

# Continuing Dialogue on Fundamentalism and the Application of Biblical Separation: Phil Johnson and David Doran (with a limited number of posts by others added)

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Posted: March 10, 2005

## Dead Right?

*Some Additional Thoughts A Week Later*

by Phil Johnson

I've read with interest the various responses to my seminar on fundamentalism from the 2005 Shepherds' Conference. (I have probably digested more than a hundred pages of feedback from fundamentalists so far.) I'm grateful, of course, for those who were encouraged by what I had to say—and especially appreciative of the encouragement they have given me.

Still, many (including some of my best fundamentalist friends) were not entirely happy with the message. I expected some criticism, of course, but I have been rather surprised by the intensity with which some have reacted. I did my best to give an even-handed and objective perspective. The message was actually intended as a friendly overture to the best men in the movement and an earnest appeal to their true fundamentalist convictions. It was certainly not meant as any kind of ultimatum or insult. Notice, for example, that I didn't make any cheap-shot remarks about "legalism." (I didn't even *mention* the L-word!) I didn't call down fire from heaven or unleash any she-bears on Greenville or Pensacola. On the contrary, I expressly affirmed every major distinctive of historic fundamentalism.

So I've been trying to understand the outrage that has been expressed by some (and the angry tone of a couple of responses in particular). The fact that my message stirred such passions shows, I think, how attached many fundamentalists are to their *movement*.

I couldn't help noticing how quickly the discussion on the Web turned to the issue of whether I am actually "inside" or "outside" the fundamentalist movement. (The question of whether I am a card-carrying fundamentalist was first raised even before the gist of my seminar was made public.) It seems to me that some American fundamentalists think anyone who stands outside their recognized circles is automatically tainted with neo-evangelicalism. They are myopic when it comes to the principle of independency. In effect, they are suggesting that true independency is either impossible or undesirable. Not only do they refuse to recognize the independency of those who don't belong to their movement; they are also doing their best to make any thought of independency impossible for those within their movement.

That's precisely why the main point of my message was a plea for independency. If the cost of being "in" the fundamentalist movement is that one can freely fellowship only with others who have formally joined the movement—or if one must dutifully submit to some visible or invisible fundamentalist hierarchy in order to be considered "in" the movement—then

American fundamentalism has in effect already abandoned the principle of independency.

Moreover, those who imagine that non-membership in the fundamentalist movement automatically makes one a member of some other movement don't really even understand or appreciate what "independency" means. In my view, such an assumption is not even really a fundamentalist way of thinking. That, after all, was the concluding point and the punch line of my seminar.

All I'm ultimately arguing for, however, is a greater commitment to the spirit of independency and less of a movement-driven mentality. I do wish I had made a few important things more clear in my seminar: I am not trying to get into the fundamentalist movement, nor am I trying to pull other men away from it. I am not calling young fundamentalists to leave their schools or churches. I have no agenda to dismantle the faithful remnant of the fundamentalist movement. I certainly am not urging anyone to become a "new evangelical."

But I am trying to make the simple point that it's not necessary to belong to or identify oneself with anyone's "movement" in order to be faithful to the Word of God. For those fundamentalists who want to stay in their movement in hopes of recovering it: Go for it. All I am asking is that you honestly stay true to the fundamental doctrines of Scripture; care more for the principles of historic fundamentalism than you do for your movement; recognize the legitimacy and historic importance of independency; respect those of us who desire to remain independent—and don't look so aggressively for reasons to hammer everyone who is not part of your movement. See Luke 9:49-50.

Although my schedule at the moment doesn't permit me to participate actively in the forums, I would like to try to clarify a few other points raised by my critics. Several have made what I think are valid criticisms. Others have brought up some issues that really do need further explanation.

### **Valid Criticisms**

Dr. David Doran (and others) found fault with my abbreviated retelling of the history of fundamentalism. Some of the points Dr. Doran made are incontrovertible. He points out, for example, that the fundamentalist exodus from the mainline denominations began much earlier than the '40s or '50s. He also notes that I virtually skipped over the issues of Graham's ecumenical evangelism and Ockenga's philosophy of "new evangelicalism."

(Of course, I neither promised nor attempted to give a detailed history of fundamentalism. I merely mentioned some of the early highlights in order to underscore where fundamentalism came from and where fundamentalism's priorities ought to lie. Then, after making passing references to Billy Sunday and J. Frank Norris, I pretty much jumped to 1971 in order to explain why when I first encountered fundamentalism, I decided not to identify with or formally join the "movement.")

Perhaps I should have done more to acknowledge the complexity of the various fundamentalist crises of the 40s-60s. I certainly ought to have made it crystal clear that my anecdotal account of fundamentalist history was just that. Had I thought to do so, I would have referred people to David Beale's history of the movement (*[In Pursuit of Purity](#)*) for a more detailed account. I would also have mentioned the new edition of David Fountain's work, EJ Poole-Connor: Contender for the Faith, which includes an account of British fundamentalism and the separatist disputes that took place there in the mid-20th century. That book is due out next month from [The Wakeman Trust](#). I've read the page proofs, and it is a vital history of this whole discussion from the other side of the Atlantic.

By the way, my omission of any reference to neo-evangelicalism should by no means be interpreted as an implicit endorsement or sanction of that movement or its principles. Perhaps in a future Shepherds' Conference I'll devote a whole seminar to the failure of "new evangelicalism" and the poisoning of American Christianity by [Christianity Today](#). (Some of my published remarks on that very subject are [here](#).)

Other valid criticisms have included the obvious complaint that my perspective of fundamentalism is skewed by my own experience. Many have also pointed out that fundamentalism is not a monolithic movement, so my generalizations aren't fair complaints against everyone in the fundamentalist movement. I did make some strong disclaimers about those very things when I delivered my message. Unfortunately, the disclaimers weren't included in [the notes that were first posted on the Web](#). I am herewith making the [.mp3](#) file of the complete seminar available, so that people can listen for themselves to what I actually said and how I said it.

### **Other Issues That Need Clarification**

*Degrees of Separation.* I understand (but don't accept) the argument of those who complain that it's wrongheaded to speak of 3rd-, 4th-, or 15th-degree separation. From their perspective, if a brother is inadequately separated, he is a disobedient brother and 2 Thessalonians 3:14 demands that we separate from him. In other words, his disobedience is the issue; not the number of degrees of separation between him and someone else who is an outright heretic. That line of reasoning wrongly assumes that there's an easy, obvious, objective way to distinguish between someone who is sinning and a person who simply has a different perspective on where and when to draw the line of separation.

But for the sake of argument, let's forget the question of degrees of separation for a moment. I still don't know of a single thoughtful fundamentalist who would deny that hyper-separatism has been a perpetual problem in the fundamentalist movement. Hair-trigger separatist impulses have repeatedly and unnecessarily rent the fundamentalist movement and continue to do so today. My third main point was that a lack of due process has been the major contributing factor to this problem. I haven't seen anyone flatly deny that point. But it's disheartening to see some trying to deflect the whole issue into niggling arguments about whether it is right or wrong to speak of degrees of separation.

*Due process.* I want to clarify one vital point about what I mean by "due process." I was not suggesting, and do not believe, that pastors and church leaders always have an obligation to confront another author or speaker privately before making public criticisms of that person's published works or sermons. When someone commits his views to print or otherwise disseminates his teaching through the wider Christian community, those views are fair game for critics.

My complaint about the way Bob Jones, Jr. handled the controversy over the blood of Christ is not that he published criticism of John MacArthur's views without first speaking to MacArthur privately. He was certainly free to publish his criticism—and might have even legitimately felt he had a duty to expose and refute something immediately if he believed someone's teaching posed an imminent danger to the doctrine of the atonement. But he summarily declared John MacArthur's view heresy and then flatly refused to listen, even when MacArthur graciously offered to clarify or explain himself. In effect, he treated his own decree that "MacArthur's position is heresy" as if that should automatically settle the matter, close the conversation, and render all subsequent discussion moot. Anyone who claims such behavior is unusual in the fundamentalist community hasn't been awake for the past three decades.

*Deprecatory names.* At least one critic took umbrage at my use of the expression “Baptist ayatollahs.” I’d love to offer a humble apology for such a gross insolence, but I couldn’t do it and be sincere. That still seems to me a perfectly appropriate description of some well-known preachers who have dominated Baptist fundamentalism, especially in the era I was describing. I’m frankly amazed and somewhat amused that someone who was part of Baptist fundamentalism in those days would pretend to be scandalized by my use of that expression.

*Documentation.* A few critics have complained that my “paper” lacked documentation. If I had published the document as a journal article, those complaints would be valid. But what [sharperiron.org](http://sharperiron.org) requested from me—and what I supplied—wasn’t a “paper” in any academic sense. It was a set of notes from which I delivered a message to fellow pastors (most of whom themselves have a fundamentalist background or personal experience in the movement). I would be happy to try to supply documentation on request for any point of fact or history that I cited. If someone wants to listen to the .mp3 file and make a complete transcript, I will be happy to annotate it with full documentation. In the meantime, please accept it for what it is—my personal account of why I see the 20th-century American fundamentalist movement as a failure.

*Deflecting Criticism.* Some of the more vocal critics seemed more interested in my criticisms of evangelicalism than in anything I had to say about fundamentalism. I was saddened to see that attitude so prevalent in the feedback from fundamentalists. As I said, I’m no fan of the evangelical movement. But the problems with the evangelical movement don’t mitigate the problems with fundamentalism, and vice versa.

For the sake of those who asked, here are some of the things I said about evangelicalism in another seminar:

Quote:

If you don’t know me, you might have assumed I am a gung-ho contemporary evangelical—someone who considers himself a member of the “new evangelical movement” as opposed to a “fundamentalist.” You might get the notion I’m all excited about the future of the evangelical movement and the direction today’s evangelicals are headed. That’s not the case. As bleak as the picture is for the fundamentalist movement (and if you come tomorrow, I think you’ll see that it’s pretty bleak), I’m convinced that mainstream evangelicals are in a whole lot worse trouble.

Quote:

The evangelical movement right now, at the beginning of the 21st century, is in a spiritual condition not very much different from the medieval church just before the Protestant Reformation. Think about it: Luther had to deal with Tetzels, the charlatan fund-raiser who went through Europe promising people indulgences in return for money so that the Pope could build St. Peter’s church in the Vatican. There are at least a dozen Tetzels appearing daily on [TBN](http://TBN), promising people miracles in exchange for money so that Jan Crouch can make the sets of their television studios gaudier than any room in the Vatican—while she adds enough pink hair extensions to rival the Dome of St. Peters.

Quote:

**Preaching the Word** is what we are called to do as pastors—not to follow the fads and fashions of our culture. Not even to follow the silly parade of evangelical fads that have

assaulted the church in wave after wave for two decades running. The fads and the programs are killing the evangelical movement. And I'm convinced that those who do not get back to the business of preaching the Bible will soon see their churches die—because, after all, the Word of God is the only message that has the power to give spiritual life.

