

The Bible Doctrine of Separation
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“What are your separatist convictions, and how do they regulate your ministry?” Have you thought about that question? Many in ministry today have not. This condition of the church, of course, is part of the legacy of New Evangelicalism, which repudiated the Bible doctrine of separation generations ago. Harold Ockenga’s news release of December 8, 1957 was very clear: “The New Evangelicalism has changed its strategy from one of separation to one of infiltration.”¹ It is not surprising that many raised in the legacy of that movement have little understanding today of the Bible doctrine of separation.

This history notwithstanding, whether our generation of fundamentalists will continue to pass on to the generations that follow us a clear articulation of our separatist convictions and of the ways those convictions regulate our ministries remains an open question. Troubling anecdotal evidence at times indicates that the answer may be that we will not. Perhaps now more than ever, fundamentalists need to renew their appreciation for the theological importance, scriptural content, and principled application of the Bible doctrine of separation.

The Theological Importance of the Doctrine of Separation

The theological importance of the doctrine of separation stood at the center of the controversy between new evangelicalism and its fundamentalist heritage. New evangelicals argued that this doctrine was biblical but peripheral. George Marsden explains, “New evangelical reformers thus did not repudiate all separatism. On the other hand, they did reject making separatism a high principle. This was a fine distinction, however, exceedingly difficult to maintain consistently.”²

All Bible doctrines are equally authoritative because they are equally inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), but the Bible indicates that they are not all equal in terms of appropriate emphasis. The Bible emphasizes some doctrines more than others, and this emphasis is positively correlated with both the doctrine’s perspicuity and its consequence. This greater emphasis, perspicuity, and consequence characterize a category of doctrines that the Lord Jesus called, “the weightier

¹ William Ashbrook, *The New Neutralism* (Columbus, OH: Calvary Bible Church, 1970), p. 4. Dr. Harold Ockenga was the pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, the first president of Fuller Theological Seminary, and the first president of the National Association of Evangelicals. Church historians remember him as the “Father of New Evangelicalism,” and the one who coined the term in his 1947 inaugural address at Fuller Seminary. Faced with political pressure from his own Presbyterian denomination, Ockenga made clear in that address that “we do not believe and we repudiate the ‘come-out-ism’ movement.” Critical of the separatism of his former friend, Carl McIntire, the founder of the ACCC, Ockenga said, “Now there are those who exist in the world simply it seems to attack others, and to derogate others, and to drag them down, and to besmirch them. Our men will have no time for that kind of negativism.” See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 64-65.

² Marsden, 7. The observations of Marsden notwithstanding, new evangelical leaders did repudiate forcibly Biblical separatism early in their movement.

matters of the Law,” doctrines like judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23). Doctrines like these are the great theological themes of Scripture, and the size difference of the frequency, clarity, and consequence they possess in the written revelation when compared to doctrines of lesser weight parallels the size difference between a camel and a gnat (v. 24).

Therefore, understanding the theological importance of the Bible doctrine of separation requires correctly discerning whether this doctrine is a camel or a gnat, whether it has more to do with categories like judgment, mercy, and faith or with categories similar to the need to tithe spices under the theocracy of Israel. Two considerations indicate that the Bible doctrine of separation is one of the great camels of God’s revelation: (1) separation stands at the center of major theological themes: the holiness of God’s nature, the sanctification miracle of God’s work of salvation, and the pilgrimage of the believer in a hostile world; and (2) a common consequence of the neglect of separation over time is often the denial of the faith, because separation is a watershed doctrine between truth and error.

Our Holy God’s Expectation for His People

Separation is part of the holy God of the Bible’s expectation for His people. For this reason, only a holy sacrifice could atone for their sins. When describing the holiness of Christ, which qualified Him to be a blameless sacrifice for our sins, the author of Hebrews mentions separation as a critical component of this holiness: “For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). Had Christ not been separate from sinners in an important sense, He would have lacked the holiness that qualified Him to be a blameless sacrifice.

The Old Testament foreshadowed this requirement of God’s holy nature in the separatist practices of its ceremonial law. This law required the Nazirite to separate from certain objects and practices (Num. 6:1-8), the Levites to remain distinct from the rest of Israel (Num. 8:14-19), Israelite families to eat clean food rather than unclean food (Lev. 20:22-26), the expulsion of lepers from the camp (Lev. 13:45-46), and many other separatist practices, which were designed to put a ceremonial difference between the clean and the unclean, in order to teach God’s people that He is holy and that holiness requires separation from common things that can corrupt and spoil holiness.

The apostle Paul relies on similar Old Testament separatist themes in the era of the New Testament local church in order to argue for the importance of separation to perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). He treats them as contrasts of biblical theology, such as righteousness vs. lawlessness (Ps. 45:7, LXX), light vs. darkness (Gen. 1:4), Messiah vs. Belial (2 Sam. 23:1-6), and God’s temple vs. idols (Jer. 7:8-11). New Testament believers must present their bodies as a living sacrifice and affirm as they do so that only a holy sacrifice is acceptable to God. This holiness requires nonconformity to this world (Rom. 12:1-2). New Testament believers want to be nonconformist separatists, because they want to be holy, and they want to be holy, because our God is holy (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

Salvation Out of Darkness, Into His Light

Second, separation is part of what happens to the sinner who is called “out of darkness, into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). As the objects of God’s saving grace, believers are not only washed and justified, but also sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11). This union with Christ makes us part of the Bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21:2), and so the nature of our salvation through the atonement of Christ is analogous to marriage. Marriage is simultaneously the greatest act of union and the greatest commitment to separation known to man. What makes marriage a profound union is the commitment each spouse makes to separate from all others. Our English word *consecration* captures this idea especially well in the Old Testament ritual surrounding the firstborn of Israel (Exod. 13:2). This indicates that consecration is equally important for the relationship between today’s church of the firstborn ones and their God (Heb. 12:23).

The Believer’s Pilgrimage in This World

Third, separation defines the nature of a believer’s pilgrimage in this world. He finds himself a foreigner in a strange land, having obtained citizenship in a kingdom that is not yet of this world (John 18:36, Rev. 11:15, Heb. 11:13, 1 Pet. 2:11). Although we still dwell in the world, we do so as wheat among tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), as salt with a distinctive taste (Matt. 5:13), and as light that cannot be hidden or camouflaged (Matt. 5:16).

As the domain of Satan, that aspect of the world that stands in rebellion against its Creator is a hostile and dangerous place for the Christian (1 John 5:18-19; Eph. 2:2-3). It tempts him with its idolatry, and he must respond with self-sacrifice (Matt. 4:8-10, 16:24-26); it confuses him with its philosophy, and he must respond with faith in God’s truth (1 Cor. 3:18-21, Col. 2:8); it appeals to the enemies within, pride and lust, and he must love God rather than it (1 John 2:15-17).

