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Implementing Authentic Separation

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It is undeniably true that Jesus Christ has called His followers to assume a posture of radical non-conformity to the world system. At the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, the manifesto of Jesus, we find these words: "Be not ye therefore like unto them" (Matt. 6:8). That is a clarion call for Christians to be different from the world around them.

To be perfectly honest, most of us do not like this "difference-talk." And the reason is clear: moral difference does not make for social acceptance and social acceptance is the one thing for which a good many contemporary Christians are prepared to sell their souls. The world thrives on conformity, it "gags" on diversity. It is always attempting to force us into its mold (Rom. 12:2). "How dare you be different," the *cosmos* says to Christians, and far too many of us "cave-in."

But why are Christians to be different? Why has Jesus Christ called His followers to be radical, but godly, non-conformists? It's not so that we can pour contempt on the world. That's what the "punk culture" has done. They, too, are radical non-conformists but of an ungodly variety. They refuse to conform, and for some of the right reasons but in all the wrong ways. Most of the "punk culture" is a reaction to the materialism and the conformism of the older generation, often their own parents. But this contemptuous reaction manifested in outrageous hair-styles, eccentric wardrobes and shameless life-styles is not fitting for Christians. Christians are not to have contempt for the world but compassion for its needy people. And neither are Christians called to be different so that they can call attention to themselves. As a matter of fact, authentic Christians are always seeking to divert attention away from themselves and up to Christ.

Why, then, are we called to be different? I believe the reason is two-fold. First, we are called to this radical difference for the sake of *conforming* to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ Himself. That is a theological reason. It goes without saying that Jesus Christ was morally unique, that He was unequalled and unexcelled in His character and conduct. Christians are to aspire to this kind of spiritual excellence and moral difference. We are to become like Jesus Christ. Second, we are called to this radical difference for the sake of *modeling* before lost men and women the genuine possibility of change. That is a practical reason. Lost people need to know that change is possible. They need to know: "it doesn't always have to be like this. I really can change." Who is it that holds out hope to such people? It is Christians who in their values and life-styles are modeling the change, the difference, which only Jesus Christ can make in a life.

I have thought often of the despair which must come to lost people when they look at professing Christians who are no different than they are. They must think to themselves: "I had hoped that Jesus Christ might make some sense out of my life. I have tried everything else, and He was my last hope. But as I look in upon these Christians I am discovering that they are really *no different* than I am." It is too often true that the deformities of secular society are surfacing in the community of faith. Sometimes we have the same bad ethics, wrong values and self-centered lifestyles; sometimes we manifest the same judgmental spirits, carping criticisms, power-politics and materialistic appetites. So what do these seekers who are looking for a way out conclude? I am convinced that they are saying: "These Christian people are no different. Therefore, the Christian faith must be impotent." That is the tragic price we Christians pay for our eagerness to conform to the world-system.

Clearly, there is a need for a carefully defined, biblically based and compassionately implemented concept of Christian separation. We shall seek to bring this concept into focus by looking at it from three critical perspectives. First, we shall try to identify why men *resist* separation; second, we shall attempt to define the concept, *restating* it in the clearest terms possible; and finally, we shall seek to *rescue* separation from some of the eccentricities which have gathered around it.

Resisting Separation

Without doubt the contemporary Christian attitude toward Christian separation is decidedly cool, if not downright frigid. Why is it that this whole matter has fallen on such hard times?

Functional reasons

To begin with, Christian separation requires disciplined abstinence from what is "evil" and determined adherence to what is "good," and both discipline and determination are rare virtues in the modern Christian community. Discipline requires that we deny ourselves; we would rather indulge ourselves. Discipline requires that we lose ourselves; we would rather love ourselves. Discipline requires that we crucify ourselves; we would rather coddle ourselves.

Moreover, Christian separation demands a willingness on the part of God's people to be misunderstood, misrepresented and even maligned by the world around them because Christian values intersect secular values. Persecution, whether verbal, psychological or physical, is the inevitable clash between two irreconcilable systems of values. In a world gone soft in the cult of material well-being, there is little readiness to endure this kind of hardship even within the Christian community.

Further, sometimes our rejection of separation is nothing less than a reaction to certain "separatists"; men who have tended to be autocratic and affirmational without being compassionate and exegetical. These were men who "barked" and expected that we should "bow" only because they said it. It's not difficult to see how thinking and sensitive individuals would react to such demands. But, unfortunately, the reaction of many has become a tragic over-reaction. Too many have tended to "throw the baby out with the bath water." Because some men have abused the law, they have repudiated all law. Because some men were always saying "no," they are convinced we must never say "no." But we should never betray principle because we "gag" on some personality who may have abused that principle. To do so is to refuse to behave like the mature men and women God has called us to be and to begin to behave like the emotional little children God has forbidden us to be. At best such behavior is adolescent, at worst it is infantile. The result has been a disastrous accommodation of Christian convictions and conduct to non-Christian culture. No longer is there any significant behavioral difference evident between Christians and non-Christians, and whenever that happens the "salt" loses its pungence and the "light" loses its brilliance.