And, frankly, the death of the fad-driven churches will be a good thing in the long term. It's something I hope I live long enough to see.

Quote:

Last month, [Time Magazine](#) did a feature photo-essay and cover article titled "[The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals In America.](#)"

Here's why I don't think that's a particularly encouraging development: I read the Time magazine list of 25 influential evangelicals. That article by itself would have been enough to convince me the evangelical movement is in serious trouble. The list included people like T. D. Jakes, who denies the Trinity; former Lutheran-turned-Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus; Joyce Meyer, the jet-setting charismatic prosperity-gospel preacherette; and Brian McLaren, the postmodern pastor who denies the authority of Scripture and wants to see the church make a radical break with just about everything that's rooted in historic Christianity.

Thirty years ago, not one of those people would have even been included in a list of "evangelicals." They are not evangelicals in the historic sense of the word. What's changed? It's not that more people became evangelicals, but that the concept of evangelicalism has been expanded to become all-inclusive. The word evangelical has lost its historic meaning. These days it means everything—and it therefore means nothing.

(I'd post the entire transcript, but I have already allowed the complete content of the fundamentalism seminar to be posted, and I don't want to frustrate those who commercially taped the seminars and are trying to recoup their costs through sales of the recordings.) Those excerpts should be enough to give the flavor of my criticism of evangelicalism. It was certainly harsher than anything I said about the fundamentalist movement.

Still, it disturbs me when fundamentalists respond to criticisms about the doctrinal poverty of the wider fundamentalist movement by deflecting the criticism and pointing to others who (they are convinced) are worse off. It's true enough that American religion in general has tended to be anti-intellectual, atheological, devoid of propositional truth and objective content, and hostile to the very idea of doctrine since the beginning of the 20th century.

But for the fundamentalist movement, such doctrinal apathy and anti-intellectualism is absolutely inexcusable. Neo-evangelicals practically admitted from the get-go that they didn't care much about doctrine. By contrast, fundamentalists are supposed to love sound doctrine, and they are supposed to be prepared to do battle for the fundamentals. Deliberate neglect of doctrine is therefore a worse sin for fundamentalists, because it also involves gross hypocrisy. This is not one of the flaws of fundamentalism that serious fundamentalists ought to be downplaying or discounting just because everyone else is doing it, too.

*Defining my audience.* Someone in one forum raised this question from a fundamentalist pastor:  
Quote:

“Exactly to whom was Phil Johnson speaking?”

He claimed that the thoughtful fundamentalists have already done everything I suggested and the fundamentalists to whom my criticisms really apply aren't listening anyway. Presumably, the pastor asking this question feels I totally missed every viable target and should just sit down and shut up and let the fundamentalists quietly deal with their own issues.

For the record, the actual audience in the auditorium that day consisted of pastors and church leaders, most of whom are deeply sympathetic with the principles of historic fundamentalism but who see the very same kinds of problems with the movement that I was trying to point out. A high percentage of them are men who once identified with the movement and knew it well from the inside. A hundred or more of them were men who are still “in” the movement but wonder about its future. My own personal conversations with dozens if not hundreds of these men during the conference convinced me that my remarks did not completely miss all potential targets.

But to answer the question about whom I had in mind as a potential audience: It is my sincere hope that at least a few of the more serious-minded fundamentalists will listen and take my admonitions to heart. My hope is that they will embrace the spirit of independency, and that they will seriously and responsibly face up to the many doctrinal and practical issues that need to be remedied within the visible fundamentalist movement.

Determining who represents the real mainstream of fundamentalism. I suppose one's impression of who is “mainstream” and who is “fringe” in fundamentalism depends on where one stands. My judgment reflects both my personal experience in fundamentalism, and the sheer numbers of “cultural fundamentalists” I encounter every week compared to the relative few I have encountered who have much in common with historic paleo-evangelicalism. Jack Hyles has been dead for more than four years now, but his church in Hammond still claims 20,000 every week in Sunday school. Most at sharperiron.org would no doubt say they regard everyone from [Bob Gray](#) and [David Cloud](#) to [Peter Ruckman](#) and [Phil Kidd](#) as the lunatic fringe of fundamentalism—but those people reach constituencies that (combined) number in the millions. More thoughtful fundamentalists may be embarrassed by the [Calvary Contender](#), [Rick Miesel's](#) website, or [The Sword of the Lord](#), but I'm pretty sure that every one of those is regularly read and taken more “seriously” by far more fundamentalists than the total number who appreciate [Detroit Baptist Seminary's journal](#).

Meanwhile, even some of the best fundamentalist leaders and schools clearly aren't putting the same kind of energy into warning their people about the influences of their own movement's lunatic fringe as they spend critiquing John MacArthur. That is tragic. Thoughtful, conscientious fundamentalists ought to acknowledge the seriousness of this problem and not get indignant when it is pointed out.

I remain basically unmoved by the complaints of those who insist that my portrayal of fundamentalism is unfair because I haven't painted the best fundamentalists as the mainstream of today's fundamentalist movement. Granted, a pastor like [Mark Minnick](#) is a true historic fundamentalist, and the average [Jack Hyles](#) clone is not, but that doesn't make Pastor Minnick more representative of the mainstream in the movement—any more than the [Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals'](#) commitment to the historic Protestant creeds

automatically places them in the "mainstream" of the modern evangelical movement.

Anyway, I appreciate the dialogue and the lively response to my seminar. Fifteen years ago, no such conversation would have taken place. So something has changed for the better. I'm truly encouraged by that. And if I turn out to be wrong about the fundamentalist movement being dead—if doctrinally-minded, biblically sound, true fundamentalists-in-the-historical-sense can take control of the movement and purge it of the many aberrant influences that have commandeered its public voice for so long—no one would be happier about that than I would.

--Phillip R. Johnson

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March 11th, 2005, 09:59 AM

**Dave Doran**   
Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 14

#### **A Reply to Phil Johnson's "Additional Thoughts"**

Phil:

Thank you very much for taking some more time to interact with folks about your presentation on fundamentalism. I believe this discussion is needed and can be profitable if guided and conducted according to biblical truth. As you know, I sent you an advance copy of an article I was writing to make sure that I was representing you fairly. This resulted in you being able to answer some of my criticisms before they were made public. Because of that, I have replied to your "Additional Thoughts" separately in this post. The original article has now been posted at our seminary website (you may access it by following this link: <http://www.dbts.edu/notdeadyet.asp>).

Even-handed and Objective?

I passed on many things in the bigger article out of an attempt to not inflame the situation, but frankly feel that courtesy is working in only one direction. Although you may think that you "did [your] best to give an even-handed and objective perspective" of fundamentalism, it seems that your own ability to assess that is pretty limited. I would imagine you would agree with me that some of the things written on this forum about you and John MacArthur have been less than even-handed and objective, but I doubt the ones who wrote those words think that. Now, consider this line from the manuscript of your presentation: "But within the visible fundamentalist movement today, you can hardly find a pastor, much less a trained lay person, who is prepared to give an accurate definition of any of those doctrines, even at the most basic level" (p. 14). In what sense of the words can you call this "even-handed" and "objective"? And there are many other comments like this that are simply condescending, not even-handed and objective. I don't believe you want to come across this way, so perhaps you should become more self-critical rather than defensive.

Fundamentalism and New Evangelicalism

I believe you too conveniently dismiss the criticism regarding your failure to account for the period from 1940-1960. Sure you didn't promise to give a detailed history, but that isn't the complaint. You have supplied a distorted history simply because you completely ignored one of the most formative issues in fundamentalism. Can you imagine someone outlining the failure of fundamentalism without addressing the modernist controversy? Not likely. How can

you really assess the success or failure of fundamentalism without dealing with it in relation to new evangelicalism?

One of the basic reasons for all the things you outlined as failures of the fundamentalist movement is because we did not address effectively the challenge of new evangelicalism. It was what destroyed the unity of the fundamentalist movement. Far brighter minds than mine recognize this. Perhaps you should take a good look at Farley Butler's Ph.D. dissertation (University of Florida) "Billy Graham and the End of Evangelical Unity." I know you have read Murray's book, *Evangelicalism Divided*. There is little historical debate about this. All you have done is climb up in the tree to point out bad fruit. It would have been better to look at its roots, but to do so would expose a real problem in your own position.

Let me be direct here, this is precisely the problem that most fundamentalists have had with John MacArthur. He sided with the new evangelicals decades ago and has said more against the fundamentalists than he ever has the new evangelicals. Consider the very lame criticism of them found in *Reckless Faith*, "One wing of fundamentalism, desperate for academic respectability, could not resist the pluralism of the modern age" (p. 95). He says nothing about their rejection of separatism and that was the defining issue and pivotal change. Bottom line: the glaring absence of any reference to the movement which called itself the new evangelicalism is the Achilles' heel of your critique. Attacking present day evangelicalism is no great accomplishment—anyone who can't see the cancer out there is truly blind. The real question is whether you are advocating the principles of separatist fundamentalism or only a more conservative version of the original new evangelicalism.

#### Degrees of Separation

I found your comments on "Degrees of Separation" to be particularly weak. You write, "it's disheartening to see some trying to deflect the whole issue into niggling arguments about whether it is right or wrong to speak of degrees of separation" (p. 4). This is a classic example of wanting to have your cake and eat it too. You made the argument that second degree separation easily degenerates into all of the other degrees. When someone tries to show that your argument is incorrect, you dismiss them as niggling. Again, your rebuttal is simply too convenient. You don't want to deal with it, so toss it aside.

My contention is that the whole 3rd, 4th, 15th degree argument is a red herring. To expose it as such is not niggling. The real problem that serious fundamentalists are concerned about is taking a consistent stand in defense of the Faith. To do so requires great discernment and not every one will agree in every case. On this much I am sure we are agreed. Where we disagree is that you seem inclined to discredit anyone who practices "secondary separation" more aggressively than you by calling it "third degree" or "fifteenth degree" separation.

#### Deflecting Criticism

You seem to be misreading some of the criticisms of your initial presentation, at least mine for sure. When someone tries to demonstrate that your criticisms of fundamentalism apply equally to evangelicalism, that is not deflecting them, it is evaluating their true weight. In other words, if both movements have the problem then it does not have the same weight as if it were only a problem in one of them. You even acknowledge that no one has denied some of your charges. I even embraced some of them. But we see them differently than you precisely because we appreciate the difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism. We may be concerned about our movement, but we are not jaundiced because we have focused only on its weakest points and worst representatives.

I will grant that you are trying to stake out some kind of middle position where one is neither a fundamentalist nor an evangelical. But you have terribly over-simplified things at this point.

Protest all you want that you are not in the evangelical movement, but this protest only works because of the lack of definition within evangelicalism and I doubt that many in that movement see you as an outsider. At times it sounds as if you are guilty of what you accuse fundamentalists of, namely thinking that yours is the only correct position. I doubt that you want to come across this way, but it seems as if you are saying that if the rest of us benighted people would simply break out of our silly desire to be accepted in some movement we would see things properly.