The Scriptures command the Christian to separate from the world with a variety of expressions. We must overcome the world (1 John 5:4), speak out against the world (John 7:7), keep clean from its stains (Jam. 1:27), escape it never to return (2 Pet. 2:20-22), die to it (Gal. 6:14), and never conform ourselves to its shapes (Rom. 12:2).

Separation is a Watershed Doctrine

A final consideration indicative of the theological importance of the Bible doctrine of separation concerns its consequential nature as a watershed doctrine. The American Council of Christian Churches articulated this truth in a recent resolution entitled, “Resolution on the Doctrine of Separation and the Spectrum of Evangelicalism.” Here is part of what we said:

“A metaphor for the theological significance of a doctrine over the passing of time, a watershed doctrine is one that marks the line at which inevitable theological deterioration begins once it is crossed by a theological position. The importance of correctly marking the

watershed for understanding what has happened to American evangelicalism was pointed out by Francis Schaeffer, a man not remembered today as a fundamentalist separatist, in his aptly titled volume, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. While Schaeffer lamented the surrender of biblical inerrancy in that volume, he was closest to correctly discerning the true watershed issue when he wrote, 'evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not.'³

"It is the courageous and faithful application of the convictions of biblical ecclesiastical separation that draws this line. In Schaeffer's example, failure to draw the line precedes failure to take a full view of Scripture, so it is the failure to draw the line that marks the true watershed point at which inevitable deterioration begins.

"The apostle John explains why this is true: 'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds' (2 John 10-11). What John calls *bidding God speed*, Schaeffer called *failure to draw the line*. To fail to draw the line is to become a partaker in the evil theological position orthodoxy opposes. In the context of 2 John, it is to deny the doctrine of Christ by association rather than by message. Consequently, the inspired apostle charges both the false teacher and the bidder of Godspeed with participation in the evil deed, denial of the doctrine of Christ. As a result, John's readers must now bid Godspeed to neither in order to be faithful to his command."⁴

Relegating the camel of separation to gnat-like status is a mistake of momentous consequence. Although some today see it as merely an outdated style of ministry, the Bible doctrine of separation carries the weight of weightier matters of the law, like God's holiness, our sanctification, and our pilgrimage through a hostile world. To neglect this important doctrine is to be on the wrong side of an important theological watershed. Over time, the faith is surrendered where the Bible doctrine of separation is neglected.

³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 51 (emphasis original). In that volume Schaeffer laments the surrender of Biblical inerrancy from within the camp of new evangelicalism, which occasioned Harold Lindsell's book, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976). Harold Ockenga wrote the foreword to that publication, where he remembered the movement he founded as "a ringing call for a repudiation of separatism and the summons to social involvement" before admitting, "because no individual carried the banner for the new evangelicalism and no one developed a theology or a definitive position, many younger evangelicals joined the movement and claimed the name, but did not confess the doctrinal position of orthodoxy" (pp. 11-12). Schaeffer's work was the first of what has become a proliferation of laments over the legacy of new evangelicalism from within the movement. David Wells, a professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, founded by Billy Graham and Harold Ockenga, typifies this sad lament: "Today, evangelicalism reverberates with worldliness. . . it is robbing the church of its ability to take its bearings from God, who is centrally holy." David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 55. See Appendix I for a detailed review of this book.

⁴ ACCC resolutions are available on our website at www.accc4truth.org.

The Scriptural Content of the Bible Doctrine of Separation

What specifically does the Bible demand from a believer when it teaches the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation? The answers to that question fall into two separate categories of responsibilities: (1) ecclesiastical separation from false teachers; and (2) ecclesiastical separation from disobedient brothers.

Ecclesiastical Separation from False Teachers

The last section mentioned Paul's general emphasis on the need for separation when it comes to perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord according to 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. He comes back to this theme in chapter 11, where he expresses grave concern over a specific danger he calls false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13). In Ephesus Paul described these religious leaders as grievous wolves (Acts 20:29), and in the book of Philippians, he calls them dogs and the concision or mutilation (Phil. 3:2). An impassioned Paul commands that men like these among the Galatian churches be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9). Clearly, the Pauline doctrine of ecclesiastical separation from false teachers is not an academic concern calling for casual dialogue, but rather it is a militant disdain for a satanic influence very destructive to the people of God (2 Cor. 11:14-15). We do not believe this doctrine well enough until we feel this Pauline passion for it. This passion must be a part of a pastor's jealous love for the people of God (2 Cor. 11:2).

Much discussion has surfaced recently among fundamentalists regarding how it is that people of God recognize a false teacher when they see one. This is an important question, because Paul makes clear that false apostles disguise themselves as true apostles in much the same way that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). It is the persistent goal of unorthodox heretics to wear the mantle of orthodox Christianity (v. 12). They are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). So how do we distinguish a false Christian leader from a true one?

Some have emphasized the gospel as the touchstone of orthodoxy. One author used this emphasis in a recent defense of fundamentalism, "The thing that is held in common by all Christians—the thing that constitutes the church as one church—is the gospel itself."⁵ None would deny the importance of the gospel to this question, but the gospel is only one-third of the concerns raised by the apostle Paul in Corinth: "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him" (2 Cor. 11:4).

So where many fundamentalists today are focused on a single category of theology, soteriology, the apostle Paul was focused on at least three: Christology, revelation, and soteriology. Consequently, the gospel-centric approach to ecclesiastical separation is an inadequate

⁵ Kevin T. Bauder, et al., eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p. 23.

summary of the Bible doctrine. Paul's categories were first those of his Lord, who had exposed the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes of His own day. Christ condemned them for rejecting the truth about Himself, hetero-Christology (Matt. 22:41-46); He condemned them for making God's Word void with their traditions, hetero-revelation (Matt. 15:1-9); and He condemned them for teaching a gospel that sent people to hell, hetero-soteriology (Matt. 23:13-15).

Those who have made the gospel the center of attention often articulate the importance of the other two categories of theology to the gospel.⁶ Yet the indirectness of this approach has one practical consequence that seems to be especially problematic today (though others, like the importance of scriptural inerrancy or the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, could be mentioned), namely, the lack of discernment it seems to promote among fundamentalists when it comes to separation from the Charismatic movement.

The apostle Paul treats "another spirit" in the Corinthian context as though it were a danger equal to "another Jesus" and "another gospel." Not all who claim the heritage of fundamentalism do the same today. Some who promote miraculous sign gifts are popular leaders in what are labeled "gospel" causes, organizations, and movements that have been attractive to fundamentalist brothers. Are we forgetting our Lord's admonition, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24)?⁷

The Bible doctrine of separation teaches that religious leaders who promote false doctrines about Christ, false doctrines about revelation, and false doctrines about the simple gospel are false apostles from whom we must separate.