Foundational reasons

There is a second reason for our antipathy for the whole concept of Christian separation. If the first reason is functional, the second is *foundational*. It is a theological reason which is rooted deeply in our racial

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identity. We are Adam's race, and Adam's race does not like to say "no" to itself. And right there we have a wrinkle! At the heart of Christian separation there lies the moral necessity of saying "no" to ourselves and to the world-system. In our culture in general and in the Christian church in particular, there are very few who are prepared to do so. Since the Fall in Eden we have been intrinsically existential: "Deny me nothing. Give me everything. And give it to me right now!" Unmarried parents, unfaithful partners and even undisciplined politicians find it difficult to say "no" to their amorous adventures. Untold millions remain enslaved to cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, gambling and high-cholesterol, high calorie foods in spite of all that is now known of cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. All of it is evidence of a chronic inability to say "no." Employees who embezzle, employers who exploit, students who cheat and criminals who commit felonies all give graphic confirmation to Harvard sociologist, Dr. David Riesman's claim that, "The ethic of the United States is in danger of becoming, 'you're a fool if you obey the rules.'"[1]

This stubborn reluctance to say "no" grows out of a spirit of self-indulgence, which will resort to almost any form of deviate behavior so long as one can avoid the necessity of self-denial. It is an alarming phenomenon permeating almost all contemporary social and spiritual relationships. Why is it that we do not want to say "no" to ourselves or to the world-system? Why is it that we do not want to be disciplined, but prefer the easy-going way of self-indulgence? It seems to me that there are two key Scripture passages which speak to this issue and provide a clear biblical perspective.

First, *Genesis speaks*, telling us why we do not want to say "no" to ourselves (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7). It is significant that human history begins with divine *permission*: "Of every tree . . . thou mayest freely eat" (2:16); and only then is there a divine *prohibition*: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it . . . " (2:17). That sets the tone for all of God's dealings with humanity -"Thou mayest" always precedes "Thou shalt not." It means that Christian separation is first and foremost a *positive* dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ, but it includes a *negative* abstention from whatever is displeasing to Him.

So original man was given a choice. There stood before him a super-abundant "yes" (every tree - freely eat) and only a solitary "no" (one tree - do not eat). In order for Adam and his race to remain in God's favor, all that was necessary was an act of obedience to that solitary "no." Such an act would have been proof of his love for God and would have confirmed the man and the race in righteousness. But what did Adam choose? He refused the solitary "no." That was the very *crux* of the fall: the refusal to say "no" to what he wanted. And ever since it has been our natural

disposition to refuse to say "no" to what we want, to say "no" to ourselves. Adam's "me-first," self-centered infection has spread to the whole race. So Genesis speaks, telling us why we do not want to say "no."

Second, *grace speaks*, telling us why we should say "no" (Titus 2:11-12). Paul says that "grace" speaks: "Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." I have always been struck by the fact that "grace," which is rightly perceived to be a very positive and upbeat concept, starts off the Christian life with an emphatic "what *not* to do." In fact, Paul's word "deny" (*arneomai*) means quite literally "to say no."[2]

It seems to me that a host of modern Christians have misread "grace." In Jude's words they have "turned the grace of God into lasciviousness" (v. 4). These "grace freaks" see grace as the total abolition of the rule of law in all its forms. They wish to be rid of the very category of law! For such people rules, guidelines, standards, and regulations have nothing whatsoever to do with the Christian life. Of course, this is a tragic over-statement of what God intended.

Every Christian on this side of the cross must agree that the Mosaic law, as a temporary expression of the moral law of God, has been "done away." The Mosaic law has been "abolished" and in our day, it has been superseded by the standards of grace revealed in the New Testament documents, the "law of Christ" to which Paul, the apostle of liberty, felt he owed a loyalty: "being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ (I Cor. 9:21). Paul's phrase "under the law" (*ennomos*) means, "subject to the law; obedient to the law; or subject to the law of Christ."[3] And we are told how this "legal obligation" is to be worked out of Christians in the age of grace: "that the righteousness (*dikaioma* - righteous demands or requirements) of the law might be fulfilled *in* us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). It is our submission to the Spirit and our sensitivity to His promptings which enable us to live a disciplined and Christ-honoring life. The natural by-product of walking in the Spirit is the fulfillment of the "righteous requirements" of the moral law of God. That's why Paul says at the end of his listing of those jewels he calls "the fruit of the Spirit": "against such there is *no law*" (Gal. 5:23). Of course not! Righteousness never suffers at the hands of those who are marked by, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." As a matter of fact, Spirit-induced love is the fulfillment of the two tablets of *the Law* (Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Jas. 2:8). And as we all know, this kind of love is a "fruit" which can only be produced "in us" not "by us," as we depend upon the divine energy of the sovereign Spirit.

So we are given a powerful insight. Our contempt for "law" in general, and our penchant for refusing to say "no" in particular are traceable to our racial roots in Adam. But authentic Christians, who have tasted of God's saving grace and have been taught by God's sanctifying grace, understand that they must be prepared to say "no" to themselves and the world-system on the basis of God's principles. This can only mean that in the end they will be committed to a biblical form of Christian separation, refusing "ungodliness and worldly lusts" and purposing to live their lives "soberly, righteously and godly in this present world."

Restating Separation

We begin with the *foundation* of Christian separation. The biblical teaching of separation is founded squarely upon the character of God, especially, but not exclusively, His holiness.

Holiness in Scripture, whether the Old Testament *qadosh* or the New Testament *hagios*, means essentially: "apartness or distinction from that which is common or profane." To sanctify or make holy means simply to "set apart from common use, to consecrate" for sacred purposes.

According to Dr. Rolland McCune, president of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan, the holiness of God is His "apartness" in two realms. First, there is His holiness of *majestic transcendence*. This describes the divine separation from all that is created and finite, for the God of the Bible is both uncreated and infinite (Isa. 6:1-3; 57:15; Ps. 99:1-3). Second, there is His holiness of *moral purity*. This describes His basic separation, apartness or difference from all that is unclean and sinful. God's holiness, McCune says, is the self-affirmation of His being (God *is* Holy). Thus God has a constitutional reaction against anything which contradicts His holiness or is unlike Himself morally. Therefore, God demands that all people, and especially believers, be like Him in character and conduct (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:4; 5:27; 1 John 2:1).