But your whole premise misses the real point. Eliminate all the labels and boil it down to what a person believes on the fundamental doctrines and about ecclesiastical separation. You come away with two groups—separatists and non-separatists. Among the separatists, there seems to be another division into two groups. On one hand, there are those who will separate from apostasy and those who compromise with it. On the other hand are those who will separate from apostasy, but not from those who compromise with it (or at least not consistently do so). Here's the big question: which of these belief systems best fits Grace Community Church and the Master's Seminary? I would love a direct answer to that question.

I have been more direct in this response than the longer article, but I believe it is warranted by the way in which the discussion is turning. The longer article is designed to use your presentation to talk about issues of importance in fundamentalism. This is designed to respond directly to you. My aim is still the same—understand and apply biblical truth about the local church's responsibility to be the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). I still remain convinced that fundamentalism may have its warts, but evangelicalism is riddled with cancer. To my fundamentalist friends, let's pull out the wart remover and get after it. To those who are tempted to bail out, look a little more widely and deeply at fundamentalism than Phil has done. Phil, thank you for provoking thought and discussion.

For the sake of His name,

David M. Doran

March 11th, 2005, 03:49 PM

**Phil Johnson**



Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Santa Clarita, CA

Posts: 6

#### Answers for Dr. Doran

I *really* tried to resist the temptation to join the forum, because I know it will take more time than I can afford to remain active here. I *certainly* can't take time to reply to every post directed at me. But I have great respect for Dave Doran, and he has asked some direct questions and requested unequivocal answers, so I feel I have a duty to reply at least this one time.

By the way, I responded via a private e-mail to some of the concerns Dr. Doran raised about whether I was treating him courteously or not. Let me say publicly that it was not my intention to try to preempt his critique of my seminar. He *did* very graciously send it to me in advance, and I very much appreciate his courtesy in

doing so. I saw his final draft on Wednesday evening and sent my "Additional Thoughts" to this forum late Thursday, without realizing that he had not yet published his paper. In any case, my "response" wasn't really meant as a reply to Dave's paper; it was intended as a reply to the things that have been posted on this forum. However, I did make reference to his paper, and I apologize for doing so before finding out for sure whether he had already made it public. Note, however, that my one comment about his paper was a concession that he had made some points that are "incontrovertable." Hopefully that mitigates somewhat the heedless way I jumped the gun on him, but I do apologize for the unintentional discourtesy nonetheless.

Now, here are some replies to Dave's direct questions:

[C]onsider this line from the manuscript of your presentation: "But within the visible fundamentalist movement today, you can hardly find a pastor, much less a trained lay person, who is prepared to give an accurate definition of any of those doctrines, even at the most basic level" (p. 14). In what sense of the words can you call this "even-handed" and "objective"?

Well, "hardly" is a relative term. But I propose a test: We'll survey the churches listed at [fundamentaltop500.com](http://fundamentaltop500.com), which seems a pretty representative sample of American churches that identify themselves as members of the fundamentalist *movement*. What percentage of the pastors of those churches do you really suppose could give a clear, succinct, and accurate explanation of the core differences between the Protestant and Catholic views of justification by faith?

Obviously, I'm aware that there's a segment of theologically literate fundamentalists who *can* define and defend justification by faith perfectly well—because I know you and Mark Minnick. In that sense, I plead guilty to the charge of using hyperbole to make my point. But in the real world where I live, if you visit all the fundamentalist churches in my neighborhood, you'll find that it *is* hard to find a fundamentalist pastor with a clear grasp of what *sola fide* is all about—and even harder to find well-taught fundamentalist church members who could give a sensible explanation of why it's important to stress that justification is about being *declared* righteous, as opposed to being *made* righteous.

Now, you're absolutely right when you say that the same criticism applies equally to the evangelical movement. But I remind you once again that I'm not arguing in favor of the evangelical movement. I've been saying for years that theological illiteracy has crippled *both* movements. There are, of course, evangelical exceptions to that rule, as well as fundamentalist exceptions to it. But the exceptions don't nullify the rule. So I stand by my point, overstated though it may be.

And there are many other comments like this that are simply condescending, not even-handed and objective. I don't believe you want to come across this way, so perhaps you should become more self-critical rather than defensive.

Point taken. "In many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). I acknowledge my frequent failures in this regard. When I said I *tried* to be evenhanded, I meant just that. You should have seen how condescending I would have come across if I *hadn't* exercised caution.

How can you really assess the success or failure of fundamentalism without dealing with it in relation to new evangelicalism?

It wasn't easy, I admit. But I had only an hour and fifteen minutes, so I had to trim something. Bottom line is this: I was giving my own perspective about the problems with fundamentalism, and I had three points I felt were vital. While I despise "New Evangelicalism"; and neo-evangelicalism was indeed a huge issue in the fundamentalist disputes of the second half of the century; and the neo-evangelicals must surely bear the brunt of the blame for the *evangelical* meltdown; I don't happen to believe neo-evangelicalism is to

blame for the failure of *fundamentalism*. I think *fundamentalists* are to blame for that. So that's what I said in my seminar. If I had laid the blame for fundamentalism's failures at Harold Ockenga's feet, I'm certain it would have made a lot of my fundamentalist friends ecstatic, but it wouldn't have been an honest perspective.

The real question is whether you are advocating the principles of separatist fundamentalism or only a more conservative version of the original new evangelicalism.

I'm *certainly* not proposing any version of new evangelicalism. I don't know how to make that any more clear than I have. I am also clearly calling for separatism; I explicitly said so in my original message. ("[True fundamentalism] has to remain committed to separation from those who deny essential gospel truths. But it also has to be equally committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among those who affirm the essential truths of the gospel.")

Still, if you mean what I think *you* mean by "fundamentalist separatism," then I propose a third option: historic separatism, of the Reformed and Puritan variety, where it is clearly understood and constantly emphasized that schism is as evil and as scandalous as legitimate separation is righteous and holy—and the two are not always easily distinguished. What I'm proposing is that no one should make precipitate judgments labeling otherwise gifted teachers and godly men as "disobedient brethren," just because those guys might not be separated from everyone *we* regard as a disobedient brother. Sometimes bad judgment is just that; not deliberate disobedience. Sometimes the evil is in a man's conscience and not his will.

I'm saying that unless we are willing to grant *ex cathedra* authority to one man and let him make all the judgments about whom we must separate from, we're never going to have complete agreement on the boundaries of separation. I'm saying it's OK to live with a modicum of ambiguity on that. And I'm saying an obstinate refusal to tolerate that ambiguity is the source of probably 98 percent of the strife between fundamentalists over the issue of separation.

Where we disagree is that you seem inclined to discredit anyone who practices "secondary separation" more aggressively than you by calling it "third degree" or "fifteenth degree" separation.

I might with equal justification say that you seem inclined to discredit anyone who practices separation less aggressively than you by automatically questioning whether they believe in separation at all. I'm not trying to "discredit" anyone, and I would hope that you aren't either. As I have said a couple of times, I think we *do* have a basic disagreement on this particular issue; it's not merely a misunderstanding or a matter of semantics, but a real different perspective. I'm not going to separate from you over it. I'm not sure your view of separation would permit you to say that about me—though I can't imagine how you would make a valid or biblical argument for relegating me to the ranks of the disobedient brethren from whom separation is necessary.

I will grant that you are trying to stake out some kind of middle position where one is neither a fundamentalist nor an evangelical. But you have terribly over-simplified things at this point. Protest all you want that you are not in the evangelical movement, but this protest only works because of the lack of definition within evangelicalism and I doubt that many in that movement see you as an outsider.

1. God forbid that I would seek the *via media* on anything.

2. How can I be guilty of oversimplification? My whole argument is that the landscape is a whole lot more complex than you want to admit. There aren't just two "movements." Where, for example, would you put the Sovereign Grace Baptists? Or the Reformed Baptists? Or the churches aligned with FIRE? (They are all outsiders as far as the evangelical mainstream are concerned. They almost all practice separation—some more aggressively than you, I'd guess, and some not as rigidly. But they're not really "in" your *movement*. What about the Presbyterian Covenanters who insist on exclusive psalmody without musical

instruments? They'd write ten-page diatribes against you if you labeled them "evangelical." They are certainly not "in" your movement, though. And then, there are the true independents like me...

3. Doubt not, my friend. *Many* in the evangelical movement see me as an outsider, including most of the evangelical publishers who know me, some of the powers that be at my alma mater, the neo-evangelical elite at *Christianity Today*, and the Evangelical Alliance in the UK. They all at one time or another have described me as a member of *your* movement. I keep trying to tell them I'm an independent, but they are as stubborn as you are in their refusal to believe it.

Eliminate all the labels and boil it down to what a person believes on the fundamental doctrines and about ecclesiastical separation. You come away with two groups—separatists and non-separatists. Among the separatists, there seems to be another division into two groups. On one hand, there are those who will separate from apostasy and those who compromise with it. On the other hand are those who will separate from apostasy, but not from those who compromise with it (or at least not consistently do so). Here's the big question: which of these belief systems best fits Grace Community Church and the Master's Seminary? I would love a direct answer to that question.

You won't like my answer, but it's direct. We're in that important third category you refuse to recognize: the true independents. We don't fit your paradigm. Nonconformists. We *are* separatists; we *are* harsh critics of the evangelical mainstream; we *are* militants who don't like compromise. We also care deeply about truth from biblical, historical, and practical perspectives; we recognize the supreme authority and absolute inerrancy of Scripture; and we are therefore not willing to join any movement where matters of conscience are decided by a few men who are high in the hierarchy of the movement. That makes us outsiders as far as both evangelicals and fundamentalists are concerned, and yet both groups insist that we belong to the other.

But we don't.

Phil Johnson

PS: You said,

I still remain convinced that fundamentalism may have its warts, but evangelicalism is riddled with cancer.

You keep saying that. I agree that evangelicalism has terminal cancer, and I really, truly hope it's not the lingering kind. But don't reassure yourself too much about your own "warts." Some of them look like they *might* be melanoma.

March 11th, 2005, 08:07 PM

**Dave Doran**   
Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 6

#### One More (Last) Time

Phil,

I returned to the office to catch up on some studying and found your response to my earlier post. I enjoyed reading it and found it very helpful. Thanks, Phil, for taking time to walk through what I had written and offer replies to it. I know that neither of us wants to get on

the merry-go-round, but please allow a few comments/clarifications:

I concede that the test scores over at fundamentaltop500.com may not be that high in your doctrinal exam, so point well made. While I hardly think that serves as an accurate gauge of fundamentalism, I cannot deny that there are plenty of professing fundamentalists with an inadequate grasp of theological concepts.