Ecclesiastical Separation from Disobedient Brothers

Unity and sanctity are the rules of Christian experience within the boundaries of the orthodoxy mentioned above (Eph. 2:21). Jesus made two requests of the Father in His high-priestly prayer for His people: (1) unity (John 17:11), and (2) sanctity (v. 17). Just as the marriage relationship simultaneously constitutes the most profound commitment to unity and to separation known to a couple, so also the relationship believers enjoy in union with Christ constitutes a profound reality of unity dependent upon a faithful commitment to separation. Union with Christ and His people is an act of consecration. Where the commitment to separation fails, the force of unity weakens.

Two forms of this breakdown are mentioned in the New Testament, one involving an otherwise orthodox church member whose immorality fails to live up to his profession of sav-

⁶ Ibid., 31. The author addresses his concerns over Biblical authority as it relates to Roman Catholicism while relating this problem to that religion's false gospel.

⁷ For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Appendix II for the 2012 ACCC resolution titled, "Resolution on the Theological Danger of Non-cessationism."

ing faith (Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5:9-13, 2 Thess. 3:6), and another involving an otherwise orthodox church leader whose teachings or disobedience create divisions within the body of Christ (Acts 20:30, Rom. 16:17-18, 2 John 11). It is important not to confuse these challenges, for they call for somewhat different responses, but it is also important to appreciate what they have in common. In both cases a failed commitment to the sanctity or purity of the church damages its unity.⁸

Concern for the purity of the church expresses itself in two distinct ways, depending upon which challenge mentioned above threatens the testimony of Christ. In the first case, the immoral church member, local church discipline is the correct response. This church decision first admonishes in a brotherly way in order to encourage restoration (2 Thess. 3:15). Ultimately, in cases where repentance never comes, the so-called brother's profession must be disbelieved and the immoral man must be expelled from membership and treated like other unbelievers (Matt. 18:17). This is an important responsibility related to the purity of the church, but it is not what this article refers to when it calls for ecclesiastical separation from disobedient brothers.

Instead, the responsibility in view here bears greater resemblance to the responsibilities of faithful church leaders in response to false teachers. Just like a pastor must guard the flock of God from grievous wolves attacking from without, so also must he watch for perverse betrayals rising up from within (Acts 20:29-30). These betrayals come in the form of good words and fair speeches that cause division through disobedience (Rom. 16:17-19), and the officially sanctioned disobedience is often an act of association in violation of the Bible's command to separate from false teachers (2 John 7-11).

John tells us that those who bid false teachers Godspeed are partakers in their evil deeds (v. 11). This means that it is possible to deny the doctrine of Christ by giving Christian recognition to someone who denies the doctrine of Christ. This is new evangelicalism, and it is a spirit of disobedience that has divided the body of Christ for generations, just as it divided Jehoshaphat and Micaiah in the days of the king's compromise with Ahab (2 Chron. 19:2). As with false teachers, those who participate in the evil deeds of false teachers through their ministry associations must be people we mark and avoid in view of the division they have caused. The prophet Haggai was correct when he warned that uncleanness spreads through association in a way that cleanness cannot (Hag. 2:10-14).

⁸ Note that some fundamentalists have advocated choosing the unity of the church over the purity of the church as "the primary motive of fundamentalism" (Bauder et al., p. 21). This proposal, however, fails to appreciate the nature of the relationship between purity and unity. Unity depends upon purity. Therefore, purity comes before unity as primary in the responsibility of fundamentalism. David Beale explains, "While Fundamentalism has always embraced and defended the cardinal doctrines of traditional Christianity, the movement has been characterized by an emphasis on the doctrine and practice of holiness, a full-orbed holiness that includes both personal and ecclesiastical aspects." *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), p. 6.

From the beginning of the new evangelical vs. fundamentalist controversy, the new evangelical has objected to the practicality of this responsibility by labeling the practice secondary or tertiary separation.⁹ The question is often asked, “Do you separate from the one who fellowships with the one who fellowships with the one who fellowships with the apostate?” Clearly, this question has little to do with the letter or spirit of the Bible doctrine of separation. Instead, what the doctrine calls for in the heart of the man of God is a Pauline passion for the protection of God’s people from false teachers and a willingness to feel the same way about otherwise orthodox men who lack that passion when they become partakers in those evil deeds. Paul had an answer from his heart to the question, “What are your separatist convictions and how do they regulate your ministry?” This is the question we must ask ourselves and others, and we must be satisfied only with an answer from the heart that faithfully articulates a commitment to ecclesiastical separation from false teachers and ecclesiastical separation from brothers with disobedient ministry associations.

Separation and Personal Holiness

It is the nature of young children to imitate their parents. As the children of a holy God, believers are called to lives that imitate the holiness intrinsic to our Heavenly Father’s nature (1 Pet. 1:14-17). As the beneficiaries of His saving grace, we are called out of darkness into His marvelous light, and then we are called to walk in that light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). The world is not our home, and we must guard our lives, families, and churches from its dangerous spiritual influence (1 John 2:15-17).

Imitating the holiness of our Father, walking in His light, and resisting the influence of the world require standards of personal holiness in the life of the believer that involve separatist convictions. Because the believer’s thought life is an important part of personal holiness, standards of separation in regard to entertainment choices are necessary (Ps. 1:2; Phil. 4:8). Choices of music, television viewing, entertainment venues, holiday celebrations, and recreational food and drink should reflect the believer’s constant delight in the principles of God’s law and his commitment to a thought-life that meditates on what is pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy, and temperate.

Because the way the believer communicates to others is an important part of personal holiness, godly standards that regulate the messages he conveys to others are necessary (Eph. 4:29). The courtesy of the believer’s speech, the modesty of his dress, the length of his hair,

⁹ William Ashbrook says in response to this line of reasoning, “This ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ separation line is just another semantic invention of the New Neutralism. Paul put no such tags on his words when he said: ‘Touch not the unclean thing,’ 2 Cor. 6:17, and John evidently had not heard of such distinctions when he wrote 2 John 9-11 . . . note carefully his concluding words: ‘For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.’ Now there is an old axiom in mathematics which says that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other” (p. 27).

his cleanliness and orderliness, and the appropriateness of his appearance for a given occasion must all speak a message that gives grace to those who hear and see these parts of his life.

Finally, because the believer is called to nurture the covenantal relationships of family, church, and citizenship as a part of personal holiness, he must be careful about his associations. Paul counseled Corinthian believers to eat no meat they knew to be sacrificed to idols because they were a brotherhood of believers who were called to flee idolatry and care for one another's conscience (1 Cor. 8:13, 10:14, 28). The problem with the meat in this context was one of associations--it was identified with idolatry. The believer's use of social media, the place he sends his kids to school, his involvement in political parties, his membership in societies, and his selection of his closest friends must be regulated by a desire to strengthen God-ordained covenantal relationships, not weaken them. These are the ties that bind us as families, as churches, and as dutiful productive citizens. In whatever the believer does, he must disassociate from anything that would fail to bring glory to God or be unbecoming of the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:27).

