

COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

A POSITION PAPER ON BIBLICAL SEPARATION

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and to exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3)

The history of God's people is the account of small groups and lonely individuals contending for the faith. Abel, the second-born human, died at the hands of his brother, who despised him because God accepted him. When "every imagination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually . . . Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:5 & 8) and stood alone preaching righteousness to a rebellious race. Obeying God's call, Abram left his kindred and came out from his country – and God made a separated, holy people of him.

Elijah stood for truth against hundreds of Baal's government-sponsored prophets. Isaiah cried to his fellow countrymen, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity," while standing virtually alone, his only comfort being: "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:4 & 9). God instructed Jeremiah to declare the Israelites' infidelity, warning that "they shall fight against thee." But God encouraged him with the words: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jeremiah 1:19 & 8). Similar features can be found in the lives and ministries of many Old Testament prophets.

Life was no easier for God's servants in the New Testament. John the Baptist preached outside the prevailing religious establishment and condemned it. He was spurned by the religious power brokers, hated by the queen, and eventually murdered by the king. Jesus Christ shared John's view and was crucified. The disciples labored outside the bounds of "acceptable" religion and denounced its doings. They were martyred.

The Apostle Paul likewise broke all ties with his former religious body that he might know Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. The religious establishment hounded him, imprisoned him, vowed to kill him and, if tradition is correct, succeeded. Paul instructed Christians to separate from anyone who opposed the doctrines of God's Word.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Corinthians 6:14–18). The great apostle told the Galatian Christians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). To the church at Ephesus he wrote: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). Paul instructed Timothy to remain at Ephesus, "that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Timothy 1:3). Timothy was exhorted to "give attendance" and to "take heed" to doctrine (4:13 & 16), and to "shun profane and vain babblings" such as those of "Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred" (II Timothy 2:16–18). As for the disobedient who had a powerless form of godliness, Paul exhorted Timothy, "From such turn away" (3:5). Titus was taught the same by Paul. Concerning deceivers, he wrote: "Whose mouths must be stopped . . . wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:11 & 13). "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (1:16). Titus was to "exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (2:15). He was admonished: "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (3:10–11).

Obedience to the command to be separate is not popular. Our Saviour spoke of the oppression his disciples were going to bear, telling them that they were blessed when persecuted for righteousness sake, being assured of great rewards in heaven and of identity with a godly line of prophets (Matthew 5:11–12). Paul warned the Philippians: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). And Timothy was advised: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12).

Christian history is the record of godly men striving to obey these commands and suffering the consequences. During the first three centuries, believers separated from the paganism of the Roman Empire. As a result of their fidelity to God's Word, they were randomly tortured and martyred. But truth prospered, and the body of believers grew.

Christianity became not only legal, but fashionable in A.D. 313 when the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity. That newfound popularity made it easy to feign allegiance to Jesus Christ. This opened the visible church to unconverted professors, and true Christians had to separate from them. The disengagements took place amid great controversy regarding correct doctrine.

Whereas the Christian church has possessed the full body of truth since it was first revealed in the Scriptures, that truth was not expressed in a creed without being subjected to strenuous and divisive debate. Such debate resulted as misguided men taught doctrines contrary to the Word of God. When their ideas were preached, Christians were driven to intensive study, examining those ideas closely in the light of Scripture. These studies provided historic Christianity's credal statements of orthodox doctrines.

The first major separation occurred when Arius, a popular teacher in Alexandria, Egypt, preached that Jesus Christ was a created being, not God. The debate produced the first firmly held credal statement on Christ's deity, and Arius was condemned as a heretic. Though his heresy has reappeared in the history of Christianity, the body of Christ has always condemned his error. In similar fashion all the doctrines of Christianity gained credal authentication.

As time passed, the church that grew out of the fallen Roman Empire took in many who might never have entered under the earlier persecution. Their pagan practices often came with them. Ideas and practices founded on human tradition and reasoning – rather than Scripture – arose and gradually became the established dogma of the Roman church. Central among these errors was the teaching that justification is gained through faith in Christ *plus* performance of church-prescribed works. Roman Catholicism has never abandoned this heresy.

Outside the massive and powerful Roman church, a faithful remnant, small and despised, continued to preach the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ alone and to cry out against corruptions of the religious establishment. Like Christ, whose ministry reestablished the truth buried beneath traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, this faithful few proclaimed the truth when prevailing religious tradition had well nigh obscured it completely. And like Christ, these believers were hated and murdered, thousands of them, at the hands of the Roman church. The Waldensians in mountainous northern Italy, the Hussites in Bohemia, and countless other saints were brutally tortured and slain in an officially orchestrated quest to eliminate Christ's flock. The record of bloodshed for Christ at the hands of Rome's church is lengthy, well documented and dreadful.