This seems to be Peter's emphasis when quoting the Book of Leviticus: "because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:16). While we can never share in God's majestic transcendence, we can all share in His moral purity. God is "separate" - that's what it means to be "holy" - and we too must be separate for we are called to be like Him. Thus, McCune is right to conclude: "Biblical separation then, is not a foggy notion concocted by some Fundamentalist malcontents . . . . It was not pragmatically devised during the heat of controversy. It is of God's very nature to be separatistic as

defined earlier, and the demands of separation made upon His people are first of all endemic with the God who called them to be like Him."

If it is true that Christian apartness is an imitation of divine apartness, that immediately precludes all images of harshness, meanness, brazenness or rudeness as authentic expressions of separatism. God is guilty of none of these deformities, and yet He Himself, in His very nature, is the prototype for all true "separatists." It means that we are responsible to conform to Christ in all dimensions of His morality and that will include both purity (God is holy) and charity (God is love).

Having laid the foundation, we continue with the *definition* of Christian separation. It seems to me that authentic Christians are called to implement three forms of biblical separation. In this way they honor God's holiness in a fallen world.

Personal separation. I define personal separation as: radical non-conformity to the *cosmos;* resolute conformity to Jesus Christ. Theologically the *cosmos*, the "world," is that highly organized and carefully arranged system of thought and practice which stands in total opposition to God and His truth and is fed and energized by the devil (Eph. 2:2, 3; II Cor. 4:4; I John 5:19). The Christian, in terms of his value system and behavioral patterns, is not to "conform" to the *cosmos*, but instead he is to be "transformed" into the likeness of Jesus Christ. It goes without saying that Christians are obliged to obey the moral imperatives of Scripture, which are stated in categorical and unmistakable terms. However, there are situations which arise in life which are not specifically addressed in God's Word. In such cases what are Christians to do? What are the regulatory principles revealed in Scripture which will help modern Christians to fulfill their calling as radical but Godly non-conformists?

First, there is the principle of *expedience* (I Cor. 6:12a). It is possible for Christians to reach a dissipation level by expending time and energy on things that do not really matter, things that are not "expedient." For that reason Paul prays that we will learn to "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:10). In erecting our hierarchy of values and our system of priorities, it is vital that we never allow the permissible to become the enemy of the essential. We must choose things that are "expedient."

Second, there is the principle of *enslavement* (I Cor. 6:12b). To be "brought under the power" of anything is to be controlled or mastered by it. Paul is saying that all forms of personal freedom are to be regulated and curtailed by the principle of self-control. If I may be mastered or enslaved by a certain habit or activity, then I must abstain. Christians are taught that they are to "delight themselves in the Lord" (Ps. 37:4). If anything other

than God Himself is becoming our chief source of joy, it is time to withdraw from it and avoid it altogether.

Third, there is the principle of *enrichment* (I Cor. 10:23b). To "edify" means to build up, benefit, strengthen or establish. If Christians might be impoverished rather than enriched, whether mentally, emotionally, physically, morally or spiritually, then they must learn to say "no."

Fourth, there is the principle of *exaltment* (1 Cor. 10:31). Every Christian must realize that God's reputation is at stake in his behavior. Our goal should be the exaltation of the divine name, not the gratification of personal appetites. Every activity and appetite must be subordinate to this major consideration. All too often the wicked are given an occasion to blaspheme the name of God on account of the defective behavior of believers (11 Sam. 12:14; Titus 2:5). Pre-occupation with such self-assertive, self-acquisitive conduct will not do for authentic Christians. If the name of the Lord might be jeopardized, or His reputation compromised, then Spirit-filled Christians must avoid all such activity.

Fifth, there is the principle of *endangerment* (1 Cor. 8:9-13). Here is a section of Scripture dealing with our responsibility of protective care for younger and weaker Christians. Only the most selfish of God's people would live their lives irrespective of their obligations to be a moral example to their fellow Christians. Maturing Christians, who take seriously their responsibilities to those who are watching them, studiously avoid anything in their lives which might cause others to stumble and fall spiritually. While we must never feed pharisaical judgmentalism, neither should we grow calloused to the legitimate needs of struggling and immature Christians. Rather, we should gladly defer to the well-being of others rather than selfishly demand the fulfillment of our personal "rights." In so doing we follow the moral example of Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 17:24-27).

Sixth, there is the principle of *entanglement* (1 Thes. 5:21, 22; II Tim. 2:4). Paul makes clear in II Timothy 2:4 that Christians "on active duty" (which is what "warreth" means) are to refuse to be overmastered by the seductions of "this life" (*bios* - the realm of purely physical and human pursuits.) And, in contrast to the contemporary mood of coming as close to the world system as possible, while still maintaining some semblance of Christianity, Paul insists that the authentic Christian is ready to follow the divine mandate in I Thessalonians 5:21-22. "Prove all things" means: subject everything in your life to the scrutiny of Scripture with a view to either approving or disapproving it. If it proves to be good, "hold it fast." If it proves to be evil, "hold it off." We are called to manifest a godly contempt for what is evil and a godly commitment to what is good. Yet, how many of us do so?