The Principled Application of the Bible Doctrine of Separation

Given the theological importance of this doctrine, and understanding its biblical content, how do we apply ecclesiastical separation to our lives and churches? Related questions are often not easily answered. When the local Presbyterian Church U.S.A. choir invites your church's choir to sing together at the town Christmas caroling and tree-lighting event, should you accept the invitation? If a fundamental Baptist church in your area is hosting a men's gathering featuring a former Red Sox player who advertises the 700 Club on his website, should you promote the gathering? If the Congregational Church in a neighboring town is hosting a Joni and Friends presentation for ladies, should you encourage your ladies to go? If a renowned evangelical scholar, who is a member of a church that claims Billy Graham as its favorite son, is conducting a Bible conference in your neighborhood, should it be on your church's calendar?

In these days of increasing theological confusion and ecclesiastical compromise, the faithful fundamentalist pastor will find himself faced with questions like these that challenge him to prayerfully consider a principled application of the Bible doctrine of separation. The Scriptures help in this regard by providing counsel regarding an Old Testament example and a New Testament passion.

An Old Testament Example

We begin with some lessons from the life of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. Jehoshaphat was a godly king who was greatly used by God; nevertheless, it is Jehoshaphat, surprisingly enough, who provides for us a negative example in regard to separatist convictions. Separation was not really important to Jehoshaphat, even though the Lord was. This single flaw in the life

of this great king seemed like a mere gnat not worthy of the strain of concern during Jehoshaphat's lifetime, but it is Jehoshaphat's legacy which tells the whole story. Because Jehoshaphat repudiated separation from Ahab, generations that followed suffered greatly.

The compromise we see in Jehoshaphat existed first in his father, Asa. He too was a godly king, greatly admired by the devout in Judah. The nation knew the blessing of this kind of faithfulness for thirty-five years before Asa stumbled. The tragic last six-year period of Asa's reign is given as much coverage as the blessed first thirty-five years. The lesson the chronicler of Israel's history seeks to emphasize is that Asa's demise began with an ungodly alliance with Benhadad (2 Chron. 16:1-10). The words of Hanani the seer leave no doubt regarding the Lord's assessment of ungodly alliances: "You have relied on the king of Syria and have not relied on the Lord thy God" (v. 7).

The axiom that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it held true for Asa's son, Jehoshaphat. His alliance with wicked Ahab came earlier in his reign, was arranged under less desperate circumstances, and was tied with a tighter knot than his father's alliance with Benhadad.

Here we see two other axioms at work. One is that each generation of compromisers becomes progressively worse than its predecessor, a truth related to the watershed importance of ecclesiastical separation.¹⁰ The second principle is that Satan can use both times of difficulty and times of success as temptations for compromise. God's people need to be aware of both temptations. Some may think that we need to compromise our principles because our church or movement is struggling so. Others may think that the old principles are passé and out-of-date because we are so successful now. Whatever our situation, the principles which are right and godly should not be compromised. They have not changed. They are not matters of convenience, but mandates of eternal truth.

Whereas Asa's day had its Hanani, Jehoshaphat's had a Micaiah. While the revivalist king, beloved in Israel, went out to the glory of battle in disobedience with Ahab, the faithful prophet who had condemned the whole effort sat in prison where he was given water to drink and bread to eat. This contrast is instructive. If we were to ask, "Who influenced more people to follow the Lord?" or "Who was more appreciated by God's people?" or "Who was given the greater venue of influence for God?" we would answer, "Jehoshaphat." But were we to ask the questions, "Who was more hated by God's enemies?" or "Who was more obedient to the Lord?" or "Who suffered faithfully for the cause of Christ?" we would have to answer with the chronicler, "Micaiah."

Perhaps the most important question to be asked of Jehoshaphat's example is, "What was the legacy of his compromise?" The answer, of course, tells the sad tale of the destruction of his household and the plunging of his nation into pagan darkness (2 Chron. 21:1-7). Is it

¹⁰ See page 3.

merely a coincidence that our nation's plunge into pagan darkness came a generation after the new evangelical experiment that repudiated ecclesiastical separation? If not a coincidence, then is not today's fundamentalist-forgetfulness regarding the dangers of new evangelicalism reminiscent of Jehoshaphat's failure to learn from Asa's mistakes?¹¹

While it may be true that no one boldly and honestly clings to the label *new evangelical* anymore as Ockenga stubbornly did, it is nonetheless true that new evangelicalism's repudiation of the Bible doctrine of separation is a timeless temptation. Neglect works just as well as repudiation when it comes to this sin. Potential for this failure is at least as old as the history of the kings of Israel and as recent as the last time our own hearts were tempted, either by too much difficulty or too much success, to follow in their steps. It is easier to aspire to be a Jehoshaphat who is going to change the world than it is to be content to be a Micaiah who sits in prison with his bread and water. But as much as we can appreciate the influential Jehoshaphats of our day, we must still be Micaiahs when faced with that choice.

This is the first thing we must do in order to apply the principles of ecclesiastical separation to our lives and ministries. We must aspire to be Micaiahs rather than Jehoshaphats. We can appreciate the good done by gifted people greatly used of God, but we must require that they not have the blind spot of a Jehoshaphat regarding obedient separation before we embrace their ministries and organizations. Obedience to this Bible doctrine must be more important than influence and opportunity. This is how we guard the future of the faith once delivered to the saints from the legacy of a Jehoshaphat-like neglect or repudiation of the Bible doctrine of ecclesiastical separation.

A New Testament Passion

In addition to choosing the correct Old Testament example, we must cultivate a New Testament passion before we can correctly apply the Bible doctrine of ecclesiastical separation to our lives and ministries. Emotions can be visceral and powerful forces in our lives. One need only remember the power of music, the language of emotion, to destroy a nation's godly culture to realize the power of this part of our makeup in the image of God. It is not surprising that compromise in the realm of music often precedes compromise in the realm of theology, because it turns out that cultivating correct feelings is essential to the right application of doctrines like ecclesiastical separation.

This feeling is found throughout the Gospels' descriptions of the life of Christ and the writings of the apostles like Paul, Peter, and John. One need only read Matthew 23 and listen to the woe after woe against the false teachers of His day to see that Christ felt very strongly about

¹¹ David Beale describes a phenomenon that began with Jerry Falwell's move with the Moral Majority into broad evangelicalism in the 1970s and early 1980s: "Many of this movement's adherents are former Fundamentalists still clinging to the label. Both the secular and the religious media, recognizing the new movement's shift away from separatist Fundamentalism, have dubbed it the 'new fundamentalism' or 'neo-fundamentalism'" (p. 9).

the need for separation from these teachers. He calls them whited tombs full of dead men's bones. We blush at times as the apostle Paul writes to the Galatians about their desertion from Christ for a different gospel and to the Philippians about the dogs and concision that they needed to avoid. Peter felt it too as he called false teachers unreasoning animals, stains, blemishes, and much more. When we read expressions of ecclesiastical separation in the New Testament, we read expressions of great emotion and passion.