By God's grace, the light of truth shone brightly once again in the 16th century. The Protestant Reformation exposed the heresy and abuse of the dominant

religious establishment and amid great controversy reestablished the important doctrines of justification by faith alone and the supremacy of Scripture over religious tradition.

This succession of conflicts entered a new phase in the 19th century. While earlier arguments regarded single doctrines, this one focused upon the reliability of Scripture, a doctrine upon which *all other* doctrines stand or fall. If Scripture is totally trustworthy, then all its truth is to be embraced. If Scripture is untrustworthy in any way, then nobody can be sure of any truth.

This unprecedented attack on Scripture was the legacy of rationalistic 18th century theologians who began to openly question the reliability of Scripture. The century that followed witnessed a gradual spread of their unbelief. These unregenerate theologians were often seminary professors who succeeded in imparting to their students a faith in human reasoning that supplanted faith in Scriptures. By the early 20th century, major denominations of North America were increasingly led by clergy who had learned well the infidelity of their instructors. Theirs was not historic, biblical Christianity: it was "another gospel," of which the Spirit of God had warned through the Apostle Paul.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, believers vigorously opposed the apostasy which by then was very evident within these denominations. But the pattern of history was to be repeated, not reversed. Heresy cannot be reformed; it must be renounced. God's children are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Rather, they are to reprove them, to come out from among them and be separate.

Noah and Abraham, Elijah and Isaiah, the prophets, Christ and His apostles had all labored outside the religious establishment of their days. First-century Christians, the faithful remnant that would not cooperate with the growing Roman religious machinery, the Waldensians, and many others knew and practiced well the principle of Titus 3:10: "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject." Infidels will not be reformed. Once identified, they are to be rejected.

These infallible truths of God's Word were recognized by many believers within the major denominations of North America. They obeyed Scripture, coming out of their comfortable denominations to establish separated, biblically-obedient congregations. They were called "fundamentalists," a name that has now been wrenched from its original meaning and applied to any extremist movement or individual. By this misuse of the term, Christian Fundamentalists are further scorned.

The 19th century theological struggle over the reliability of Scripture led to the great struggle of the 20th century. That struggle focused upon the biblical doctrine of separation from false teachers, teachings and movements.

In 1947, a term was coined to identify a new departure from the biblical commands to separate from false teachers. The term "new [or neo] evangelicalism" identifies a philosophy that advocates the infiltration of apostate denominations to reform them rather than separating from them in obedience to Scripture. New Evangelicalism seeks to avoid the reproach for Christ that comes with maintaining a biblically-obedient, separatist position. It advocates tolerance for infidels rather than rejection of them, tolerance for evolutionary theories rather than exclusive acceptance of the seven-day creation revealed in Genesis, and tolerance for an all-inclusive approach to Christian religion. With this new philosophy the doctrinal struggle of the 20th century became evident. Must one obey the biblical commands to separate from false religion and denounce those which purport "another gospel"? Or may one embrace a philosophy of disobedience that advocates unity at the expense of truth?

New Evangelicalism rapidly became a major religious philosophy in North America. Its most visible proponent was Evangelist Billy Graham, whose ecumenical evangelism ignored biblical commands to separate from "another gospel." General approval was thereby given to idolatrous Romanism and theological liberalism. New publications such as *Christianity Today* appeared to serve the cause of the New Evangelicalism. Many Bible colleges which were originally established in the spirit of separatism succumbed to this philosophy. The sad effect has been that a whole generation of professing Christians now lacks any perception of the biblical commands to stand separate from those who, while religious, are in fact the enemies of God's Word and God's people.

Throughout this lamentable development, an underlying unbiblical principle has been employed to justify the disobedience. Advocates point to the movement size and to professions of salvation gained through the enlarged audience that compromise engenders. Herein the philosophy of pragmatism, "the end justifies the means," is employed as the measure of whether the New Evangelical philosophy is correct. Consistent with the movement's abandonment of Scripture, it rests its defense upon human wisdom rather than upon the Word of God. To turn to Scripture would expose its error.

Our instinctive response when personal religious beliefs are challenged is often emotional so that fleshly passions rule, rather than spiritual sensitivities. It is far better to immediately retreat to the Word of God alone for instruction and guidance. It is to this infallible source that we must continually return if we are to please God, know His truth, and serve His purpose.

