



# IBFNA

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# THE REVIEW

## What Difference, at This Point, Does It Really Make?

by Pastor Charles Dear, Moderator *IBFNA*

The infamous quotation from our former Secretary of State expresses an attitude that is both pervasive and destructive, not only to our society, but also to the Church. Failure to own consequences of decisions that make significant changes in the Lord's work goes beyond the tragic loss of lives to the eternal loss of souls. Changed methods and message have undermined the clear and simple proclamation of God's plan of redemption to a lost world.

Our expectation for the imminent return of Jesus Christ should never cause the stifling of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. We do not sit on rooftops in white robes looking for Jesus, idly watching as thousands pass by into a Christless eternity. Retiring missionaries are not being replaced with sufficient recruits. The church backgrounds of many missionary candidates we do see called to the field continue to broaden well beyond Fundamentalist Baptist convictions. The ministries many of these candidates anticipate will focus less and less on the biblical priorities of evangelism and church planting. Lengthy deputation is another concern. All this raises a question about what difference twenty-first century missions will make. In time we will know whether we have seen souls saved and gathered into local assemblies where the Word is faithfully preached, or whether efforts focused on the need for water, food, and shelter have left people unaware of Christ-like living.

The question is not unknown among the people of our churches. "What difference does it make if we have congregational government or a ruling board of Elders?" "We're too busy to be bothered with business meetings and personal service in the local Church. Just keep us informed about what you're doing on our behalf." This is the same mindset that brought us to a federal takeover of medical care in our nation today. The abandonment of personal participation in the local church, in church business and in service, is contrary to the Scriptures, and the corresponding seizure of control by a few violates principles such as those taught by the apostle Peter in I Pet. 5:3. Obedience to biblical models and doctrines has yielded to an expediency bred by congregational laziness, because both leadership and people have concluded, "What's the difference?"

The fact is that most of those changing toward contemporary worship over recent years have abandoned holy living as an objective related to God's work of progressive sanctification. These changes can gin up feelings that substitute for true holiness (think charismania), but they quickly lead to overwhelming worldliness. The natural and constant pull of the world around us will always militate against sanctification. Where people in our churches are not taught sanctification, but are preoccupied with the things and pleasures of this life, the world will find its way into our churches, into our schools, and into our pulpits. We have witnessed the efforts of good pastors, struggling to recover churches slipping into compromise, who faced rebellion and departure. We have also seen good men try to find the "middle of the road" by yielding to demands for more worldly methodology. Their ranks thin on both sides of the issue as conservative members want no part in compromise and liberal members feel that concessions have not gone far enough.

The shift from principle to pragmatism puts a pastor in an impossible situation in a church like this. With integrity already bartered away, any historically strong positions for separation and sanctification are either outright denied or politely relegated to the "before we



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knew better” distant past. Having uncorked the genie of a more comfortable Christianity, these pastors must now avoid preaching the whole counsel of God’s Word, lest the Scriptures reveal just how different their ministries have become. Credibility is lost when a preacher tickles the ears of his hearers (2 Tim. 4:3). It is at this point that such leaders may ask themselves the question, “What difference, at this point, does it really make? After all, we will become so much more popular and draw so many more people.” This placating has led them to preach “smooth things” and “deceits” (Isa. 30:10).

When you attempt to please both the world and Christ, it is impossible to pay more than token lip service to a number of Scriptures, such as:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

“Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. But as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

You see, no matter when the time or what the circumstances, times of political pressure included, we are still bound by God’s Word to make differences that matter for eternity. Rather than abandoning a ministry after its testimony has been destroyed and its membership decimated, it would be far better to repent before God and the people and lead them back to the place where God can once again bless His Word. The ultimate fatal error, however, rests in the inability to honestly admit where we have been wrong and where we have failed to uphold and obey all the counsel of God’s Word.