Historic fundamentalism once felt that passion against false teachers, but more common today in fundamentalist circles is a similar passion directed not at false teachers but at faithful fundamentalists.¹² The passion of Christ and the apostles against apostasy has been harder to find, and the woes in Matthew 23 originally directed at those who taught false views of Christology, soteriology, and revelation, often have been directed at a fundamentalist heritage in need of appreciation and respect instead. We still have emotion on this topic, but it is not the New Testament passion. If we are going to apply faithfully the principles of ecclesiastical separation to our lives and ministries, we need to recover the feelings that Christ and the apostles had about these matters. We must be jealous for the people of God with a godly jealousy (2 Cor. 11:2-4).

A Fundamentalist Practice

So once we have decided that we would rather be a Micaiah than a Jehoshaphat, and we begin to feel that intense New Testament emotion for the cause of ecclesiastical separation, what do we do with the questions we have to answer week after week about from whom we must separate and from whom we must not? The history of fundamentalism provides a helpful template for answering that question.

Fundamentalism was born as a multi-denominational call to the theological importance of the Bible doctrine of separation from apostasy.¹³ Because of its multi-denominational birth, fundamentalists from the beginning had to discern the difference between different levels of theological importance when it comes to Bible doctrines. There are weightier and less-weighty matters of the law. Simply put, fundamentalists believe that we can have a large measure of fellowship unified on the weighty matters of the law while we agree to disagree on the less-weighty matters of the law. Where we disagree on a weighty matter of the law, we must separate.

Having inherited this godly set of parameters for fellowship, we can simply ask the question, "Is the Bible doctrine of ecclesiastical separation a weighty matter of the Law?" This study has demonstrated from Scripture that the *yes* answer our fundamentalist fathers taught us

¹² See, for instance, Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, and Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), p. 248.

¹³ See Appendix III for the 2011 ACCC resolution titled, "Resolution on the Multi-denominational Heritage of Biblical Fundamentalism."

is correct. The Bible doctrine of separation is one of the great camels of the faith, not a mere gnat. Given that, with each new question of fellowship that arises, the fundamentalist pastor would do well to ask those involved two simple questions: (1) "Where do you hold your formal church membership?" and (2) "What are your convictions regarding ecclesiastical separation, and how do these regulate your ministry?"

The answers this questioner seeks are those that support a complete understanding of the theological importance and biblical content of the Bible doctrine of separation as outlined above. Where he senses that he is communicating with a Micaiah, who feels the New Testament passion for this responsibility, the answers are even better. Fundamentalists never mitigate the weighty matters of the law in their willingness to fellowship, and the Bible doctrine of separation is a weighty matter of the law. Where we cannot agree on it, we cannot fellowship in a Christ-honoring way.

The Separatist's Care for Christian Unity

John 17 contains our Lord's prayer for His people, and two requests pervade this prayer. He prays that they would be one (v. 11), and He prays that they might be sanctified in truth (vv. 17, 19). This unity and sanctity constitute Christian consecration. In the answer to this prayer, oneness and separation are companions. Separation is the necessary guardian of Christian unity, just as separation from all others is a commitment necessary to the unity of a couple's marriage. This unified sanctity glorifies Christ (v. 10), and it encourages faith in a faithless world (v. 21). It is when believers walk together in the light that they have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7-10). The place of sanctified unity is the place of the Lord's blessing (Psalm 133), but when iniquity is allowed to abound in violation of biblical separation, the unifying love of many grows cold (Matt. 24:12).

In the cause of Christian unity, the separatist believer must be committed to a readiness to forgive (Philem. 10-20), a spirit of humility (Phil. 2:1-11), the love that gives and sacrifices (1 John 4:7-21), diligence in this regard (Eph. 4:3), a willingness to resolve conflict (Phil. 4:2-3), a mutual commitment to obey God's Word (Col. 3:15-16), controlled liberty (1 Cor. 10:14-33), and a proper respect for spiritual leadership and authority (Eph. 4:11-13).

The separatist will speak the truth in love that the body of Christ might "grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). At the center of his principled application of the Bible doctrine of separation, the faithful believer will long for the genuinely sanctified unity our Lord prayed for so fervently, and he will eagerly anticipate the day when that prayer shall be answered in full.

Appendix I

A Review Article on *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, by David F. Wells. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. 278 pp.

Today's new evangelical movement began in 1948 with Dr. Harold Ockenga's Fuller Seminary convocation address. Ten years into the new approach, Dr. Ockenga's press release of December 8, 1957 made some bold claims.

Fundamentalism abdicated leadership and responsibility in the societal realm and thus became impotent to change society or to solve social problems. . . .The New Evangelicalism has changed its strategy from one of separation to one of infiltration. . . .The results have been phenomenal.¹⁴

Another two decades pass, and now as the president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dr. Ockenga remembered his movement's inauguration as a "ringing call for a repudiation of separatism and the summons to social involvement."¹⁵ But the word, "phenomenal," had fallen into disuse with the developments that necessitated the publication of *The Battle for the Bible*.¹⁶

Now with the first sixty years of the new evangelical legacy complete, Dr. David Wells reports on the continued progression of Ockenga's call in *God in the Wasteland*. "Today, evangelicalism reverberates with worldliness. . . .it is robbing the church of its ability to take its bearings from God, who is centrally holy" (55). The book is a sequel to the author's *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, a work published a year earlier with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts.¹⁷ Wells describes the relationship between these two publications.

[*No Place for Truth*] produced only half the picture I wanted to present . . . It offers an explanation of the cultural factors that have diminished the place and importance of theology in the church, but it offers no suggestions for a remedy of the problem. . . . Here I outline the first step that I believe needs to be taken to reverse the situation I described in the first book (ix).

¹⁴ William E. Ashbrook, *The New Neutralism* (Columbus, OH: Calvary Bible Church, 1970), 4-5.

¹⁵ Harold J. Ockenga, foreword to *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1976), 11.

¹⁶ "Because no individual carried the banner for the new evangelicalism and no one developed a theology or a definitive position, many younger evangelicals joined the movement and claimed the name, but did not confess the doctrinal position of orthodoxy" *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ See Michael Harding, "Review Article: No Place for Truth," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1996), 291-296.