Completely unaware of the history and unbiblical philosophy of this movement, many sincere people swell the ranks of New Evangelicalism. They are active in opposing the horrendous sins of abortion, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, etc. They are sometimes zealous in evangelism and eager to see men manifest a moral integrity and courage. Although their zeal is commendable, it lacks necessary authority and power when they condone idolatry and apostasy by virtue of their silence. Scripture says more in condemnation of idolatry and infidelity than it does about America's most publicized moral evils. By violating Scripture to swell its numbers through religious endeavors and morality campaigns, New Evangelicals remove the same platform on which they would stand on issues of homosexuality and abortion. The only authority in those matters is the Word of God. But to give deference to those who deny Scripture – and to disobey Scripture in doing so – is to subscribe to a position of spiritual impotence.

Evidence of this impotence is abundant. Today, there are more organizations and programs for evangelism and morality than ever before, yet at no time has our nation been more saturated with abominations publicly and shamelessly approved. By ignoring fidelity to the Word of God, the compromised ecumenical emphasis participates in the very problems it professes to fight. The problems of the day are not abortion, homosexuality or promiscuity: these are only symptoms. The problem is departure from the Word of God.

Leading this national epidemic of spiritual degeneracy are preachers who employ techniques of crowd psychology combined with sensual music to arouse audiences to an emotional “high.” The resulting ecstasy is then proclaimed as God-sent.

Reformation Bible Church, with other churches of diverse denominational identities, endeavors to maintain scriptural obedience. It is never an easy task, because the pressures to ignore Scripture are always greater than the encouragements to obey. And when a biblical position is ignored in much of the professed Christian community, the stand becomes even more difficult. But truth must be maintained for the glory of God and for the advancement of His purpose.

Biblical commands to separate from infidelity gave birth to Reformation Bible Church of Dublin, MD. God's blessing on this separated ministry has been clear and abundant. Among those blessings was the establishment of Harford Christian School in 1966. The church and school continue in the biblical, separatist tradition of historic Christianity.

The biblical command to be separate governs the ministry of Reformation Bible Church and Harford Christian School. Chapel messages and Bible classes are grounded in the authority of an inerrant, infallible Word of God. We teach both the

total trustworthiness of Scripture and the need for separation from those who deny its inerrancy and infallibility. Members of the board of directors embrace and promote these essentials. Faculty members must be in accord with these vital truths and are recruited from churches separated from both the theologically liberal National Council of Churches and from those that subscribe to the scripturally disobedient New Evangelical philosophy.

Like the ancient church of Constantine's era, modern Christianity is adrift amid the currents of pragmatism, worldly respectability, sensualism, hero worship, and secularism. Entertainment has replaced worship, and spiritual sensitivities are so dulled to the point that few even realize what has happened, let alone recognize the error. Convenience has replaced conviction and is justified on the basis of creating larger audiences. Psychology has replaced theology; thus the preaching of Christ has been replaced by religious pep talks on how to be happy, how to enjoy life and avoid religious hang-ups, and how Jesus can help one meet his/her personal goals. Obedience to Scripture becomes optional if such "legalism" dares infringe on personal liberties and lusts. Biblical exhortations to separation from error are lost in the rush to advance a popular religion that makes people feel good about themselves.

Amid this drift many, unsuspecting people may assume that Harford Christian School is part of that system, especially if they have never encountered a ministry anchored in the separatist position of historic Christianity. It is therefore necessary that this important element of truth and obedience be clearly stated. The faster the religious currents move, the greater the pressures become to drift with them and with the crowd. The greater the drift, the more conspicuous the steadfastness of our necessary biblical stand and, lamentably, the more peculiar it appears. This standard must still be raised as it has been throughout the history of this ministry. To do otherwise would betray the sacrifices of its founders. Worse, it would like Peter deny our Lord for the sake of momentary, earthly acceptance. One concession or compromise is never enough. Each is followed by demands for greater compromise. The road of compromise is unending. When one embarks on it, he rarely, if ever, returns to the path of obedience. Unchanging truth must be received with unchanging allegiance.

"As good stewards, we must maintain the cause of truth against all comers. 'Never get into religious controversies,' says one; that is to say, being interpreted, 'Be a Christian soldier, but let your sword rust in its scabbard, and sneak into Heaven like a coward.' Such advice I cannot endorse. If God has called you by the truth, maintain the truth which has been the means of your salvation. We are not to be pugnacious, always contending for every crotchet of our own; but wherein we have learned the truth of the Holy Spirit, we are not tamely to see that standard torn down which our fathers upheld at the peril of their lives. This is an age in

which truth must be maintained zealously, vehemently, continually. Playing fast and loose, as many do, believing this today and that tomorrow, is the sure mark of children of wrath; but having received the truth, to hold fast the very form of it, as Paul bids Timothy to do, is one of the duties of heirs of Heaven. Stand fast for truth, and may God give the victory to the faithful!" — Charles H. Spurgeon, 1867