Anyone who has taken the path of compromise and found its promises empty and its leaders spiritually bankrupt must find courage to return to the full authority of God’s Word. To stay on that path is to perpetuate its failure and destruction upon the cause of Christ. After a reawakening to proven biblical principles, “how can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2). There is no place for anyone in ministry knowingly to do harm to others. Likewise, where harm has been done, where we have sold out holiness and sanctification in our ministries, it must be corrected. The truth must always prevail over any and all error, no matter where we find it. Whether we recognize it in our society, in politics, in unbiblical ministries or even in our own churches, the proclamation and support of the Truth of God, particularly the Truth of the Gospel, must be non-negotiable. Error and deceit must be exposed, because the spiritual welfare of our people is more important than our own comforts and name. Accurate discernment between truth and error must be cultivated within the hearts of our people so that the differences that are so important in the Lord’s work may be established both in their hearts and our churches.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12).

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## Preparation for Ministry

by Dr. Clay Nuttal

Sorting out old files is not easy. One usually ends up reading them before they go in the waste basket. Down in the stack was an article I authored some thirty years ago. It was published in the state magazine where we lived at that time. The subject had to do with the Bible college and seminary. That healthy discussion continues to this day. Many things are different today, but the question still lingers, “What is the most effective way to prepare for ministry?”

It is a serious mistake to think that the way a person views this answer is the only right way. This is not

a theological issue, although it may have that kind of implication. It is a simple matter to see that not everyone needs to be trained the same way. In medicine general practitioners have a good track for training, but it is not the same as a brain surgeon. One is not trained better than the other, nor are they less qualified than their peer. Their goals are different.

I understand our prejudice because I have taught at every level of education except elementary. It is true that at this point graduate level training seems to be most rewarding to this professor, but it has not always been

that way. Our experience tends to color our view about the best way to train servants for ministry. However, it is unwise to discredit the history of ministry training. Institutes had their place in our movement's history. They were effective and valuable. God used these servants of Christ in a marvelous way. They were trained for general practice. What would it have been like without them?

Many of us were trained in a Bible college and will be forever thankful for the solid foundation that this education gave us. A book could be written about those college graduates who effectively served in the pastorate and the mission field. Only heaven will tell the value of their preparation and ministry. It would be best to let the Lord sort that out.

For me, seminary was simply an additional step in theological growth, and some of us were surprised at how much we covered in seminary, which we had already been taught. That was not a negative; it simply confirmed and expanded what we needed. We felt bad, however, for some fellow students, who came from a state university, who could barely find the books of the Bible. They worked hard and were an enjoyable addition to the classroom.

Post graduate work revealed something new. At this point we studied alongside people who were focused on a specific discipline. The subjects were deeper and direct. It was here where critical and analytical thinking became essential. It was something that was not a priority in my previous education, and I determined that if I ever taught at a college or seminary level I would make it a level one goal. That dream came true in teaching theology, hermeneutics, and apologetics. The fruit of this intellectual emphasis became very evident in the students as they worked through their training. Post graduate work also added something new—a passion for writing. It is a shame that some of the best minds in our movement die without putting much of their thinking into print.

## **Back to the Question**

Let's now return to the original question: "What is the most effective way to prepare for the ministry?" That, of course, depends on what ministry we are thinking about. If the person is thinking about the general ministry, history has settled that question. If, however, one has a goal of specialized ministry, such as teaching at the graduate or post graduate level, the answer would be different. I personally have never regretted the years of hard labor at any educational level.

There are some questions in this debate that need to be addressed for your consideration. If we can get over the prejudice of "my way is better than your way," we might be able to see this with clarity. There are a number of approaches to education. There is the university model, where one does graduate work in a graduate school and

moves on to postgraduate work in a specific field. A seminary model has developed, which begins with a liberal arts education followed by a seminary graduate degree and then to a postgraduate program. There is nothing wrong with this, but it depends on the goal of the servant.

Much has been made of the weaknesses of a Bible college education. There are no perfect colleges, just as there are no perfect seminaries. Many things could be done better, and we ought to keep working on our flaws. It is a serious oversight, however, to say that anyone of these is without flaws. Bible colleges are always better when they stay focused on their mission and avoid the temptation to move into something else. Like it or not, something is always lost with such a move, and some things are gained but not always for the best.

