

**Lesson Title:** The Balance of the Spirit - Isolation

**Key Concept:** As disciples of Christ we must learn to live a life balanced by the Spirit. God calls us to separation from the world, but he does not call us to isolation from people.

**Scriptures:**

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.  
(2 Corinthians 6:17 *New Living Translation*)

<sup>9</sup> When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. <sup>10</sup> But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that.  
(1 Corinthians 5:9–10 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** John 17; Philippians 3:5–6; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

**Lesson Thoughts:**

When God rescued the nation of Israel from slavery, they physically traveled out of Egypt to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. This distance was also symbolic of the spiritual separation that God intended for his chosen people. They were to live differently from everyone else, set apart for a special purpose. The books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy record the regulations of how Israel was to carry out this principle. God's intention was for his people to serve as an example (witness) to their neighboring nations by their distinct lifestyle. The rest of the Old Testament records the history of Israel's successes and (mostly) failures at living differently.

By the time of Jesus, the Jews in Palestine were the descendants of a fractured nation that survived two exiles in foreign lands, and had a temporary, but

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tenuous peace. External forces (e.g.: Hellenization and the Roman imperial rule) and internal politics (e.g.: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Herodians, Zealots) threatened to tear apart this people once again. One group, the Pharisees, tried especially hard remain separate; in fact, the group name comes from the Aramaic word for “the separated ones”. As the self-appointed guardians of Jewish culture, they worked tirelessly to ensure that Israel remained distinct from everyone around them. But something else happened in this process. In an effort to remain different, they became isolated. What God intended as witness, became a philosophy of superior judgment that was hated by their surrounding nations.

The balance between separation and isolation is challenging, but important. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, he often interacted and ate with notorious sinners. Jesus was distinct from their sinful lifestyle but did not isolate himself from their contact. After the Last Supper Jesus prayed for the disciples who would still be in the world after he left (John 17). This prayer commissioned the disciples to go out into the world as witnesses of the gospel. Jesus did not expect his disciples to live in isolation.

Later the Apostle Paul, who considered himself to be an exemplar of the Pharisees (Philippians 3:5–6), stated that he lived with both Jews and Gentiles, working to find common ground with everyone to effectively preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Paul also wrote the two focus scriptures in this lesson: the call to come out from unbelievers and the reminder that we cannot live apart from all who engage in sin. Finding spiritual balance is hard, but if we don’t, our separation taken too far becomes isolation, and isolation drastically reduces our witness to a world that needs to hear of the hope we have within us.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) How do you think the Pharisees let separation become isolation?
- 2) How did Jesus interact with notorious sinners and still maintain a separated (holy) lifestyle?
- 3) How can we find the balance between separation and isolation?

**Next Lesson:** The Balance of the Spirit – Separation

**Notes and Reflections**

1. Can you think of a time when you interacted with a group that isolated themselves from most people in order to maintain “holiness”? How did that make you feel?
2. Read Mark 2:13–17 and Luke 7:36–50. What did the religious leaders think of Jesus? What did the “sinners” think?
3. Think of a way that you can engage your community (outside of a church activity) as a witness for Christ while not compromising your separated Christian lifestyle. Does this make you feel comfortable, uncomfortable, or neutral? Why?