You wrote:

"While I despise "New Evangelicalism"; and neo-evangelicalism was indeed a huge issue in the fundamentalist disputes of the second half of the century; and the neo-evangelicals must surely bear the brunt of the blame for the evangelical meltdown; I don't happen to believe neo-evangelicalism is to blame for the failure of fundamentalism. I think fundamentalists are to blame for that. So that's what I said in my seminar. If I had laid the blame for fundamentalism's failures at Harold Ockenga's feet, I'm certain it would have made a lot of my fundamentalist friends ecstatic, but it wouldn't have been an honest perspective."

I believe you missed my point. In my post I wrote, "One of the basic reasons for all the things you outlined as failures of the fundamentalist movement is because we did not address effectively the challenge of new evangelicalism." I was not trying to blame the failure on new evangelicalism—I blame it on the ineffective response of fundamentalism to the challenge of new evangelicalism. In many ways, my argument here parallels yours about not defining carefully what constitutes a fundamental doctrine of the faith. I believe fundamentalism stumbled because of its inability to chart the choppy waters created by the rise of the new evangelicals. That is our fault. But we can't act as if the problems of separation sprang up out of nowhere—they sprang up precisely because of the rise of a group of non-separatist fundamentalists. And since the rise of that group, fundamentalists have been divided on how to respond to them. The mess that you decribed in your workshop is the result of confusion and division on this point. That is what I was trying to communicate and apparently not doing so well at it.

I believe the following is one of the most important things you have said in this discussion: "I'm certainly not proposing any version of new evangelicalism. I don't know how to make that any more clear than I have. I am also clearly calling for separatism; I explicitly said so in my original message. ("[True fundamentalism] has to remain committed to separation from those who deny essential gospel truths. But it also has to be equally committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among those who affirm the essential truths of the gospel.")"

Here is where I believe the difference between our views comes most clearly into focus. In the first affirmation ("[True fundamentalism] has to remain committed to separation from those who deny essential gospel truths") we are in complete agreement, and I sincerely rejoice over it. But the second affirmation ("it also has to be equally committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among those who affirm the essential truths of the gospel") pulls up short. In other words, we agree completely as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. As your statement stands, it allows for only two kinds of people: those who deny essential gospel truths and those who affirm essential gospel truths.

But in your workshop at the Shepherd's Conference you acknowledged that there is a third category: those who affirm essential gospel truths, yet compromise those truths through some form of ecumenism (your example was turning the pulpit over to the Pope). In your workshop you said that in such cases "second-degree separation is perfectly appropriate" (p. 20). This, in my mind, is the key point of all our discussions because it really is a dividing line. I hope you can see that my questions about your position are rooted in the fact that it

seems that you are saying things that appear self-contradictory.

And this leads me to my last point, and it is the one which I have already expressed that it seems as if we are talking past each other. I genuinely do not care what label you wear, and suggesting that being an independent answers my question evidences that we are not understanding each other. The real point of what I have been driving at is what you believe about the biblical teaching regarding separation. Your mention of various groups only obscures the issue and shows that you are the one fixating on specific groups. My question was about belief systems, not practices. Certainly you recognize the value of describing belief systems (Calvinism vs. Arminianism; pre-trib, post-trib, etc.). If someone says they believe in unconditional election, I know they don't believe in the Arminian view. If someone tells me they believe that Jesus will come back before the tribulation, I know they are not post-trib. It is the content of their position that matters, and some content defies certainly labels.

My point is that there are limited options in terms of your beliefs regarding separation: (1) no ecclesiastical separation; (2) separation from apostates, but not from those who fellowship with them; and (3) separation from apostates and those who fellowship with them. Can you really think of any other options? I can't.

Where you seem hung up, at least to me, is that you don't want to come out and say I believe #3 because you have seen it abused by some fundamentalists (in your view, by most). But don't answer what you think is the next question, answer this one. And for the record, you can be an independent and still tell me your answer! Given some of what you have said, I think your answer should be #3, but the statement I quoted above would actually be #2. Now, I have my view about the historical names we give to these positions, but let's just skip the names and talk about our theology. Does this make sense?

Genuinely seeking to understand,  
DMD

March 11th, 2005, 10:42 PM

**Phil Johnson** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Santa Clarita, CA

Posts: 6

**More answers.**

Dear Dave,

Good post. You wrote:

- > In many ways, my argument here parallels yours about not
- > defining carefully what constitutes a fundamental
- > doctrine of the faith. I believe fundamentalism stumbled
- > because of its inability to chart the choppy waters
- > created by the rise of the new evangelicals. That is our
- > fault. But we can't act as if the problems of separation
- > sprang up out of nowhere—they sprang up precisely
- > because of the rise of a group of non-separatist

- > fundamentalists. And since the rise of that group,
- > fundamentalists have been divided on how to respond to
- > them. The mess that you described in your workshop is the
- > result of confusion and division on this point. That is
- > what I was trying to communicate and apparently not
- > doing so well at it.

That's a helpful clarification. Maybe if they let me do a follow-up seminar next year, I'll delve into that. I absolutely agree with you that the fundamentalists stumbled badly in their response to the neos. That *did* cause division and confusion among fundamentalists (and the confusion persists today). I furthermore am convinced that the rigid narrowness and unguarded bellicosity of some of the stricter separatist rhetoric of that era was also a **MAJOR** factor in making the very idea of separation odious to people (both fundamentalists and evangelicals) who were desirous of biblical unity among brethren—thus driving many evangelicals away from the fundamentalist movement.

- > Here is where I believe the difference between our views
- > comes most clearly into focus. In the first affirmation
- > ("[True fundamentalism] has to remain committed to
- > separation from those who deny essential gospel truths")
- > we are in complete agreement, and I sincerely rejoice
- > over it.

Ditto.

- > But the second affirmation ("it also has to be equally
- > committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among
- > those who affirm the essential truths of the gospel")
- > pulls up short. In other words, we agree completely as
- > far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. As your
- > statement stands, it allows for only two kinds of people:
- > those who deny essential gospel truths and those who
- > affirm essential gospel truths.

Well, the section you quoted only *mentions* two kinds of people, but it doesn't necessarily exclude other categories or subcategories. Thus—

- > in your workshop at the Shepherd's Conference you
- > acknowledged that there is a third category: those who
- > affirm essential gospel truths, yet compromise those
- > truths through some form of ecumenism (your example was
- > turning the pulpit over to the Pope).

Actually, one point that needs to be made is that 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 isn't specifically talking about ecumenists; it's talking about all kinds of willful disobedience. That would include, say, a person who is chronically and willfully pugnacious. (Like a couple of the more outspoken Baptist ayatollahs.) We ought to separate from people like that, too.

- > In your workshop you said that in such cases
- > "second-degree separation is perfectly appropriate" (p.
- > 20). This, in my mind, is the key point of all our
- > discussions because it really is a dividing line. I hope
- > you can see that my questions about your position are
- > rooted in the fact that it seems that you are saying

> things that appear self-contradictory.

I'm not completely sure I understand where you see a contradiction. Is it because you think there's a conflict between being committed to "evangelical unity" while refusing to keep company with someone who is willfully and chronically disobedient? I wouldn't see 2 Thessalonians 3:14 as in any way incompatible with a commitment to true biblical unity. See verse 15.

Still, perhaps I can eliminate the "contradiction" by supplying a small ellipsis that may clarify the true meaning of my original statement:

True fundamentalism has to remain committed to separation from those who deny essential gospel truths. But it also has to be equally committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among [*faithful Christians*] who affirm the essential truths of the gospel.

I suspect you would agree with that statement. Where we might disagree is over the question of when and how we decide someone's bad doctrine, bad manners, bad behavior, or bad churchmanship is owing to willful rebellion rather than ignorance, misunderstanding, faulty reasoning, slowness of heart, or something else short of faithlessness (or deliberate *unfaithfulness*). We're required to separate from *rebellious* brethren, not anyone and everyone who may be confused or in error.

> My point is that there are limited options in terms of  
> your beliefs regarding separation: (1) no ecclesiastical  
> separation; (2) separation from apostates, but not from  
> those who fellowship with them; and (3) separation from  
> apostates and those who fellowship with them. Can you  
> really think of any other options? I can't.

Sure: (4) Separation from apostates, from those who fellowship with them, from those who fellowship with others who fellowship with them, and from everyone else who is associated with any of those people.

> Where you seem hung up, at least to me, is that you  
> don't want to come out and say I believe #3 because you  
> have seen it abused by some fundamentalists (in your  
> view, by most).

Actually, I *did* affirm #3. I reject #4.

Where I am *actually* hung up is on your definition of "apostate." Is Billy Graham "apostate?" Al Mohler would say no. I happen to disagree with him, but I don't therefore consider *Al Mohler* "apostate" or even necessarily "willfully disobedient." Perhaps you consider *Mohler* apostate. But if not, and you break fellowship with MacArthur because of his association with Mohler, you're practicing #4.

You might well ask why I haven't broken fellowship with Al Mohler if I hold to #3 and Mohler is associating with someone whom I consider apostate. The answer, again, is that the command in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 deals with willful disobedience. Before I take the extreme measure of refusing to keep company with a brother whom I disagree with, I owe it to him to try to discern whether his error rises to the level of willful rebellion or not. That's part of what I mean by "due process."

For exactly the same reasons, I haven't automatically separated from every evangelical and fundamentalist who wants to make a hero out of Charles Finney. Have you? I've certainly argued vehemently that Finney was apostate, but I've tried to be patient with those whose deep respect for Finney is rooted in ignorance, or in the bad teaching they have received from some fundamentalist revivalist—as opposed to someone who

simply doesn't care about defending the truth from error.

Based on what I have seen from Mohler, and the fruits of his housecleaning at Southern Seminary, I can't bring myself to consign Al Mohler to the category of someone who doesn't care about defending the truth from error. Perhaps I will change my mind about that, if, say, I get the opportunity to challenge him about Billy Graham and he indicates that he supports Graham as a matter of sheer political expediency; or if he otherwise manifests some kind of willful rebellion. But at the moment, my conscience tells me it would be uncharitable to make that kind of judgment of him.

> But don't answer what you think is the next question,  
> answer this one. And for the record, you can be an  
> independent and still tell me your answer! Given some of  
> what you have said, I think your answer should be #3, but  
> the statement I quoted above would actually be #2. Now, I  
> have my view about the historical names we give to these  
> positions, but let's just skip the names and talk about  
> our theology. Does this make sense?

Sure. My answer *is* #3, but I reject #4. The statement you quoted from me isn't meant as an argument for #2. It was intended as a corrective for extreme applications of #4—especially for those who see no difference between righteous separation and sinful schism, and who care nothing about cultivating any kind of unity among authentic believers.

March 12th, 2005, 02:37 PM

**Dave Doran** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 6

#### **Sorry for the pause in the action**

Glad to see you all have kept on talking while I have been away. I can't really hop into the discussion right now, but hope to have something to say later. I did want to provide a little fact-finding research info though. I spent the day teaching in something called A Conference on Theology for fundamentalist pastors and church folks in the Great Lakes area. Based on my scientific survey: (1) we did not do well in defining the Latin term sola fide (although folks knew the concept when translated); and (2) hardly anyone thought that justification meant Christ's righteousness was infused or imparted. Obviously, there is room to grow, but overall it was reassuring to find that we were not a bunch of closet Catholics!: >

(Just in case some of you are sarcasm challenged [or I am just not funny], this is intended to be playful, not some serious argument.)