Seventh, there is the principle of *equivocation* (Rom. 14:23). To "equivocate" means to halt between two opinions, to be unsure, to be doubtful or uncertain. When Paul says in this verse that we are to do nothing apart from "faith," he means that we are not to operate in life blindly. If we have no standard or conviction growing out of "faith" to provide clear direction in a matter, the prudent course would be one of abstinence.

So these are the principles which, if consistently and carefully applied, will enable us to practice personal separation. Of course, Scripture does not dictate what we should or should not do in every possible scenario of life. But it does provide a series of great principles which we as priests before God are responsible to implement in all the real-life situations of our daily walk. If we are faithful to do so, then we shall fulfill our mandate of radical non-conformity to the *cosmos* and resolute conformity to Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiastical separation. But if the first form of Biblical separation is to be found at a personal level, the second form is to be found at an ecclesiastical level. I define *ecclesiastical separation* as: Radical non-conformity to "babel;" resolute conformity to "the faith," i.e., the body of truth revealed in Scripture.

What does "babel" have to do with the matter of separation on an ecclesiastical level? Babel in Genesis 11 represents the formal institution of "the mystery of iniquity," the religion of Satan and Antichrist. Thereafter, throughout all of Scripture, Babylon becomes the "code word" for satanic religion, whatever form it takes. This would include liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, the eastern religions (which are being popularized in the avalanche of "new age" propaganda which has flooded our culture) all forms of the occult, cultists, false prophets and apostasy and unbelief.

The very word "babel" (Gen. 11:9) comes from a Hebrew verb (*balal*) which means "to pour together or mingle together," with the result that "confusion" is forth-coming.[4] Theologically, "babel" means the distortion and perversion of truth by mixing or mingling it with error. On a linguistic basis in Genesis 11 it meant the end of unadulterated language. On a theological basis in both the ancient and modern world it meant and means the end of unadulterated truth. The real subtlety of "babel" is that it always has a trace of truth in what it says.

This is why authentic Fundamentalists have always felt the necessity to be biblical separatists. They have never felt the liberty to knowingly "pour" truth and error together, and the only alternative available to them was to "separate" the truth from error. That is what we call "ecclesiastical separation."

But we learn from history that the Babylonians called themselves not "Babel" (confusion) but "Bab-ili" (gate of God) - "a flattering reinterpretation of its original meaning."[5] So throughout earth-history, "Babylon" in its multiformity is always saying: "We are the gate of God." But Scripture is always saying: "No, you are confusion." It's no surprise, therefore, that authentic Christians have always sought to keep their distance, theologically, from "babel," practicing radical non-conformity to it. II Corinthians 6:14-18 is probably the pivotal passage on the matter of ecclesiastical separation. In it Paul presents three significant insights in support of this form of biblical separation.

First, he makes clear the *requirement*. It is unfolded in the form of four commands. It is very difficult to miss his point when you are staring four imperatives in the face. What does he say? *"Be ye not unequally yoked together"* (v. 14). Historically the concept of "the yoke" had both matrimonial and doctrinal overtones. "A mixed marriage or cooperation with one who had a different doctrine was considered to be 'unequally yoked.'"[6] This kind of mismating with something which is totally diverse is strictly forbidden to God's people. Then Paul says: *"Come out from among them"* (v. 17). The aorist imperative suggests immediate and decisive withdrawal and the verb carries the connotation of "escape" as in John 10:30 where it is used of Jesus' "escape" out of the hands of the Jerusalem Jews. And again Paul says: *"And be ye separate"* (v. 17). This is a verb suggesting the setting of a limit, the erecting of a boundary or the drawing of a line beyond which we are not to go. And finally Paul commands: *"And touch not the unclean thing"* (v. 17), by which he means that we are not to meddle with or take hold of the realm of doctrinal unbelief. Earlier, Paul had made it clear that "Christian separation did not mean absolute isolation from unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:9-10) . . . . Perhaps some Christians had gone to the other extreme by making few distinctions between themselves and the world."[7] While Paul would never call Christians to a stance of complete physical and social segregation from the world's people, he does call them to a stance of ethical, philosophical and doctrinal separation from the world system.

Second, Paul makes equally clear the *rationale* for this requirement. This rationale is two-fold. First, Paul insists upon *the distinctiveness of the Christian way* (vv. 14-16). Paul begins his rationale with the word "for" (*gar*), a grammatical device which shows a logical conclusion to the preceding clause. What Paul is going to say logically flows out of the prohibition of an "unequal yoke" with unbelievers. What Paul does is ask a series of rhetorical questions, each consisting of an *antithesis*, which will not allow for any *synthesis*. An "antithesis" describes mutually exclusive

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qualities which cannot be blended without great harm. A "synthesis" describes a mixing or mingling together (shades of "babel"). These five questions, when combined, present a formidable obstacle to any potential link between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Satan, belief and unbelief, and the temple of God and idols. The distinctiveness of the Christian way is made incontrovertibly clear by Paul's insistence that there can be no fellowship, no communion, no concord, no common ground and no agreement between these mutually exclusive theological realms!

But second, Paul's rationale is built further on what we might call *the uniqueness of the Christian church* - " . . . for ye are the temple of the living God . . ." (v. 16b). "Temple" (*naos*) means the "inner sanctum" where God dwells.[8] In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had already warned these believers of the dire consequences of "defiling" the temple, by which he meant the church body as a whole (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). There is no doubt that an "unequal yoke" with lawlessness, darkness, Satan, unbelief and idolatry would be corruptive and ruinous to the church, so it is no surprise that it is strictly and categorically forbidden.