Remarkably, Dr. Wells reassesses the movement so harshly criticized by the Father of New Evangelicalism. “Fundamentalist doctrine on these and related matters was to them as important socially as it was credally. . . . The great sin in Fundamentalism is to compromise; the great sin in evangelicalism is to be narrow.”¹⁸

Perspective – The World of Dreams

Yet David Wells is no fundamentalist polemicist. As the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the author writes as one who has served the Lord with a first-hand view of the results of the Ockenga vision.¹⁹

He formulates his assessment of the new evangelical landscape, in part, with the results of a poll he conducted at seven new evangelical seminaries. The survey sought to measure the “saliency of belief” among the seminarians at these institutions (ix). But these seminaries share only a part of the wasteland Dr. Wells finds himself in. He understands that the dream of new evangelicalism itself involved drowsiness in regard to important concerns. He regrets what occurred when “new” was added to “evangelical.” He cites the turning point that produced Ockenga’s optimism as the origin of trouble.

I believe that our effort to be both modern and Christian produces deep and perhaps insoluble problems. I believe that our efforts to be both modern and Christian . . . accounts [*sic*] for much of what has happened in evangelicalism in the years since the end of World War II, and it is to this topic that I now want to turn (16).

Writing of wasteland and fading dreams, Dr. Wells is a new evangelical addressing new evangelicals about new evangelicalism.

Problems – The Dreams Fade

Although the author purposes to provide solutions to the problem highlighted in his first book, *God in the Wasteland* begins with the end of the problem’s description. Dr. Wells’ diagnosis warns that the condition is critical. He describes new evangelicalism as ready to “buckle completely” (117), as standing “little chance of preserving historic Christian faith”

¹⁸ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 129.

¹⁹ Whereas the separatist convictions of men like A. J. Gordon and A. C. Dixon gave birth to the infancy of Gordon College, leading new evangelicals, Harold Ockenga and Billy Graham, enacted the 1969 merger of The Conwell School of Theology with The Gordon Divinity School to form The Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Ockenga served as Gordon-Conwell’s first president. Funding for the new institution was provided by J. Howard Pew, one of the beneficiaries of the Sun Oil dynasty and a co-founder of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

(120), as “run aground in the shallow waters of modernity” (151), and as in danger of becoming “indistinguishable from New Age spirituality” (222).

In his first chapter, Dr. Wells demonstrates the inadequacy of modernity in society. He convincingly argues that the breadth of experience which communications technology has brought to mankind has robbed those experiences of their depth. While mankind gains the whole world, he loses his soul. Additionally, the quantity of communications sacrifices the quality of each communication. We live in a world of clichés, a world in which the average person must process two million advertisements by the age of sixty-five (15).

In the second chapter, Dr. Wells shows that the modern new evangelical church correlates positively with the defective modern world. Although *Newsweek* reported progress by declaring 1976 the “Year of the Evangelical,” Dr. Wells argues that this progress has been an illusion (19). While the 1960’s admittedly marked the end of liberalism, the period also qualifies as the inception of new evangelicalism’s regression down the same road.

Before the 1960’s, evangelicalism was a cultural outsider; after, it rapidly became a part of the inside. Before, it defined itself theologically; after, it increasingly has not. Before, its leaders were seldom managers and bureaucrats; after, they usually were. . . . Before the 1960’s evangelicalism was “strong”; after, it was “weak” (24).

The grounds for unity shifted away from a commitment to a common theological confession to a commitment to a common acceptance of diversity (25). Religion became civil, and culture became neutral (26-28). A passion for truth and a cutting edge for battle in the face of costly consequences suffered obsolescence.

Wells introduces the next chapter with the admission that new evangelical Christians are unique in society with their confidence in the neutrality of culture (35). He argues that those so ambiguous about the danger they face hold little hope of defense. “Those who are cognitively and morally dislocated from the worldly culture are the ones who are driven to change it” (36). Further arguing against this ambivalence, Dr. Wells discusses the biblical doctrine of κόσμος. He finds three New Testament meanings for the term: a) “the earth, created order”; b) “the nations, the human community”; and c) “the ways of fallen humanity, alienated from God and his truth” (37). He then gives evidence that the Scriptures demand “other-worldliness” in the context of the third meaning of the term. Yet Wells strictly affirms the church’s calling within the context of the first two meanings. “Biblically speaking, it is entirely inappropriate for the church to become ‘other-worldly’ with respect to these first two meanings of κόσμος” (38).

But with this position, Dr. Wells unwittingly mutes his clarion call for change. He fails to demonstrate how it is that “other-worldliness” can be achieved consistently in the third context without also proper application to the second when necessary. Practice cannot consistently sustain the theoretical distinction defined by Dr. Wells between the “human community” and “the ways of fallen humanity.” Simply put, the “community” produces the “ways.” Other-

worldliness must at times apply to the former if one desires to truly maintain other-worldliness in regard to the latter. Church history teaches that an unregulated enthusiasm for this-worldliness in the “human community,” a zeal for political influence and social relevance, has often opened the door to her acceptance of “the ways of fallen humanity.”

Chapter Four is entitled “Clerics Anonymous.” Here Dr. Wells attacks “two connected revolutions on the modern world – the therapeutic and the managerial” (61). He takes on some heavy-weights of new evangelical ministry philosophy, the advocates of the church growth movement. Specifically, he critiques the “Religious Economy” of Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (63).²⁰ Correlating the numerical growth of a denomination subsequent to the American Revolution with its relative emphasis on democracy, these men argue that church growth depends upon a correct response to market forces. They enumerate four of these forces: (1) organization (church polity); (2) sales (clergy); (3) product (religious doctrine and life); (4) marketing technique (evangelism and growth).²¹ Dr. Wells responds forcefully. He charges the movement with teaching the sovereignty of the audience and with legitimizing ideas only in the market place. He protests that the success measured by these proponents may only prove that the new evangelical church has been willing to “prostitute itself by seeking worldly accommodations” (68). A pragmatic optimism drives the movement with an anthropocentric therapeutic process that obliterates the doctrine of sin (80-81).

With Chapter Five Dr. Wells begins his transition from problem description to problem solution. Yet Chapter Eight, which contains the analysis of his extensive survey, belongs to his description of the problem as well. Dr. Wells draws three conclusions which he claims are “beyond dispute.” New evangelical seminarians personally affirm the importance of theology; they have lost confidence in the Church’s vision and theological character; and their theology stops short of controlling their lives and thinking (187). The loss of meaning suffered by the label, “evangelical,” exposes the impotence of theology among those surveyed. “The result is that it is now impossible to predict exactly what people who refer to themselves as evangelicals will think, how they will view the world, or how they will act” (191).

Inerrancy and involvement in a local church only made it to 55% in the survey, while a preference for the love of God over the holiness of God scored a resounding 80%. Dr. Wells identifies a troubling trend toward viewing ministry as counseling. After suggesting that the popularity of counseling majors among students portends little good, he fears that graduates “will likely offer leadership that is more consensual, that takes large account of the feelings of

²⁰ See Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

²¹ Note the absence of “price” in this list. Any successful front office operation understands the importance of price to its marketing effort. Those who sell a product want the cost to be as low as conceivably possible.

those being led, and that will place as much emphasis on preserving relationships as it does on acting on principle" (203).

