

## Set Apart for God

By Nathan Warner

*“But know that the LORD has **set apart** the godly for Himself; the LORD hears when I call to Him.” (Psalm 4:3 ESV)*

*“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, **set apart** for the gospel of God.”  
(Romans 1:1)*

*“And [the devil] led [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.’”  
(Luke 4:5-7 NASB)*

The world feeds us with visions of our “potential” in it. After all, how much we miss out on when we are set apart from its promise! How we suffer needlessly for “rules” that keep us from having fun and “outdated beliefs” of self-denial. Why do we deny ourselves the pleasures that are available to us? Why do we suffer “needlessly” when the world is at our fingertips?

As Believers, the bounds of our faith can and often do cause us to suffer loss in the world, whether financial, relational, or experiential. Perhaps our honesty causes us to lose out on a promotion. Perhaps you had an opportunity to take advantage of someone for your profit or pleasure but didn’t. Perhaps you stayed in your marriage because of your vow and pledge of faithfulness. Many people claiming to be Christians have commented that there is no point to living in an unhappy marriage. After all, how is it God’s plan if you’re both unhappy? Faithfulness is nothing but a life-sentence to misery! We’ve heard talk about swapping in the “old model” for the new one when seeking a divorce. “Why limit yourself to one man or one woman for the rest of your life?” they ask. For that matter, why limit yourself to the opposite sex? Why have limits at all? Get out there and experience “life”! Live life to the full! They mean, of course, to encourage you to do everything that your flesh desires. And why not? Everyone does it. In college, I was told that life is about “experiences” and “self-development” – it’s about trying new things and letting yourself go. College is about having fun! You can decide what you want to do with your life later – there’s no rush – enjoy it while you can!

We look around us and we see people excelling in self-pleasure and money and means, while we turn down opportunities to do the same. They say Believers live “unfulfilling” lives because we don’t live up to our “potential” in the world. They tell us we are denying ourselves the joys of life, because we haven’t fully tasted all life has to offer us. Everyone else out there is getting a piece of the action, why not us? How can we be satisfied with our lives without fulfilling the world’s promise?

Some Christians struggle with the bounds of the Faith as if it is a straitjacket they’d rather not have to wear. “How unfair God can be,” they think, “to deny me what I want, while letting sinners have their way.” Why do Believers have such joy at missing out on all the world’s fun? Moses would be a great one to ask this question, for *“when he was grown up, [he] refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt,**”* (Hebrews 11:24-26a). Moses chose to be mistreated for

the sake of Christ rather than continue as royalty, living out his “potential” in life, fulfilling all his earthly desires! What “promise” there was for Moses! While we’re at it, we might also ask Abraham, because he went out of the world to live as an “alien” in the wilderness rather than enjoy a portion in the world’s domain and glory. What about Noah, Enoch, and Rahab? What about Paul? He gave up his reputation, his education, and his future to become one of the very Believers he made suffer? When he came into contact with the Holiness of Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was made Holy unto God. And it was this setting apart of his life to God that made him eager to be mistreated for Christ rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. By this we see that true Believers consider the reproach of Christ greater than their “promise” in the world. Truly, they have no choice if they believe in truth, for they have been set apart for God and He demands it.

Why does God “*set apart the godly for Himself*” (Psalm 4:3a) rather than let them “live their lives to the fullest” as the world advises? Why does He demand Believers be Holy by the sanctification of Faith in Jesus? The answer is quite simple. The difference between God’s definition of a fulfilling life and the world’s is the difference between life and death, between the Eternal and the temporal. From God’s perspective, all that is tied up in time is already dead. Therefore, anything that has not been sanctified and set apart spiritually to live where He lives in the eternal heavens is instead set apart for destruction. Anything and anyone **set apart from** God must come to an end because “*their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave*” (Psalm 5:9). To them belongs a “*day of destruction,*” (Zephaniah 1:15) which is the Day of the Lord. “*For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 3:18-20).

God is holy. He is set apart from His creation, from time, from destruction, and from death. He is set apart from the common and the profane. His “*holy dwelling place*” (2 Chronicles 30:27b) is an abode that is set apart, for Heaven is God’s “*holy and glorious habitation*” (Isaiah 63:15b). God told the Israelites, “*You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine*” (Leviticus 20:26). God does this “setting apart,” not us, for He tells the Israelites that “*I am the Lord who sanctifies you*” (Leviticus 22:32).

To better understand this, let’s look at the Old Covenant God made with Israel. Everything to do with God was Holy. The Priests were “set apart” from the rest of Israel for service in God’s temple. Aaron was “*set apart to sanctify him as most holy...to minister to [God] and to bless in His name forever*” (1 Chronicles 23:13). Everything to do with the temple was considered holy. The utensils, pots, pans, and all implements were “*holy,*” consecrated, and set apart for service to God (Ezra 8:28; Leviticus 8:11). This meant that they could only be used for service to God. If they were used for anything else, they were considered unclean and defiled.

These implements had a pretty specific purpose and couldn’t leave the temple where they were to be used before God’s presence. They couldn’t be used for tea trays, graduation parties, dinner gatherings, or special guests, no matter how important. They couldn’t even be brought out for the King or visiting dignitaries. They were reserved solely for service to God. Paul uses this as an example of what a Believer’s life should look like: “*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work*” (2 Timothy 2:21). The world’s confusion over us is as if a common table fork that serves fancy dinner parties to dignitaries and

heads of state, should say to the temple implement, “You need to get out more! Why do you deny yourself your potential and your promise?”

We deny ourselves the pleasures of our “promise” in the world because we have been given the promise of God. He has given us promises by His Holy Calling through faith in His Son. *“Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”* (James 2:5b) *“He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust”* (2 Peter 1:4).

Indeed, Moses turned down the pleasures of a sinful life because *“he was looking to the reward”* (Hebrews 11:26b), knowing that *“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22b). *“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life”* (Romans 6:22).

*“Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY”* (1 Peter 1:13-16). Beware of the promise of the world, for it is as *“those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature”* (Luke 8:14); therefore, *“flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”* (2 Timothy 2:22) and know that *“in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power”* (2 Timothy 3:1-5a). These are the cares and riches and pleasures of life that choke the seed of eternal life.

We were once *“foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:3-7), for *“He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”* (Revelation 1:6).