Finally, Paul makes clear the *reward* for obedience to his mandate of ecclesiastical separation. Two great blessings are promised to those who obey. In the first place, we can expect a deepened *relationship of divine favor*: "and I will receive you" (v. 17b). "Receive" is the verb which means literally "to receive *into*, to receive with *favor*, to welcome or *take in*." This is good news for those who have been asked to "come out." For their act of obedience they will be "taken in" by God Himself, welcomed into a deeper, more intimate and more favorable relationship with their God. While such obedience often proves to be costly in a hostile environment, the smile of God far outweighs the approval of the world.

Secondly, we can expect a heightened *relationship of divine fatherliness*: "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters . . ." (v. 18). Paul does not mean that Christians who do not practice this form of separation are not "sons and daughters." But he does mean that the people who really experience and enjoy that dimension of their relationship to God are those who are prepared to honor His holiness and truth by uncompromisingly, and yet compassionately, identifying with, defending and fleshing-out in the context of Christian ministry those great divine attributes no matter the cost. So the call to radical non-conformity to babel, and resolute conformity to "the faith" is no "barren renunciation."[9] On the contrary, obedience to this call introduces us to exciting and new levels of the divine favor and the divine fatherliness. This is a reward indeed!

Before we leave the matter of ecclesiastical separation, two further points need to be made. *First*, we must be very careful to make a clear distinction between unbelief and unbelievers. Francis Schaeffer once spoke of his very unique relationship with Bishop James Pike, a leading liberal in the Episcopal Church. He described a couple of occasions in which he was able to make clear statements regarding the Christian position "without one iota of compromise," while at the same moment treating Bishop Pike with the respect which is due all human beings. One of Schaeffer's statements is particularly probing: "I will never forget the last time I saw him . . . . He said one of the saddest things I have every heard: 'when I turned from being agnostic, I went to Union Theological Seminary, eager for and expecting bread; but when I graduated, all that it left me was a handful of pebbles.'"[10] Such men are definitely not our *kin* theologically or spiritually but they are our *"kind"* creationally. We must treat them as the image-bearers that they are, while never giving away one iota of the Christian faith to their system of unbelief or apostasy.

Second, I feel the necessity to give at least one example of the tragic consequences of failing to practice ecclesiastical separation in the contemporary world. The February 5, 1990 issue of *Christianity Today* carried a fascinating article entitled: "The Remaking of English Evangelicalism" (pp. 25-36) written by David Neff and George K. Brushaber. In it John Stott is identified as "the dean of Anglican evangelicals." Following the Second World War, Stott's tack was to gather around him "a coterie of 40 under-40 clergy who set out to change the face of the church." And on the surface, it would appear that they had succeeded. In the early 1950's less than 10 percent of those ordained to Anglican ministry were evangelicals. By 1969 the figure was 31 percent and by 1986 it was 51 percent. Superficially, it would seem that the "stay-in" rather than "come-out" philosophy of Anglican evangelicals such as J.I. Packer, Dick Lucas and John Stott has been vindicated. But a closer look at contemporary English evangelicalism paints another picture altogether.

While it is true that the "evangelical party" within the Anglican church has *grown* phenomenally over this period, it is equally true that the essential nature of that evangelicalism has *changed* phenomenally during the same period. Dick Lucas, who along with Stott, was one of the "founding fathers" of the evangelical push in the Church of England is characterized as saying: " . . . much of the effort seems to have been for naught. Expository preaching, concern for doctrinal orthodoxy, the piety of the mind . . . are being ignored or merely taken for granted as the charismatic movement has revitalized [sic] evangelicalism both in and out of the Church of England." Stott himself expresses a similar concern when he

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says: "I am now afraid there is a liberal evangelical element. People are really going soft on Scripture." The "charismatic flavor" of British evangelicalism, which with its "yeasty ferment has leavened nearly every part of the evangelical lump," has radically impacted the influence of the postwar leaders. It is no surprise, therefore, that the authors of the article conclude that, "a remarkable success by the classical evangelicals has also been a source of discouragement. There is an ever increasing percentage of young evangelicals in the Church of England, but their evangelicalism is less and less like that promoted in the postwar resurgence." So profound is this "discouragement" that with respect to preaching Stott is quoted as saying: "I'm in as much despair as Dick Lucas is. The standards of preaching are abysmal, even among evangelicals who are supposed to believe the Bible." And it's not only bibliology which is suffering in Anglican evangelicalism. Other doctrines are too, according to Michael Baughen, Stott's successor as rector of All Souls, Langham Place, and president of the Anglican Evangelical Assembly. Neff and Brushaber describe Baughen's concerns as follows:

> After learning that in the major charismatic songbooks, only 1 percent of the hymns contain references to the Cross, he fears that the doctrine of the Atonement is being ignored: "I'm about to start a "red party" - that's "red" for the Atonement. The church has lost sight of the centrality of the Cross." Baughen is also worried about a fading awareness of sin. "For many Christian young people today, the greatest sins are experiments on animals and wearing fur coats, rather than the sins that are particularly given priority in the New Testament-such as sleeping with somebody else," says the earnest bishop.[11]

So on further reflection, the picture of Anglican evangelicalism is not nearly as impressive as the statistical data might suggest. One feels compelled to ask, of what value is the term "evangelical," when it is being applied to 51 percent of the ordained clergy within Anglicanism, if it no longer represents historic evangelicalism? What enduring value can possibly come from an "evangelicalism" which has gone soft on the Word, the Cross and the whole matter of sin? Is an evangelicalism eviscerated of an authentic bibliology, soteriology and hamartiology capable of radically impacting its world for Christ? Should Christians be preoccupied with their "churchly duty" (to quote Stott) to "stay in" and attempt to "reform" an apostate organization, as the Church of England with its Anglo-Catholic and liberal branches has most assuredly become? Or would it be wiser to

obey the Biblical mandate to "come out from among them, and be ye separate," while simultaneously setting about to build a dynamic network of New Testament local churches which are grounded squarely upon God's Word and are committed fully to Christ's lordship? What would have happened in England over the past generation, where today only 9 percent of the population attend any church, if John Stott and his "coterie of 40 under-40" representatives of historic evangelicalism had chosen the latter, rather than the former, option?