March 12th, 2005, 03:23 PM

**Phil Johnson** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Location: Santa Clarita, CA  
Posts: 6

### My Further Thoughts about the Baptist Ayatollahs

Apparently my indirect responses to the "Baptist ayatollah" issue have been too subtle for some, who think my referencing the point at all must mean that the criticism "seems to be registering." So here's a more direct reply:

Don Johnson quotes the dictionary definition of "pejorative" ("having negative connotations; especially : tending to disparage or belittle : DEPRECIATORY") and asks,

- > How is the use of 'ayatollah' in this context not
- > 'tending to disparage or belittle'?

Would it have been better if I had used the expression "brood of vipers"? I beg you to note that I *did* at least abstain from expressions like "sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore" (Isaiah 57:3). Given the context and the subtext of Isaiah 57, however, I think expressions like those might actually have been more suitable and biblical descriptions for at least one or two of the more egregious Baptist ayatollahs.

Who ever said it is bad to "disparage" or "belittle" false religious leaders? I certainly didn't suggest any such thing. Yet you say,

- > You know, I would say that people like Phil are exactly
- > right when they criticise fundamentalists for
- > their [picturesque language.] How does that excuse him
- > from using it himself[?]

Where did *I* ever criticize anyone for "picturesque language"? What I criticized the fundamentalist movement for was its tendency to sell out substance and sound doctrine in favor of flamboyant style and histrionics in the pulpit. I never complained about colorful prose or frank expressions. The plain-spokenness of some fundamentalists is one of the things I happen to like *best* about the movement.

I also think it's perfectly biblical to use derogatory epithets in very rare but especially deserving cases. The bumptious vainglory of certain deviant but well-known Baptist fundamentalists would seem to be a classic case where such language is fully warranted. We have Christ's own example for it (Luke 13:32; Matthew 12:34).

If you *really* think "Baptist ayatollahs" is an undeservedly demeaning description of men like Jack Hyles, Joe Combs, Bob Gray (I mean the Longview, TX, Bob Gray), and their ilk, then perhaps you don't understand how badly such men have dishonored Christ and sullied the reputation of the fundamentalist movement.

Incidentally, I don't think serious-minded fundamentalists today should just try to slink away from their movement's past without facing the fact that it was the fundamentalist movement that created the environment in which so many men of that sort could flourish. I first heard Jack Hyles speak in 1972. In those days he regularly was being invited to speak at BJU, and he was held up to their students as a model fundamentalist. I was a brand-new Christian, and pretty impressionable. Yet I was shocked and appalled at the overt narcissism of Hyles (he made no attempt whatsoever to veil his carnal ego), not to mention his shallow preaching sometimes utterly devoid of any reference to Scripture. He certainly put on a good show, but that was about it. He was like a train wreck; impossible to look away from, but horrifying at the same time. Almost everything about the man and the persona he cultivated was wantonly unChristlike. If I could see that as an 18-year-old, why couldn't most of the leaders in the fundamentalist movement see it? But if my memory serves me right, I don't believe BJU formally broke fellowship with Hyles until *after* Hyles started a competing college.

Many in the movement want to claim that everything has changed—as if the ugly side of the fundamentalist movement no longer existed. But it is still there in all its glory. I'm grateful for the things that *have* changed, and it is obvious that some important things are still changing for one segment of fundamentalism. But you can't simply act as if the style of fundamentalism represented at [fundamentaltop500.com](http://fundamentaltop500.com) isn't really important. There are far more people in the groups and churches represented there than there are fundamentalists who truly know and love and understand the fundamental truths of biblical Christianity.

And it doesn't help much of anything to blow off the significance of those facts while pretending to be outraged and offended every time a non-member of the fundamentalist movement is too blunt in pointing out some of the excesses of your movement.

I *know* some of the current leaders of the more sober arm of the fundamentalist movement understand perfectly well what I mean by the expression "Baptist ayatollahs." Column 5 in [Kevin Bauder's chart](#) on the styles of fundamentalism refers to the same Bapto-fascist style (his category 5) in terms that are hardly less derisive than I used: "Central concern: Quirks ... Dictatorial and manipulative." I'm glad to see a leading fundamentalist who is able to acknowledge that tendency and articulate why it is wrong. Yet it's discouraging to see *other* fundamentalists who supposedly understand the value of clarity, strong opinions, and candid expression respond reflexively to criticism of their movement with typically post-modern post-mortems on someone's word usage and misdirected lectures on the supposed impropriety of harsh language or plain speech.

Speaking of Dr. Bauder's taxonomy of fundamentalist styles, it is as witty as it is insightful. A refreshing example of the kind of objective self-analysis that has been too rare from within the fundamentalist movement. If you want to see how Brotherhyles dissected the fundamentalist movement, here's an interesting link: [Where We Are in Fundamentalism](#). He apparently made this speech about the time the rift between him and BJU was

beginning to open up.

March 12th, 2005, 06:08 PM

[Phil Johnson](#) 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Santa Clarita, CA

Posts: 6

**In all fairness...**

My remark about Hyles speaking at BJU was not meant as a criticism of the quality of the school's chapel speakers per se. It was actually a question about fundamentalism's policy on separation when it comes to the *kind* of "disobedient brethren" who blatantly thumb their noses at what Scripture plainly teaches about morality, personal character, church leadership, or ministry philosophy—yet remain loyal separatists and want to remain "in" the fundamentalist movement.

Why does it seem like separation from men like that is never done as quickly or talked about as profusely as separation from the kind of "disobedient brethren" who happen to be Southern Baptists? Or presidents of different colleges?

 March 13th, 2005, 02:40 PM

[Gerry Carlson](#) 

Contributing Author

Join Date: Mar 2005

Posts: 13

#### **Finney and Fundamentalism**

There has been some entertaining, and maybe profitable, rabbit chasing about rhetoric, hyperbole, etc. in conjunction with interesting side issues. But, how about getting back to the intriguing question from Greg Linscott. Greg asked several posts ago, "I'm still interested to see you address my question on the connection between men like Pastor Doran and Charles Finney." I would like to reframe that as, "What is the connection between Finney and Fundamentalism? Or does Fundamentalism need to do something to separate publicly from any vestiges of Finneyism that are alive today?"

This is an area where documentation needs to lead the discussion, rather than the other way around. I say that because anecdotal discussion could lead in two opposite directions. David Beale observed twenty years ago in *Pursuit of Purity*, in the context of Finney, that "Pragmatism and Pelegian Perfectionism blended naturally into what became the Social Gospel." (Although Beale's footnote on page 125-126 needs to be noted.) By documenting that assertion it would seem that Fundamentalism can be exonerated because it declared the Social Gospel as heresy even before Curtis Lee Laws coined the term "Fundamentalism."

However, I also remember the rather kind, but guarded, words toward Finney that I heard in a class on Evangelism during my years in Bible College. About ten of us had the distinct privilege of sitting at Dr. Monroe Parker's feet as he gave us a semester long insight into the historic personalities of big time evangelism from 1900 to the early 1960s. Dr. Parker was an evangelist with a Ph. D. in Old Testament languages. His professor was Dr. Charles Brokenshire, who was a student and colleague of the famous Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton.

My recollection (and Dr. Parker did not lecture from a syllabus or structured outline) was that he was cautiously generous, and only mildly apologetic, regarding Finney's contribution to evangelism. (Perhaps Fred Moritz was also in that class and his memory would be much sharper than mine.) I do remember Doc Parker being frank about Finney's shortcomings, but I don't remember it rising to the level of heresy. I remember him musing about the lasting influence many decades later of Finney's Rochester, N.Y. crusade. Obviously that class had a lot more to do with the departure of Billy Graham, and Dr. Parker was personally acquainted with Billy's compromise with liberalism.

I am not saying that Monroe Parker was soft or excusing regarding Finney. What I am saying is that in the first half of the 20th Century, the influence of pragmatism in evangelism was tolerated, if not accepted, in fundamentalism and in broad evangelical circles. The history of evangelism and evangelists from Finney until now could prove to be a fascinating study. I'm not sure that the data from such a study would be entirely supportive of either position in this discussion. Perhaps one of our scholarly seminary professors has already done some good work in this area. I'm also not sure but that the greater indictment of Finneyism will be laid at the door of evangelicalism. That may be an eye opener for some that might think that the Sword and Hyles' legacy are the only places where Finneyism might still reside. I see it at the ACSI conventions that Grace Community's day school teachers have attended. We can all learn and grow from this study.

We can be appreciative of Phil Johnson's openness and willingness to continue this discussion. I still haven't heard enough to indict all of the fundamental men that I have known, and the guys in our ministry kid me because I seem to know lots of them. Still, I traveled during my AACs days in some circles where I learned of examples of what Phil Johnson says. Do you know the editor of the Baptist Bible Tribune once bragged on the front page how proud he was that preachers were showing up at their fellowship meetings in Lincoln Town Cars wearing big diamond rings. That was a sign of their evangelistic success. It was in print!

Perhaps Phil and Dave will have time to comment further on the issue of Finneyism and Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.

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Gerry Carlson  
Ps. 91:2

**Dave Doran**

Junior Member



Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 6

**I'm back...**

Phil,

Sorry for the delay in responding to your last post that came my direction. As I mentioned in a post yesterday, I was involved in teaching at a conference all day Saturday. What a refreshing day of fellowship and instruction had amongst the fundamentalists here in MI. I got to start the day hearing one of my favorite preachers, Mark Minnick, call us to make preaching the centerpiece of our worship. I believe you would have truly enjoyed it. As you may have seen, the crowd passed my informal little justification quiz with flying colors. Not one Hyles clone to be seen in the crowd. A few Grand Pubas, but no Ayatollahs.

Now, on to the response. I have to say that your last post to me gave me the impression that we are getting somewhere in this discussion. I appreciate the clarity with which you have answered some of my questions. It really does help me understand more accurately your views.

**"Rigid Narrowness and Unguarded Bellicosity"**

Thank you for conceding, I think, my point about the trouble the new evangelicals caused. And regarding the problems some fundamentalists caused, I have and continue to acknowledge the truth of this. Nothing is to be gained by denying it. I do believe, however, that something may be lost if we over-react to controversy, particularly in our day. I may be wrong about this, but it seems to me that we are in danger of stifling legitimate doctrinal disputes under the banner of a misguided pietism. Based on your involvement in the publication of books like *Ashamed of the Gospel*, *Reckless Faith*, etc., I know that you don't believe doctrinal controversy is necessarily bad. My hunch is that some folks have made the same kind of comment about John MacArthur and you. And that's the problem—"rigid narrowness" seems to be defined fairly subjectively (often sounding like "more narrow than me").