## **Asking the Right Questions**

Some honesty here would cause us to ask some questions about the seminary model. There is no doubt that many good things are gained by using a liberal arts base. Observing hundreds of those who have taken this path, however, leads to some basic questions, and this would include secular and Christian liberal arts institutions. How are they taught to think? What is the base for their skills in this area? How strong is the theological understanding they emerge with? It might be argued that the secular concepts they are taught are erased at the seminary level. That is not an easy task.

If the seminary model is supposed to instill in them reliance upon authoritative Scripture for theological truth, does it succeed? If in the end we have people who are intellectual and have lots of information, does that guarantee a theology that is biblical? It does not; nor does any other approach to training. Stop for a moment and ask where the theological error of the month is coming from.

In doctrinal exchanges you will find people trained for general ministry that exude theological error. Most of the time it is because they do not know how to interpret Scripture and use a flawed hermeneutic. However, they do not have a great deal of influence, and their folly is negligible. Where are the major theological errors rising from? I speak of the errors that are ruining the ministries of young men who have been through the right grid but follow error blindly to their harm. The highly educated intellectuals are actually the pied pipers of this tragic story. The strange point is that these well-known thinkers have the very same hermeneutical flaw as the lesser-educated person.

This is a healthy debate, but it would be the better part of wisdom to ask the question of everyone and everything. After all, what we want are better trained servants for the work of the Lord.



## Looking Forward to Gettysburg

by Donna Dear



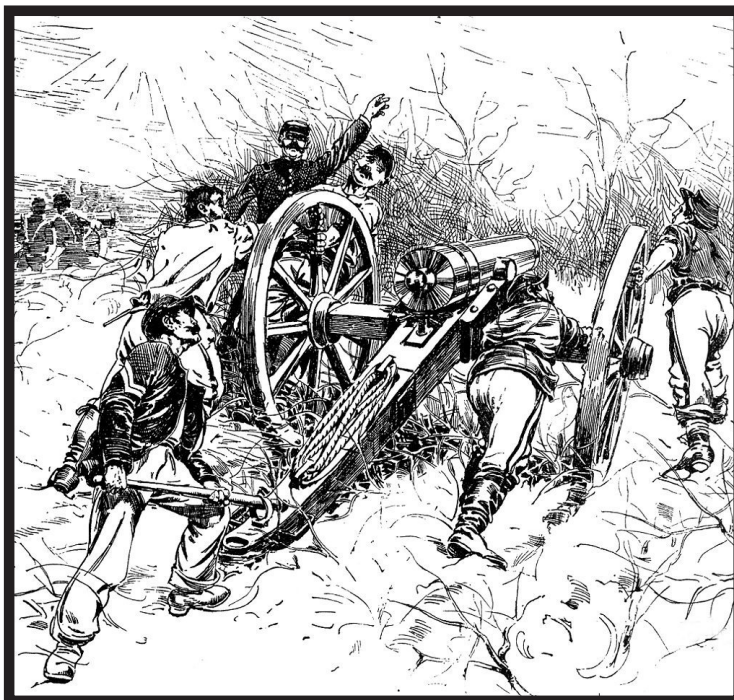
As we look ahead to our 2014 annual family conference, we would like to share with you, in the issues leading up to that event, some of the exciting activities available at our conference site—Gettysburg. In this issue we thought we would introduce you to the historic battlefield where, in three long days of July, 1863, one of the great decisive battles of American history was fought.

From July 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>, a gigantic struggle between 75,000 Confederates and 93,000 Union troops raged on the once peaceful farm lands surrounding this little town in Pennsylvania. Heroic deeds were numerous on both sides, and the battle left 51,000 casualties in the end.

There are many ways to experience Gettysburg's history. Whichever you may choose, we suggest that you begin at the Visitor Center of the Gettysburg National Military Park. No trip would be complete without a visit to the restored Gettysburg Cyclorama.