Proposal - Recycling and the Wasteland

After his convincing description of the problems facing new evangelicalism, Dr. Wells offers his solution beginning in Chapter Eight. There he describes two components to his recommendation.

The answer, I believe, lies in the convergence of two separate but related lines of thought: we need to move away from Our Time's prevailing anthropology, and we need to move away from Our Time's prevailing theology (113).

The remainder of Chapter Eight contains the specifics for the move away from the prevailing anthropology, and Chapters Nine and Ten discuss the importance of the doctrines of God's transcendence, God's providence, and the cross of Christ in order to move new evangelicalism away from the prevailing theology.

By a new anthropology, Dr. Wells means that new evangelical Christians need conversion from the consumption of religious experience to a concern for moral thought. The movement's infatuation with the love of God and embarrassment over the holiness of God must end (114). The goal of meeting psychological needs ought to pale in comparison to the need to do right (115). He issues a call to forsake religion based on our terms rather than God's (117).

The move away from the prevailing theology involves a move away from the centrality of God's love to the centrality of His holiness. "The Christians in Our Time sometimes act as though they were the first to recognize that God is a God of love" (135). Dr. Wells traces man's natural disinclination for the holiness of God throughout the history of theology. Speaking in rather broad terms, he perceives this tendency in a polarity between the holiness of God and the love of Christ early in the Church's history. Romanism compounded the problem pitting the holiness of Christ against the love of Mary. He believes that Puritan Calvinism inherited seeds of a polarity in the Godhead from the Reformers, such that after Puritanism passed, the seedlings of Deism on the one hand and modern evangelicalism on the other took root (128-129).

In order to avoid this historic tendency, Dr. Wells sets some boundaries he encourages new evangelicals to respect. First, the nature of the Father and the Son must not be disengaged. On the one hand, this boundary protects against making the Son a comfortable alternative to the Holy Father, and on the other it precludes the pluralistic view that God can be legitimately claimed without reference to the Son (130-132). Next, the nature of the holiness of God must include the concept of exclusive loyalty (138). God's holiness must have teeth (144). It must demand obedience.

Yet the fortress Dr. Wells seeks to build lacks walls. With scriptural separatist convictions repudiated long ago, new evangelicalism has no practical defense against the onslaught of

modernity. Dr. Wells illustrates the helplessness of this condition when he calls for action with the sad words, "Instead, they will have to begin to build afresh, in cogently biblical ways, among the decaying structures that now clutter the evangelical landscape" (215). Here we see not only a desire "to build afresh," but also a basic commitment "to build among." Dr. Wells believes that new evangelicalism is like a house which shows no external signs of decay, but which termites have rendered structurally unsound (90), and yet it is within this structure that the future remodeling he prescribes must take place.

Principles - The Reality of Truth

"Why is it that today the implications of God's holiness often slide off the church like water off a duck's back?" asks Dr. Wells (145). He sees the problem to be "the shallow waters of modernity," far away from "the deep waters of God's otherness - his holiness and truth" (151). He warns that the course set by some new evangelicals to rediscover these waters in the seas of Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy will fail (226-227). But there is no call here for a return to the straits of fundamentalism either, the harbor from which this anchorless vessel strayed generations ago.

"Today any evangelical who demurs from the cultural consensus will almost certainly be viewed as a rebel, perhaps even a subversive, and almost certainly as irrelevant and out of it" (59). "Irrelevant and out of it" was the Ockenga pronouncement upon fundamentalists from the beginning, a decree which has been religiously obeyed by his successors. Ironically, it is here that we find the reason why the repudiation of separatist convictions remains inviolable to Dr. Wells. But in spite of this limitation, "the reality of truth" described by Dr. Wells holds many lessons for us who own the heritage of those whose landscape has been spared the wreckage of Ockenga.

The first lesson is the power of juxtaposition. Dr. Wells begins the book with a description of an encounter he had with a rude driver who had two bumper stickers, one advertising "McGuire, a local politician," and the other advertising "Jesus."

Those who needed McGuire were encouraged to purchase him with a vote; those who needed Jesus were informed that he was also available, too, and perhaps on equally convenient terms.

It might be said that this book is about Jesus and McGuire. . . I am more concerned about the immediate by-product of this confusion, which is the difficulty that is introduced when the name of Jesus goes on the bumper alongside that of McGuire (5).

Clearly one of the hallmarks of the fundamental separatist position is circumspection when it comes to associations. A new evangelical finds himself juxtaposed with the liberal in far more publicized venues than the bumper of a pickup truck in Boston. Unfortunately, Dr. Wells

demonstrates the very problem he tries to correct. *God in the Wasteland* quotes not a single fundamental separatist author in spite of the extensive literature available relevant to this topic, although the likes of Rudolf Bultmann (39) and Karl Barth (162) receive the respect of definitive authorities.

A second lesson is the central importance of practical separation to the holiness and transcendence of God. "What has been lost. . . is God's angularity, the sharp edges that truth so often has" (114), but that kind of truth cuts and divides. "The enduring value of doing what is right" and "costly obedience" are necessary (115), but this righteous obedience responds faithfully to the command, "Come out and be separate!" "Restoring weight to God is going to involve much more than simply getting some doctrine straight" (115), so then it must also involve the passion to militantly contend for that doctrine.

Finally, there is the instructive contrast between Dr. Ockenga and Dr. Wells. Fifty years separate their respective assessments of their movement, and the decay from "phenomenal" to "fading" happened gradually. As fundamentalists, we need a discerning sensitivity for the slow movement of compromise if the future of our churches and institutions is to rise above the destiny of "wasteland" and "fading dreams." May our theology remain salient enough to pass a correct understanding of our label to the next generation; may the separatist convictions of our fathers continue to protect the landscape of our ministries for our children and for our gospel witness to the world; and may Christ find faith among us when He comes to the glory of His name.

Appendix II

American Council of Christian Churches

71st Annual Convention

October 23-25, 2012

Cedar View Independent Methodist Church

Kingsport, Tennessee

“Resolution on the Theological Danger of Non-cessationism”

The terms non-cessationism and continuism have been used in recent days to refer to the belief that the miraculous revelatory sign gifts of the New Testament era, such as speaking in tongues, are still active today. The cessationist view, by way of contrast, concludes that these special revelations of the Holy Spirit ceased at some point early in the Church’s history, either with the passing of the apostles or the closing of the canon of Scripture. The resolve to stand separated from the Charismatic Movement is not a new commitment for the ACCC. Numerous previous resolutions of the Council have articulated and defended a firm position against this error, a conviction also affirmed by the statements of faith of many fundamental churches and institutions. Fundamentalists of past generations faithfully have confronted charismaticism as a major threat to historic Christian orthodoxy.