To the authentic Fundamentalist, the answers to these questions seem obvious. "Evangelicals" who have forfeited historic evangelicalism are impotent to meet the fundamental needs of their culture. While Fundamentalists have been accused by Neff and Brushaber of "cultural and intellectual isolation," the kind of evangelicalism which is described in their article is guilty of cultural and intellectual absorption. And absorption into the culture is at least as dangerous as isolation from it, and perhaps more so. What is needed is *ecclesiastical separation* from apostasy, so that we still have a message worth proclaiming, combined with *evangelistic penetration* into society, so that we have somebody to whom the message may be proclaimed. In such separation we overcome absorption, and in such penetration we overcome isolation.

Familial separation. But if the first form of separation to which we are called is personal, and the second is ecclesiastical, then the third and final form is familial. I define *familial separation* as: the unfortunate necessity of functional severance from members of the family, true born again Christians, when doctrinal or ethical compromise creeps into their lives or ministries. While recognizing the foundational oneness of spirit which exists between true Christians we must be willing with sorrow, grief and pain, to turn away from entrenched deviation. As with biological siblings who have become "black sheep," we must feel a sense of pain and great loss whenever this necessity arises because we really do love our "brothers and sisters" in Christ. This kind of separation is a sort-of "death" - a wrenching apart of what was intended to be permanently joined together. And our heart-beat should be that those who have gone out from the family circle through some form of deviate behavior or belief might return to the center of that circle so that they might be used of God more effectively.

Of course, we must develop a "hierarchy of priorities" when it comes to the matter of familial separation. Over matters of preference we may certainly differ, but we should not divide. We shall have to determine whether or not our dispute is constitutional or merely superficial. If there is no clear-cut: "Thus saith the Lord," we should not judge and neither should we separate (Rom. 14:10-13). There are two opposite and equally

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destructive options open to us as Christians. One is to see no basis for separation at all. The other is to see every little difference as a basis for separation among God's people. If the first option is a manifestation of naivete, the second is a manifestation of heresy, which at its root means: "a person who without justification creates division."[12] And neither naivete nor heresy will do for authentic Christians.

Moreover, we will be wise to discern whether or not our brother's deviation is an isolated event or a continual pattern. All of us, I think, would prefer to be judged by the ebb and flow of our lives and ministries rather than by the eddies, which seem at times to move against the main current. Is our brother's practice or position something permanent or transient? Does it represent a major shift in direction or simply a fleeting moment of experimentation? Is it an appeal for a new and unbiblical theology, or merely an attempt at discovering a new and functional methodology, which might on the surface appear unconventional but is not necessarily unbiblical?

The answers to these questions must govern the approach we will take. If the purity of "the bride of Christ" is not at stake, then we shall have to discipline ourselves against judgmental or pharisaical attitudes and actions toward our brothers with whom we disagree. On the other hand, if a specific behavioral pattern or belief system has the potential to defile "the bride," then we shall have to love our brother enough to confront him biblically, work with him patiently and pray for him faithfully so that Christ's cause does not suffer loss before the watching world. If such an approach is resisted or brushed aside as an unwarranted intrusion, and aberrant patterns become entrenched, it may very well mean a functional severance from our brother as a way of capturing his attention and redirecting his focus to the biblical issues at stake.

While there are numerous passages in the New Testament documents which touch on the matter of familial separation, it is probably safe to say that II Thessalonians 3 is the key passage. In particular, verses 6, 14, and 15 deal specifically with this subject: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which you received of us . . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." It seems to me that several significant qualities of familial separation are unfolded in this passage.

First, it is clear that it is *official in its origin* -- "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6). These are words

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which suggest both dignity and gravity. "Command" is the word which was used of "a general ordering his troops;" and a command which is given "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" makes it "as authoritative as it can possibly be".[13] It means that we are not at liberty either to actively dismiss or passively ignore this apostolic mandate. We have no more freedom to reject this imperative than we do any of the others which come from the apostles via the Spirit.

Second, it is *fraternal in its focus* -- "withdraw yourselves from every *brother . . .* admonish him as a *brother* (vv. 6 and 15). There can be no doubt that *familial* separation is in view, for we are in this passage dealing with *adelphoi* or "brethren," those who are "born of the same womb." It is within the context of the family that this instruction is to be carried out. Clearly, we are meant to deal differently with our "brethren" than we do with apostates. In my mind, this is why a distinct category of "familial separation" is so necessary. If we lump our "brothers" together with apostates under the general heading of "ecclesiastical separation," it is not long before we are speaking of and treating our brothers as though they were apostates. This is never God's intention, and it undermines our claim to be authentic Christians (John 13:34, 35). So while the context is authoritative ("Now we command you . . ."), it is also affectionate ("brethren . . . a brother").