This may be all beside the point of our discussion, but it seems to me that many of the great works of God among His people have been preceded by and attended with a certain amount of doctrinal controversy. The Reformation was full of it. The Evangelical Awakening in Britain and the Great Awakening in America had it. As you know better than I, Spurgeon's ministry was attended with it (for those who haven't read *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, please do so!). Any time there is a resurgence of some biblical truth there will be opposition. Each of those periods was marked by both godly and ungodly elements of controversy.

I am admittedly prejudiced, but I would view the rise of historical fundamentalism as a godly movement in defense of the Faith. Among the leading defenders were men of noble stature who engaged in controversy with godly ambitions and actions, and, sadly, there were others that fell short of those ideals. It has always been this way. Your contention seems to be that the last 30 years of fundamentalist history have had more of the latter than the former. I see it a little differently, but I cannot defend any ungodly reactions to controversy. And, as you point out later in your post, I do believe that willful disobedience can include "chronic and willfully pugnacious" behavior.

(BTW, I think you are off on your chronology of the relationship between Hyles and BJU. The sermon you linked to was from the early 90s after the Sumner expose. HAC was well-established by that time. I believe the real breach came over the dispute with John Rice,

which "healed" for a short time during the 80s before re-opening again when the whole Hyles scandal broke into the open.)

Pick An Option, Any Option...

Perhaps the most important part of your post, in my mind, came in answer to my question about the possible options for views on separatism. I was pleased to see you affirm the third position, because that is what I genuinely hoped you would. I understand why you would believe there is a fourth option, but I don't agree with you there. Your fourth option is logically only an extension of #3, i.e., it is still separating from those who fellowship (however extendedly) with false teachers. (Please don't think I am suggesting this is right, only that it is really the same option extended out). In other words, this isn't a separate option, it is the right option over-extended or improperly applied.

This may seem like straining at a gnat, but I think it is important because separatism has been often abandoned inappropriately because some have concluded that it can't be applied without falling into your option #4. Frankly, at times it sounds like you have this suspicion. I would imagine that you would counter that the way you have seen fundamentalists apply it, it is option #4. I would not dispute that this happens, but I would say it is not biblical separatism at that point (therefore it is not option #3 since it is a completely biblical option). My concern is that some people reject separatism because of some hyper-separatists and the fact that some have made separatism look as if it cannot be anything but hyper in nature.

I think you do a good job in an essay at your website distinguishing between Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism (<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm>). You make a couple of statements in it that parallel my view regarding separatism:

"History teaches us that hyper-Calvinism is as much a threat to true Calvinism as Arminianism is. Virtually every revival of true Calvinism since the Puritan era has been hijacked, crippled, or ultimately killed by hyper-Calvinist influences. Modern Calvinists would do well to be on guard against the influence of these deadly trends."

"To call it 'hyper-Calvinism' is something of a misnomer. It is actually a rejection of historic Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism entails a denial of what is taught in both Scripture and the major Calvinistic creeds, substituting instead an imbalanced and unbiblical notion of divine sovereignty."

If you were to substitute Separatism and Hyper-Separatism for the words Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism, your two statements would be a fairly good summary of my point. Let me try it:

"History teaches us that hyper-Separatism is as much a threat to true Separatism as Non-Separatism is. Virtually every revival of true Separatism since the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy has been hijacked, crippled, or ultimately killed by hyper-Separatist influences. Modern Separatists would do well to be on guard against the influence of these deadly trends."

"To call it 'hyper-Separatism' is something of a misnomer. It is actually a rejection of historic Separatism. Hyper-Separatism entails a denial of what is taught in both Scripture and the major Separatist writings, substituting instead an imbalanced and unbiblical notion of purity and unity."

My "modifications" are weak at some points, but I think you can see the point I am making. As you know, most Arminians think any sniff of Calvinism is in fact hyper! I would contend

that non-separatists react the same way to any sniff of separatism. And, truth be told, anyone who has encountered genuine hyper-Calvinists develops such a negative perspective of them that they often move far away from anything Calvinistic. The same is true regarding separatism. To tie this to the discussion at hand, I believe this tendency to equate all separatism with hyper-separatism ends up causing serious damage because the reactionary position is an unbiblical one. A specific case where this has happened, as I see it, is the interpretation and application of 2 Ths 3. Because some people have seen it applied incorrectly, they have wrongly concluded that it says nothing that bears on the question of ecclesiastical separation. I was glad to see that you don't reject the significance of this text in the discussion of separation.

#### Apostates and Separation

You indicate that you are "hung up" on my definition of apostate. Sorry for any confusion I have caused on this. I think I have been consistently defining it as someone who denies an essential doctrine of the Faith. I was using apostate simply as a shortened version of that. Given this definition, I would not view Mohler as an apostate in any way (and I am not inclined to view Graham as one, although some of his comments denying the necessity of explicit faith in Jesus Christ are very troubling).

That means that I would view separation from these men as necessitated by the fact that they, at varying degrees and ways, fellowship with those who deny essential doctrines. That Graham does this is obvious to anyone who even casually examines his ministry. This has been true for half a century, and is truly sad. I have addressed the question of Mohler in my article, so I won't rehash that here.

The more important point is that the way you have approached this forces the discussion into a mold which you have made, not me. I contend that we must nail down our answers to questions of first importance before going case by case in application. The three options that I have laid out form the basis for my questions. If someone fits in the first two categories (no ecclesiastical separation or separation from apostates, but not those who fellowship with them), then I believe I am obligated to not have fellowship with them because they are disobedient to clear biblical teaching. For me, that means that I don't believe that I can engage in ecclesiastical fellowship with those who embrace any form of the position on separation espoused by the original new evangelicals (which I believe is both options 1 and 2, i.e., a virulent and watered-down version).

The reason that I see both of these options as essentially the same is simply because the second option, by its practice, actually communicates the same thing as option one. In other words, if I claim to believe that the Bible demands separation from those who have denied the Faith, yet I don't demand it of believers I am contradicting my claim. An illustration: since our church believes that immersion is the only acceptable mode of baptism, we only admit to membership those who have been baptized by immersion. If we admitted others, then we would ipso facto be denying the claim that it is the only acceptable mode. In a similar way, when someone who claims to believe that separation from apostasy is the only acceptable response for believers ignores the disobedience of believers on this very point, then that person does not truly believe separation is the only acceptable response to false teaching and teachers. Some might accuse me of being simplistic here, but it seems to be consistent with the biblical teaching.

If someone claims to believe the third option (separation from apostates and from those who fellowship with them), then the door to fellowship is open. Still, that claim must be demonstrated in practice to be considered genuine. Practices that continually contradict the claim call into question the sincerity of the belief. If there is a common commitment to the

biblical principle, then we must allow some room for differences of application. If we do that carefully and properly, then the problem for which you constructed the option number four should be less frequent (I doubt we will ever eliminate the misapplication of separation given the fact that we are all sinners). I would add, hopefully without opening another whole discussion, that I am talking only about the matter of ecclesiastical separation, not the total question of fellowship. There are other limits for other levels (e.g., Baptist vis-à-vis Presbyterian).

#### Finney and Mohler

I must admit that this, from my perspective, was a somewhat strange line of argument. You are correct that I agree with you about Finney. (For that reason, I will not help sponsor his Greater Detroit Crusade when he comes to town.) We have taken a pretty clear stand against the influence of Finney's theology and beliefs on revival. To be candid, I was fairly ignorant of his views early on in my pastoral ministry since I had never read any of his writings, so I made some early mistakes in response to some folks' promotion of him. I think we have corrected that sufficiently.

But the real point is that these are apples and oranges. I/we are separated from those who teach this stuff. Men like that don't preach here, and we are not in any ecclesiastical fellowship with folks like that. Generally those people write articles against us, etc. As you know, there are plenty of dead folks who are held in high esteem whose post-mortem press is far better than it should be. That is the case with Finney among some fundamentalists. If they really knew what he believed, they wouldn't embrace him so readily.

Now, last I checked Al Mohler is alive and very active in ministry. He has served as chairman for a Billy Graham crusade and told me he would do it again. I would encourage you to ask him his reasons for doing so. I did, and I have drawn my conclusions based on it. Based on what I have read and heard, some from personal conversation, I believe he is not committed to separatism as I believe it is taught in the Scriptures. This is what accounts for the promotion of Graham, participation in the SBC, etc.

#### Final Thoughts

I have tried carefully not to ask any questions mainly because I believe we could go back and forth for a long time past what is genuinely profitable. I believe you know what I believe. I believe that I have a better understanding of what you believe. My take on it is that you would argue that I am over-aggressive in the application of separation toward non-fundamentalists and far too lax toward those who claim to be fundamentalists. My response would be that I don't think I am either of these, but I remain open to exhortation and correction about it.

My concern for the ministry out there would be that I hear praise of Spurgeon's response during the Downgrade controversy, but then I see cooperation with men and ministries that have followed a very different path than Spurgeon. But each of us will give an account to the One who judges righteously, so each of us will have to tread the path that we believe right based on the Scriptures. I have enjoyed interacting with you on these points. In spite of our differences, I sincerely appreciate all that you have done to promote biblical truth. May the Lord grant us all much discernment in the days ahead!

For the sake of His name,  
Dave Doran

March 14, 2005, 12:13 PM

**Phil Johnson** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Santa Clarita, CA

Posts: 6

### Hyperism and binary logic

Dear Dave,

Thanks for your thoughtful and detailed reply. I sense that you don't want to prolong the dialogue, and I'm sympathetic to that. I don't want to prolong it unnecessarily, either. But I do have a couple of lingering unanswered questions I want to raise if you don't mind. I appreciate the time you have put into your replies already, and I know what a challenge that poses to real life. So if you don't want to answer further, I'll understand and won't complain. But I'm reluctant to let the conversation drop without trying to get to the heart of the question of why two men like you and me who love the Lord, are committed to the authority and inerrancy of His word, and (I think) agree on some 98% or more of what we would deem most vitally important theologically—nonetheless can't work alongside one another in ministry.

Before getting into that, however, I want to thank you for the insight and honesty of your replies. I do see and understand the distinction you are trying to make between separatists and hyper-separatists. There *is* a legitimate distinction between the two, of course. We certainly agree on that, though we would probably disagree about where to draw the line between biblical separatism and hyper-separatism. It seems to me that there are at least five (maybe ten or more) distinct philosophies of separation currently being put into practice among various kinds of fundamentalists. If we could delineate them (much the same way [Dr. Bauder has done](#)), you and I might not completely agree about which ones properly belong in the "hyper" category— but it is helpful and encouraging to hear you acknowledge that there *is* such a thing as hyper-separatism.

The parallelism you draw with Calvinism vs. hyper-Calvinism does help me understand your perspective. Of course, even Calvinists don't always agree among themselves where biblical Calvinism ends and hyperism takes over. (For example, lots of Calvinists who don't deny common grace would nonetheless disagree with my assertion that denial of common grace is a form of hyper-Calvinism.) So the label "hyper-Calvinist" in effect sometimes means nothing more than "more Calvinist than me." And, conversely, hypers tend to argue that those of us who are *less* Calvinistic than they are, aren't even authentic Calvinists.