Today’s Fundamentalist, however, confronts a new temptation for compromise with adherents of the non-cessationist teachings and practices of the Charismatic Movement from conservative evangelicals. Some have expressed concern over this temptation while testing these waters of cooperation once carefully avoided by past Fundamentalist leaders. Other Fundamentalists have expressed a vague willingness to go further. Some have put the cessationist vs. non-cessationist issue into a category of doctrines, like the mode of baptism and church polity, which, in their view, should not divide believers as a test of fellowship. While the common stand and encouraging fellowship of the ACCC has recognized for generations that not every doctrine carries equal force as a test of fellowship, the Council has discerned together that non-cessationism is a first-order theological danger, for it has led to an emphasis on religious experience that undermines biblical authority. Whether the ecstatic gibberish, known to ancient paganism, or the ridiculous claims of modern television personalities to discern maladies of anonymous viewers while pronouncing healing upon them, the currents of non-cessationism in the Charismatic Movement have led to destructive confusion among the adherents of the professing Church.

The apostle John warns us to “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Called in that context the spirit of antichrist (v. 3), the spirit that is in the world (v. 3), and the spirit of error (v. 6), these false spirits are positively correlated with the rise of false doctrine. Non-cessationism has born this fruit. From the false teachings of Oneness Pentecostalism, to confu-

sion over the necessity of the tongues experience for conversion, to tolerance for Roman Catholicism and the ecumenism of the one-world church of antichrist, the Charismatic Movement has been a popular force for false prophecy in a world so hostile to the Spirit of Truth. The apostle Paul warned not only against another gospel and another Jesus, but also against another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4).

This is not to deny that some non-cessationists have identified historically with the cause of fundamental separatism against apostasy and the compromise of New Evangelicalism. Nor is it to claim that our movement has been unanimous in its interpretation of the relevant passages in Acts or 1 Corinthians 12-14. Yet Fundamentalists have always been united as ardent critics of the worldliness, confusion, false doctrines, and ecumenism of today's Charismatic Movement—a zeal not shared widely by today's conservative evangelicals infected by this error. In addition, if the cessationist interpretation of these difficult passages is correct, the contemporary phenomena claiming precedent from them cannot be of the Holy Spirit. This is not to suggest that the God of the Bible is no longer the wonder-working, Almighty God of omnipotence. Biblical Christianity is an uncompromisingly supernatural religion. The miracles of the Virgin Birth, the substitutionary blood atonement, and the bodily resurrection of our Lord are at its core. It was the miracle of regeneration that gave us new life in Christ, and our blessed hope is the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet the Scripture is clear that our enemy also possesses a supernatural power that produces powerful signs and lying wonders (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9).

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches, at its 71st Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2012, in the Cedar View Independent Methodist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, resolves to stand where our fathers have stood, identifying the error of the Charismatic Movement as a danger to the people of God and an important test of fellowship. We determine to “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1), and to know them by their fruits, examining the doctrines they espouse according to the prophecy of Scripture—our only rule of faith and practice.

We further resolve to resist the current temptation, caused by the desire for closer ties of fellowship with conservative evangelicals, to compromise with non-cessationism. By the grace of God, we determine to leave to those who follow us a firm commitment to that great pillar of historic Protestant orthodoxy, sola scriptura. “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

Appendix III

American Council of Christian Churches
70th Annual Convention
October 18-20, 2011
Bible Evangelical Methodist Church
Lancaster, PA

“Resolution on the Multi-Denominational Heritage of Biblical Fundamentalism”

With his prayer for the Ephesian believers, the apostle Paul addressed the One “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,” the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:15). It is in this name, Holy Father, that those who have been given to Christ are to be kept as one, even as they are sanctified in the truth (John 17:11). Whereas denominational labels within the spectrum of Protestantism correctly identify important details of differing convictions, basic agreement regarding the “weightier matters of the law” has bound these traditions together as a common echo of the first century Church’s apostolic faith (Matt. 23:23).

As a clearly identifiable movement, biblical fundamentalism is not yet 150 years old. In its earliest phases, it gave voice to the foundational doctrines taught in the Bible and did so without reference to any particular denominational perspective. The earliest conferences, beginning in 1876 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, focused on that which various denominational groups held in common. It was the heritage, they argued, that had come down through the generations from the ministry of the apostles of Christ. As J. Gresham Machen observed, the movement was not the latest of a series of new “isms” but the restatement of the historic Christian faith.

Thus, there were Presbyterians and Methodists as well as Baptists from various fellowships that led the call for a return to the fundamentals of the faith. The latter part of the 19th century was a time of religious upheaval. The rapid acceptance of Charles Darwin’s ideas following the publication of his *Origin of Species* in 1859 together with the effects of German rationalism in theology produced a severe challenge to those who insisted on maintaining the orthodox doctrines taught in the Word of God.

Biblical fundamentalism was from its inception a movement to reassert the weighty matters of Holy Scripture in the face of the tidal wave of skepticism. Thus, biblical fundamentalists, whatever their denominational distinctiveness and convictions, agreed to stand together on, among other things, the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures, the creation of man by God’s direct act, the historicity of Adam’s fall into sin with all its theological consequences, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, His deity, the blood atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, His bodily resurrection on the third day, His ascension bodily into Heaven, and the certainty of His second coming.

Biblical fundamentalists also emphasized that it was necessary for sinners to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven, and that those who were converted to Christ would demonstrate that transformation through an increasing holiness of life in this world. Recognizing that, on less-weighty aspects of biblical teaching, those who held to biblical authority at times disagreed, biblical fundamentalists resolved that they would emphasize the weighty matters on which they all agreed, and they would not consent to using their lesser disagreements as tests of Christian fellowship within the parameters of obedient orthodoxy. In regard to these issues, they resolved to respect the ability of brethren to disagree without surrendering their own denominational convictions or experiencing the condemnation of others.

In 1941, the American Council of Christian Churches was formed as an explicitly multi-denominational organization with a clear doctrinal statement that represented a vivid understanding of the foundations of biblical fundamentalism. In spite of various attacks launched against the ACCC over the last 70 years, the organization has remained true to its founding purpose. It exalts the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope for the salvation of sinners. It exposes the work of theological apostasy, such as that of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches. It rebukes the work of those who seek accommodation with promoters of that apostasy. And it expounds the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Therefore, the delegates to the 70th annual convention of the American Council of Christian Churches, meeting October 18-20, 2011 at the Bible Evangelical Methodist Church of Lancaster, PA, resolve with gladness to value and to maintain the multi-denominational character of the Council, as the Lord enables, and to promote in every obedient way possible the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We resolve to respect each other in the highest expression of Christian love and brotherhood and to stand with each other against every devilish device as we contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

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