Third, familial separation is *disgraceful in its flavor* -- "withdraw . . . note . . . have no company with him . . . that he may be ashamed" (vv. 6 & 14). All of these terms suggest the cessation of normal and familiar intercourse. To "withdraw" means to remain aloof, but not with a spirit of superiority. To "note" means that the person is to be "marked" or "singled-out" as one who is insensitive to spiritual instruction. It carries the "flavor of disapproval".[14] To "have no company with" means that in cases where deviation of behavior or belief prevails as a pattern, we are not to "mix ourselves up with" such people. It is a prohibition of intimate fellowship with those who habitually "walk" (present tense -- v. 6) in a disorderly fashion, or with those who habitually refuse "obedience" (present tense -- v. 14) to the apostolic instruction. All of this is so that the "shunned" believer might be "shamed" (v. 14). This kind of "shaming" is designed to humble him, disgrace him and hopefully alert him to the catastrophic consequences of refusal to pay heed to the Word of God. But this humbling, disgracing or alerting is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. God "gives grace to the humble" but He "resists the proud." When the man is "humbled," he is in a position to receive grace and be restored. So while the immediate flavor is disgraceful the ultimate objective is beneficial.

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Fourth, Paul makes clear that his instruction in this passage is *principial in its emphasis* -- "walketh disorderly and not after the *tradition . . .* obey not our *word* by this *epistle"* (vv. 6 and 14). "Disorderly" is the word which describes a soldier who refuses to maintain his proper position in the ranks or is out of step. It implies deviation from a set of beliefs or a code of conduct. This code Paul calls "the tradition," which must be taken to mean the authoritative apostolic teaching.[15] In II Thessalonians 2:15 it is called "the traditions" (plural) and in 3:14 it is "our word by this epistle." Clearly it is to be understood in the broader sense of the whole apostolic theology or prophetic word revealed in Scripture. Or, as Morris puts it: "it stands for all Christian teaching, be it oral or written".[16] What we have here, then, is a *principle* which transcends the particular isolated *event* of laziness due to a distortion of biblical eschatology, which was the problem at that moment in Thessalonica. This means that familial separation is to be invoked in other cases than merely "laziness." The passage does not restrict us to such a narrow or limited application. The particular event in this chapter may be *indolence* in view of Christ's coming, but the general principle is *disobedience* to the whole of the Christian message as revealed in Scripture. It seems clear from the context that Paul's teaching on this matter in this passage is principial in its emphasis.

Fifth, it is seen to be *gentle in its spirit* -- "yet count him not as an enemy" (v. 15). While our insistence upon fidelity to the Word of God must be relentless, it is never to be heartless. Paul insists that there is to be an element of tenderness balancing the element of firmness. There are always those who are overly zealous to point out the faults of others and who seem to relish drastic responses. Paul wants it clearly understood that this kind of action is to be carried out in a spirit of love. "They are to be dealt with; but they remain brethren. Here we have the warm affection of a friend, and not the cold rule of an autocrat."[17]

Finally, familial separation is seen in this passage to be *remedial in its goal* -- "admonish him as a brother" (v. 15). While Paul has already forbidden intimate communion with those who are marked by entrenched deviation from Christian truth, he actually encourages *nouthetic* communication with them. "Admonish" *(noutheteo)* is the Greek word which carries with it the idea of restorative correction. Because it is imperative in mode, it means that we are morally bound to reach out to an erring brother. Because it is plural in number, it means that all Christians are responsible to help in the restorative process. Because it is present in tense, it means that one attempt will not do. We must love our brother enough to repeatedly and patiently reach out to him with the truth. Hendriksen is right to say that, "when *admonition* does not succeed,

segregation must be resorted to . . ."[18] But this is always the final and most painful step and comes only after repeated and rigorous attempts to humbly, and yet firmly, set our brother straight. According to Jay Adams, *nouthetic* confrontation consists of at least three basic elements: (1) it always implies a problem to be faced and an obstacle to be overcome; (2) it always requires that these problems and obstacles be overcome on the basis of verbal communication; (3) it always has as its goal or objective the benefit of the person confronted.[19] To "admonish" is not to attack but to assist. Our goal is reclamation not retribution, and this must be evident as we approach the errant brother.

So these are the qualities which attach themselves to familial separation as unfolded by the apostle Paul in ll Thessalonians 3. Their primary application, of course, is to the fellowship of the local church itself. But it is difficult to imagine that other authentic assemblies would organizationally affiliate with or support those who have been subjected to the biblically defined and compassionately implemented discipline of a sister agency.

If we are to be authentic Christians, we shall have to manifest the moral courage to implement all three of the forms of biblical separation which we have discussed: personal, ecclesiastical and familial. But we must look yet at this concept of separation from one final perspective.

Rescuing Separation

It comes as a surprise to some Fundamentalists that separation needs "rescuing," but as a matter of fact certain eccentricities have crept into our implementation of this great biblical principle which make its rescue absolutely essential. While there is room for a great deal of discussion and even debate on this matter, I would like to suggest three simple procedures which might assist us in this rescue operation.

First, we must *recognize its liabilities.* Separation can easily degenerate to the level of the superficial and the external. It is very easy when dealing with this matter to shift the focus from a Spirit-filled heart where Christ reigns supremely, to a code-keeping mentality where self is applauded regularly. As a matter of fact, I am convinced that this is what has happened over the past couple of generations within biblical Christianity. Two generations ago there lived a group of Christians who for the most part fleshed-out their Christian lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ and in the fullness of God's Spirit. The natural by-product of such *inward* integrity was *outward* morality, consisting of both a positive

dedication to certain practices which were pleasing to Christ and a negative abstention from those things which were not.