The battlefield can be explored in several ways. For those of you who may not be feeling energetic, there are air-conditioned bus tours which stop at all of the pertinent sites. You can also tour in the comfort of your own car, while listening to a purchased CD and map that guide you through the battlefield. This approach allows you to stop anywhere along the way at your own leisure (a CD and map will be available on loan at the IBFNA table). For those of you who are more adventurous, touring can be done via motor scooter, dune buggy, or Segway.

One site that should not be overlooked in your tour is the Soldiers' National Cemetery, which was dedicated on November 19, 1863. At the dedication ceremony, President Abraham Lincoln was asked to make "a few appropriate remarks." Those remarks became known as the Gettysburg Address.



# The Bible Doctrine of Separation – Part 3

by Pastor Kevin Hobi

In Parts 1 and 2 of this study on the Bible doctrine of separation, we noted the theological importance and Biblical content of the doctrine. In regard to theological importance, the doctrine of separation is one of the major themes of Scripture, important to a correct understanding of the holiness of God, the sanctification miracle of our salvation, and our pilgrimage as strangers in a hostile world. In addition, separation is important because the failure to draw the line between truth and error can put the believer on the wrong side of a theological watershed that produces worsening consequences as time goes on.

In regard to the Biblical content of the doctrine of separation, two categories of responsibilities relate especially to the purity of the Church or ecclesiastical separation. The first of these is the need to separate from false teachers, those especially who teach wrong doctrine regarding Jesus, the gospel, and revelation. Second, two categories of believers can also concern the obedient separatist. Disobedient church members call for church discipline within the context of the local church, and more directly an issue of ecclesiastical separation, leaders of local churches who fail to separate from false teachers must also be avoided as those who participate in the evil deed of that false teaching by virtue of association.

With this final article in this series, I would like to address the sometimes difficult application of these principles to everyday ministry. 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 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?

These are some of the questions I have had to answer before the Lord as the pastor of New Boston Baptist Church in the six short years I have ministered here. There have been a number of others like them. I grew up in a Fundamentalism that would have answered *no* to each of these questions, and I would like to try to explain why it is that I believe my forefathers had that answer correct.

## An Old Testament Example

Let me 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 narrative of the tragic last six-year period of Asa's reign is given as much coverage as the blessed first thirty-five years by the inspired prophet. 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 (see Part 1 of this series). 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 situations, 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 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?

While it may be true that no one boldly and honestly clings to the label *New Evangelical* anymore, it is nonetheless true that new evangelicalism's repudiation of the Bible doctrine of separation is a timeless temptation. New euphemisms for this error are always available, like "gospel-centered ministry." 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 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 are 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.

The feeling I am talking about is found throughout the Gospels' description 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 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 need 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.

Although I grew up in a Fundamentalism that once felt that passion against false teachers, leaving home to study for ministry quickly introduced me to a similar passion directed not at false teachers but at faithful Fundamentalists. As I have grown older, 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 whom we must separate from and whom we must not? I have found the history of Fundamentalism helpful in answering that question.

Soon after its birth, Fundamentalism became a multi-denominational call to the theological importance of the Bible doctrine of separation from apostasy. 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 as they determined to stand together for truth against error. I mentioned this principle in Part 1 of this series. 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 practice ecclesiastical separation.

Having inherited this godly template for fellowship, today's Fundamentalist can simply ask the question, "Is the Bible doctrine of ecclesiastical separation a weighty matter of the Law?" I argued in Part 1 of this series that the *yes* answer our Fundamentalist fathers taught us 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, I 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 I am looking for are those that support a complete understanding of the theological importance and Biblical content of the Bible doctrine of separation (see Parts 1 and 2 of this series). Where I sense that I am communicating with a Micaiah who feels the New Testament passion noted above, that is even better. The answers I have received have been varied and are an interesting study of their own, but they have never failed to help me understand whether or not that particular event or ministry is something that I would want our people to wholeheartedly support and trust. 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.



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