So I take your point about the folly of those from my side who automatically label anyone who draws the circle of fellowship tighter than we do "hyper-separatists." That's a valid

point, and I concede it.

However, the same principle also ought to strike a note of caution to those tempted to conclude that everyone *less* separatistic than themselves are actually "non-separatists." That kind of thinking is a tendency of hyperism. It starts with a slavish insistence on binary logic, even in areas where binary logic doesn't really fit.

And if you'll permit me to be a little bit cheeky, it seems to me that such a tendency is manifested in your refusal to notice that there *are* degrees of separation. Relying on similar logic, Dr. McCune doesn't want to acknowledge any distinctions between various kinds of fundamentalists. Everyone *must* be either a fundamentalist or a new evangelical, period. A person is either "separated," or he's not—full stop. It *has* to be that simple. If you recognize any degrees of separation or sub-classifications between fundamentalists, it will destroy your whole paradigm. Everything distinctive about your system depends on binary logic.

In practical terms, that means you must ultimately separate from virtually everyone who is not as separated as you. And that, in turn, means you have to find ways to justify labeling virtually everyone who is not *in* your movement as a "disobedient brother," or else your paradigm will collapse on itself. I'm very grateful for your reassurance that you would separate from someone teaching Finney's theology or implementing his methodology, but I still suspect that you would remain in fellowship with brethren who are much further from you doctrinally and philosophically than *I* am—yet because you can categorize them as "separated," fellowship with them fits your paradigm better than fellowship with someone like me.

I raised the question of whether you would categorize me as a disobedient brother, and if so, how you would justify that judgment biblically. You didn't acknowledge the question. Maybe you were just being gracious. But if you want to answer that question, I promise not to take offense. It would seem to me that if you're going to hold me at arm's length as a sinning fellow-believer, you are obliged to give me a reason—if not a strong admonition (2 Thessalonians 3:15).

That would get us to the real crux of the issues between us, I think.

Meanwhile, I am curious: what do you and Dr. McCune think of Dr. Bauder's taxonomy of fundamentalists? It would seem to pose a real problem to the binary logic that you both seem to rely heavily on in your defense of fundamentalism.

**Dave Doran**

Junior Member



Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 14

### Reply: Part I (Binary Thinking)

Phil:

Sorry for the delay in responding. I was teaching in the seminary this morning. Thanks for the last post directed my way. I will try to work through the issues you have raised, but I will need to do so over a series of posts.

#### Separatism vs. Hyper-separatism

I believe we are agreed about the potential misuse of the prefixes "non" and "hyper" in connection with separatist. I agree with you that caution is definitely needed before we decide that someone deserves to be hyphenated! What is important, at this point in our discussion, is to remember that we are really talking application, not belief. In other words, the tendency to use these hyphenated descriptions shows up in the realm of practice because one's choices show a pattern of either not separating enough or too much.

This is how, to get to your question regarding binary logic, I can still argue that one is either a separatist or not. I make this assessment on the stated beliefs, and at that level there is no middle ground (at least as I see it). You either believe that the Bible demands separation from those who deny the Faith and from those who disobey its clear commands to separate from them, or you don't believe this. I remain convinced that, in principle, there are really just two categories of believers: separatists and non-separatists.

The rub is really at the level of application since not all who embrace the biblical teaching about separatism apply it exactly alike. If I understood you correctly, you take these different applications to be different "degrees" of separation, but I don't agree with that way of categorizing it. The main reason is that it introduces a wrinkle into the discussion that is not based on a biblical distinction, is not very helpful, and is contrary to what we normally do in similar discussions. For example, do we speak of "degrees" of modesty because believers apply the principle differently? No, we say something is either modest or it is not, even though we may not agree with each other about that. I suppose there is some value to the statement that something is less immodest than something else, but we ought to reject immodesty completely, not by degrees.

A less important reason is that historically the concept of "degrees" (3 or higher) has been used as a critical and dismissive comment about separation. It has served as a means by which to discredit some particular decision. By incorrectly labeling it third or fourth degree separation, the whole idea of secondary separation has acquired a negative image. I imagine that you would counter something like, "No, the poor practice of it has earned it that image." But that reply actually confirms my point—the problem is the practice of it, not the principle. So it would be better to say, I disagree with that person's application of the separatist principle, then to call into question the principle itself.

Without wanting to open up a whole new front in our discussion, it seems that many of the misunderstandings about the application of separation (both inside and outside of fundamentalism) are due to the failure to properly distinguish varying levels of fellowship. This problem has cropped up in some of this latest round of discussions (e.g., are attending a conference and speaking in one to be assessed equivalently?). I would argue that many of the alleged inconsistencies of separatism are rooted in the blurring of categories (e.g., the educational vs. ecclesiastical levels).

To recap, I don't believe that binary thinking is problematic if it is precise enough, i.e., you have legitimately and sufficiently boiled the options down to two. We do this in theology all the time. For example, one binary approach to baptism would focus on whether baptism is for believers or not (since there really are only two categories of baptismal candidates). Another one for baptism would be the question of whether it is by immersion or not (even though in this case there are subordinate options on each side). I believe that the separation question can legitimately be boiled down to two options: believe it as outlined above or not believe it.

In terms of 20th century American Christianity, the names associated with these two views were fundamentalism and new evangelicalism. When the discussion turns to separation, the names are simply shorthand for the position. When I call myself a Baptist, I am identifying what I believe (and don't believe) on several specific issues. The same is true about the name fundamentalist—it identifies me as one who holds to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and believes that doing so requires me to separate from those who deny them and those who disobey the biblical commands to separate from them. I don't believe you can rightfully claim the name fundamentalist at this point in history while denying any of these three portions of that definition. (Please don't get sucked into thinking "movement" again; think about it as a summary of beliefs, like Baptist.)

Also, during the middle of the 20th century a group emerged which had as its driving force the idea that you could dismantle parts of that definition, namely that you could believe the fundamentals of the faith, but were not obligated to practice separation from those who deny them. The name which they chose for themselves was new evangelicalism. This was a conscious, deliberate choice to break from fundamentalism. Over time, the word "new" became increasingly outdated, so they began to refer to themselves mainly as evangelicals. But that did not mean they changed their belief system, only that they did not want an anachronistic name. Simple observation of how evangelicals speak of themselves makes it clear that they still do not want to wear the name fundamentalist precisely because of its separatist implications (some of which, admittedly, is identification with the abuses of separatism).

As I stated in my initial article responding to your workshop, I seriously wonder if we are on the front edge of a realignment stage. I think this would account for some of the rumblings about new names, etc. This is also reflected in the struggle to apply separatist principles to some who don't seem to fit the traditional molds. But even if some major shift happens, I believe it will not change the number of options, it will only represent movement within them. Labels serve this discussion, not rule it. To the degree they help, fine. The real issue is what is believed, and I don't believe there are three options on this very precise issue.

That's all for now,  
DMD

 March 15th, 2005, 03:29 PM

[rollandmccune](#) 

Contributing Author

Join Date: Feb 2005  
Posts: 25

Response to Phil Johnson:

Dear Brother,

Thanks for your response. I must admit candidly that I have great difficulty penetrating what come across to me as pejorative, extraneous, and emotionally-laden comments and qualifications so as to get to what I perceive are the real issues and answers. I will respond to several of your principles or proposals. These evaluations may appear to be inadequate and top water, to say nothing of being too straightforward, but hopefully will serve the purpose of meaningful interaction.

1. RE your reply to Dr. Doran and me about "binary authority" and the validity of labels and classifications: Speaking for myself, my position is that labels, classifications, and taxonomical charts are irrelevant when it comes to deciding ecclesiastical associations and separation. They do have value, but I do not construct a practice of separation or association based on "movement-type" categories. There is one authority of course, and that is Scripture, and there is nothing binary about that. With that ultimate authority, I try to classify professing Bible believing Christianity as simply as I can (and I don't think that is the same as being simplistic), but this is not for purposes of separation-by-classification. A label only captures at best the motif of a movement (pardon the "M" word). Fundamentalism's motif in its controversies is most characterized by a solicitous regard for correct doctrine, especially as that biblical teaching outlines redemptive non-negotiables and the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation, including a negative assessment of those who are content to be organizationally linked, however remote, with a religious endeavor, leader, or institution that does not share those doctrinal convictions. The authority is biblical doctrine alone, and while the fall-out may be "taxonomied" to death, for me eventually the ultimate and most primitive issue in the ongoing controversy still boils down to one's relationship to the doctrine of separation. As Dr. Doran pointed out, correctly in my view, there are only two actual viable responses to that question.

2. RE "Independency": As you describe it, it is certainly not novel, granted. And I would think that it surely antedates the Puritans and the Reformers by at least a millennium and a half. The appeal to them as a paradigm for modern ecclesiastical struggles seems a little strained coming as they do from a different ecclesiastical climate than the 21st century. But the point I was making was that it seemed novel or groundbreaking to me to invoke or project "independency" into the current complex of separation problems. And I am still not sure what contribution or fresh thinking it introduces or how it is a superior rubric in the modern discussion. Who could dispute that independency is the polar opposite of corporate coercion? But to me that is not the issue. (The not very charitable and not too veiled reference to your perception of the fundamentalist movement as a "herd mentality found in many 'movements,' denominations, and cults, especially the rigid kinds that are dominated by powerful hierarchies" is, in my judgment, beside the point.)

Independency is said to be compatible with the "idea" of fundamentalism. Agreed. But again, I don't understand its importance as such in the argument. Based on our mutual agreement on the principles of "independency" and their compatibility with the principles of the "fundamentalist idea," I find your practice to be inconsistent with those principles because, for various exceptions made, notably the recommended search to find someone's motivational conscience, I think your separation construct is unworkable and thus not very meaningful. But there is apparently something about "independency" that we really don't agree on because you seem to find me and my kind inconsistent with the principles of the "fundamentalist idea." ("[Biblical] principles" are at stake here, not personalities or unpleasant, if not sinful, events in the past. Even independency has had and still has its unsavory departures from its ideals, to be sure. That independency is not compatible with "the practice of much of the visible fundamentalist movement these days" may or may not be true; in any case it is irrelevant.)