Unfortunately, the next generation, the one immediately preceding ours, tended to focus on the externals of outward morality, which had characterized their parents, and seemed to overlook the essentials of inward integrity, which were the real roots of their visible life-style. This glaring oversight was further complicated by the fact that their parents tended to pass on the external standards without explaining the biblical principles. In an authoritarian era, it's not difficult to see how this could happen. The effect was the development of a classical form of legalism (conformity to an outward code as the sign of spirituality), which corrupted true spirituality by shifting the focus from the internal to the external.

Today's generation has in large part forgotten the principle of *lordship*, which characterized their grandparents, and has reacted to the practice of *legalism* which characterized their parents. The result has been the development of a classical form of *libertinism*, which buys into an unprincipled and standardless form of Christianity, and which is very much like the cosmos, while remaining very much unlike Jesus Christ. This tragic slide, over two generations of time, from lordship (where biblical principles were understood and external standards were implemented) to legalism (where biblical principles were ignored and external standards were exalted) to libertinism (where biblical principles are forgotten and external standards are despised) has produced a scandalous variety of Christianity which is incapable of either confronting the culture or restraining its evil. We shall have to guard ourselves against such degeneration in our life-time and seek to recover the Spirit-filled, Bible-based, heart-focus of our grandparents, if we ever hope to be authentic Fundamentalists.

Second, we must *renounce one-dimensional Christianity.* I fear that in some circles there has arisen the perception that the issue of separation is the "whole pie" instead of "one piece" of the pie. While Christian separation is an indispensable ingredient in the "recipe" for an authentic Christian life, it is not the single or only ingredient. No "recipe" for life is really palatable, if it consists of only one ingredient. It is the proper blend of a number of ingredients which issues in a well-balanced and savory product.

So we must put separation where it belongs in the Christian experience. No Christian who wishes to be "real" could ever abandon this cardinal principle of Christian living, but neither will he see it as the exclusive principle, which transcends and makes unnecessary all the others. Those who tend to do this fall very easily into two destructive traps. First, they

become *inconsistent* in their application of "the whole counsel" of God's word to their separatist friends. What this means is that a friend might hold to a peculiar set of beliefs, an eccentric pattern of a behavior or dubious philosophy of ministry and at the very same moment be warmly embraced because he espouses a form of biblical separation. And yet it is these very same elements-beliefs, behavior, ministry-which become the basis of our alienation from brothers who are not "separatists." This kind of inconsistency has without doubt been harmful to our claims to be authentic Fundamentalists. If the first destructive trap into which one-dimensional Christians fall is inconsistency, the second is *idolatry*. I heard Bob Jones III say on one occasion that *fellowship* with God is the objective of Christ's death (1 John 1:1-3), and that prayer, separation and other Christian disciplines are the means to the objective. And then he added this very insightful thought: "If we substitute the means for the objective, the means become *idolatrous* deformities." No *one* dimension of the Christian experience should be accorded that kind of elevation.

Third, we must *recover attitudinal integrity*. Sometimes we Fundamentalists are militant biblicists when it comes to *affirmational* propositions in Scripture-our doctrines. However, when it comes to *attitudinal* propositions in Scripture-our demeanor-we are not so militant. We will be truly biblical only when we can support with *equal vigor* a militancy for the message of Christ *and* a militancy for the meekness of Christ. I have often thought that perhaps a good title for a book dealing with this much needed balance within Fundamentalism might be: "Militant Meekness."

Scripture is clear regarding the necessity of attitudinal integrity:

1. We are called to manifest, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," for though we "walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mightily through God to the pulling down of strongholds)" (II Cor. 10:1-3).

2. We are called to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Without doubt, authentic Christians are lovers of the truth, but they have purposed never to speak it brutally or cruelly.

3. We are called to "weeping" in the face of tragic compromise: "Brethren, be followers of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told

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you often, and now tell you even *weeping*, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ . . .)" (Phil. 3:17, 18).

4. We are called to be utterly uncontentious in the midst of our contending for the truth: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (II Tim. 2:24-26)

This attitudinal balance to which we should all aspire, combined with a subtle hint as to how we might achieve it, is expressed very clearly in an excerpt from Peter Kreeft's book *Making Choices*. Kreeft says:

So in waging spiritual warfare we must avoid both the ancient, "hard" mistake and the modern, "soft" mistake. Our ancestors were better than we are at the "hard" virtues, like courage and chastity. We are better at the "soft" virtues, like kindness and philanthropy. But you can no more specialize in virtue than in anatomical organs. The virtues are like organs in a body; interdependent. Compassion without courage ceases under pressure, and compassion without justice is wasted. Justice without mercy becomes cruelty; chastity without charity, coldness. The "hard" virtues are like the bones in a body, and the "soft" virtues like tissues. Bones without tissues are a skeleton; tissues without bones, a jellyfish.

How can we learn to fight without hating, to hate sins but not sinners, to love sinners without loving sins? Only one ever did it perfectly. The only way we can do it is His way. He *is* "the way, the truth, and the life." If He only *taught* the way, we could learn it from others. But if He is the way, we can learn it and live it only in Him.[20]

So these are the procedures which are essential to rescuing separation from the eccentricities which have gathered all around it. We must recognize its liabilities, renounce one-dimensional Christianity and recover attitudinal integrity. In this way we shall be able to reclaim an authentic variety of separation for Fundamentalism.

Hopefully, our attempt to understand the *resistance* to this concept, our efforts to carefully, biblically and compassionately *restate* the concept and our burden to *rescue* the concept from some harmful deformities will contribute to that end.

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