3. RE "conscience": Yes, we must respect each believer's conscience, whether or not his conscience is a correct assessment of a situation. A believer must also follow his own conscience, even if it errs (Rom 14:22-23). Therefore I do respect Al Mohler's and John MacArthur's consciences, for example, and I have no problem accepting them as Christ has accepted us (Rom 15:7). But others' consciences cannot become my conscience on an issue. We are indeed to be "humble about our own motivations and slow to condemn others for theirs," although I don't think that disagreeing with them impugns or "condemns" their consciences or their Christianity. But to suggest that we somehow must incorporate the "how" of their arrival at their consciences on associational and separational issues again seems irrelevant. In my understanding, their motives, aspirations, and ideals are incapable of others' discernment as only God knows what they are. My duty is to determine whether in good conscience as informed by the Word of God I can enter into a ministry with them. On that I personally eschew ambiguity in favor of biblical and practical consistency. Nor can I see how I am thereby "in bondage to a definition of 'disobedient brethren.'" I also fail to understand how separating from Al Mohler, et al., "would force me to separate from everyone who disagrees with me on anything." That comes across as far too sweeping, biblically unsubstantiated, and simply illogical, to say nothing of being a non-sequitur. On the issue under discussion, I can't accept the assessment that all those, especially well-known leaders, who have substantial disagreement with me on ecclesiastical separation are "merely ... tripped up by a misunderstanding." That does justice to no one nor to the principles involved.

4. RE 2 Thess 3 :14 and the disobedient brother: My contention is that Paul emphasizes the pattern of disobedience involved without getting into the motivations thereof. Trying to judge another's motives or intentions, which no one except God can truly do, and attempting to factor them into the separation equation is monumentally to "open a massive can of worms" in my view. Outward actions and statements are the only objective criteria one has for determining biblically another's obedience or lack of it. Disobedience for sincere but unbiblical reasons is not a legitimate canon.

5. RE a "stable" authority vis-a-vis "a little bit of ambiguity." If such a stable authority is irretrievably tethered to the "heavy-handed hierarchical authority wielded within a movement where such authority has historically gotten out of hand," I couldn't agree more. But somehow I get an inkling that you are not referring to Roman Catholicism, and on that basis I must reject all the redundant innuendos and irrelevancy of the point. We've got to move past what sticks in your throat about Jack Hyles and others. For this reason we biblical, mainstream, historic, card-carrying, true-blue fundamentalists can't seem to move the conversation forward for some because they are wallowing in a "slough of despond" of emotional reaction to some person or incident in the history of fundamentalism. Would-be fundamentalists may well have betrayed the Scriptures and what is best about our movement by bad behavior and heretical doctrines, but they are not representative of the genius of our movement and never were, despite the loud cries of their devotees. To keep bringing them up impedes any progress in the discussion and after a while begins to sound a tad adolescent and extremely provincial to some of us who are longer in the tooth.

6. RE schism and separation: I agree that schism as such is certainly evil and scandalous, but apparently schism in the case of implicating a disobedient brother is in the eye of the beholder. Was Paul schismatic when he confronted Peter over the Gentile question (Gal 2:11 ff)? I think not. Or was Paul really right with God when he and Barnabas had a heated disagreement (Acts 15:36-39)? I think he was but don't know, cannot tell, and don't think it is relevant. But the issues were extremely relevant, and such still are. Continuous "bad judgment" by a leader regarding ecclesiastical separation is just such an issue, and whether

an evil "is in a man's conscience and not his will" is of no consequence in determining a biblical response to something as important, far reaching, and divisive as the separation issue.

This response and evaluation is not an indictment of anyone in particular in the camp opposite of me. In fact I have several former students and colleagues in study and in ministry in Sun Valley and in other Bible believing contexts around the world, whom I still regard as very good, lifelong Christian friends, but who would have varying degrees, from innocuous to notable, of disagreement with my thinking.

For lack of time I swore off blogging after my post on "labels," but fell off the wagon and allowed myself to get involved again, not even fulfilling my original intention of brevity in this piece. I think my position is clear from all that I have written in this forum, and I must leave it there and get back to other responsibilities. On that particular note, the immortal words of the inimitable Forest Gump will have to suffice: "And that's all I have to say about that."

Cordially,

RDM

 March 16, 2005, 02:12 PM

**Dave Doran**   
Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 14

#### Response to Annalisa

Annalisa:

Your wrote:

"I believe that the Fundamentals are worth separating over, but is separation itself a fundamental we must hold to above all else? By demanding that we separate from those who do not separate, you are asking us to give this doctrine preeminence over all other doctrines in our ministry."

My answer: (1) separation is not above the other doctrines, but as a clearly revealed truth of God's Word, it is required of faithful believers; (2) the test of a doctrine's importance is not its place in history, but its place in Scripture (a point on which I believe we agree), so the real question is whether the NT teaches separation clearly, not whether it received much emphasis prior to the 20th century (even though I would argue that it did); (3) texts like 2 Cor 6: 14 ff; 2 Jn 9-11; Rom 16: 17 make it essential that believers separate from false teachers and false teaching, so this is not some parochial debate; and (4) the real core of this whole debate is whether those who deny the faith are accepted as brothers in Christ and what the consequence this acceptance is on the gospel. In other words, when an apostate is granted fellowship as if he is a believer, lost people are mistakenly led to believe that you can be a true Christian while denying essential doctrines. That is what makes this such an unconscionable betrayal of the gospel. Let me restate it, to refuse to separate from those who deny the faith is to betray the gospel. To ignore this betrayal is to not only minimize it, but to engage in it. Let me urge you, therefore, to reconsider the last statement you made in the paragraph above.

Sincerely,

DMD

March 16, 2005, 02:22 PM

**Dave Doran** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Posts: 14

### Response to Shannon

#### Shannon said:

#### Rabbit Trail

I believe that both Phil and Dave are committed to accurate and diligent exegesis and they both have a passion for truth. I'm assuming both are in close communion with God on a daily basis with an active pattern of prayer. So, why then would they (and many of us) view this issue so differently? It just seems that if this is an issue worth separating over that there would be solid biblical support. (Let me acknowledge that some believe there is more than sufficient biblical support.)

Furthermore, how is it that MacArthur, who is a student and scholar of the Word and is so theologically helpful to many of us, can be sinful on this issue? One side seems to be saying that it is sin to not practice secondary separation (for lack of a better way to describe it). If that is true, and if they are consistent with that view, then John is living in persistent sin and unwilling to repent.

I'm sure some would say that they don't believe JMac is living in persistent sin, but rather, it's a "wisdom issue" or "being a good steward of your influence issue." How can that be if you are separating from him? Are you not separating because MacArthur is disobedient (which is sin)? If he is not in sin, then why are you separating from him?  
--Shannon Brown

#### Response to Shannon:

Shannon:

I think I understand the concern that lies beneath this question, but I don't think you have drawn the right conclusion based on the problem you point out. The concern seems to be something like, if godly, committed believers work hard with the text and arrive at different conclusions, perhaps it is because the Bible is not clear on that subject.

However, I would suggest that this is a dangerous path down which to turn since there is virtually no end to the things about which godly, committed believers have arrived at differing conclusions about (modes of baptism, meaning of repentance, understanding of election, etc.). We certainly do not want to argue from lack of agreement to question the biblical clarity of teaching (especially in light of the current heresies we all face).

The fact is that our depravity affects our abilities even post-salvation. Illumination does not replace the responsibility to work hard with the Scriptures. All of us bring assumptions to the interpretation of the text; none of us has mastered all of the Bible yet we have to interpret

each part in light of the whole. I think you see my point (whether you agree or not is a different story).

I will have something more to say about the whole disobedient brother thing in a later post, so I will stop here.

March 16, 2005, 02:32 PM

**Dave Doran**

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005  
Posts: 14

#### Reply to Phil II: Dr. Bauder's Taxonomy

Phil,

You asked in your last post to me about my perspective on Dr. Bauder's taxonomy of fundamentalism. Let me start by saying that this chart was not intended to be a definitive statement with rigidly fixed categories. When I heard him make a form of this presentation, he readily acknowledged that there is considerable crossover of some of these characteristics. It was more like "some fundamentalists we have all known" than it was arguing that each column represents a distinct species of fundamentalist. That would be to misread the chart. So, in that sense, there is no disagreement with anything I have said and the basic idea of the chart.

That being said, if I understand Dr. Bauder's presentation correctly, he and I do disagree about the group he labels New Image. By identifying them as rejecting secondary separation, I would not be comfortable calling them fundamentalists. To be sure, they believe the fundamental doctrines, but so did the new evangelicals—so that is not a sufficient definition of a fundamentalist. Now, I suppose I should be open about the fact that I think that Dr. Bauder also believes that I am somewhat binary in my thinking (and I have a hunch that you may already know that).

Having eliminated the New Image crowd (with much grief and absolutely no desire for such a schism), I would see the remainder of these categories as segments of fundamentalism that range from healthy to sickly. In my mind, your original critique was targeted at the Pragmatic, Imperialist, and Extremist segments of fundamentalism. Of course, I draw this conclusion from the fact that I would claim to be in the Confessionalist segment and you graciously excluded me from censure (at least that's how I took it—don't pop my bubble if I was wrong!).

But the germane points here, at least in my mind, are:

(1) All of the categories I have identified as within fundamentalism share a common view on ecclesiastical separation even if some of them have applied it incorrectly, abusively, arbitrarily, or however else you want to describe it. This distinguishes them from all other groups which deny this view (hence my continued binary thinking).

(2) Because some of these groups have become infected with aberrant doctrine and/or ungodly behavior, I believe those roughly identified as the Confessionalist group must confront and, if there is no repentance, break from these other groups. To the degree that the other groups have embraced false doctrine and ungodly schism, this is a necessary breach. I believe that Titus 3:10-11 must be applied here.

(3) I believe that the other three types are moving rapidly away from the Confessionalist group anyway, so the visible landscape is changing. What this will mean in terms of defining labels is a question that is up for debate.

To tie back to the bigger question you have asked, I still think there is a basic binary paradigm even if there are smaller sub-categories. Going back to the baptism analogy, immersion and non-immersion are the two main categories even if some who advocate the former do so for trine immersion and non-immersionists may sprinkle or pour. Big picture is binary, closer inspection reveals sub-categories of those two main options. Applying this to separation, I believe there are two main categories (separatists and non-separatists), and closer inspection reveals differing applications/approaches within these.

That's all for today,  
DMD

March 16, 2005, 08:56 PM

**Dave Doran** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Posts: 14

### Joe and Secondary Separation

#### Joe Flener wrote:

I am going to try this again.

After reading Dr. Doran's last few posts, I understand the following:

1. Believers are to separate from "false teachers and false teaching."

- This I think we would all agree on.

2. True fundamentalists are to separate from anyone who does not separate from "false teachers and false teaching."

- This is the principle of separation that I still am looking for an exegetical/Biblical defense for. To just say that we are and to just say that the Bible says so, doesn't work. In addition to just site 2 Thess 3:14 doesn't work either. There are serious questions as to whether that passage does teach this principle of separation. If fundamentalists are going to use it (and they have been, calling it their "principle passage for secondary separation.") then they MUST show how this principle is derived from this passage following sound exegesis.

3. If #2 is correct and if Dr. Doran is correct in stating "That being said, if I understand Dr. Bauder's presentation correctly, he and I do disagree about the group he labels New Image. By identifying them as rejecting secondary separation, I would not be comfortable calling them fundamentalists." Then we would have a situation that Dr. Doran would be required by application of this principle to separate from Dr. Bauder if Dr. Bauder still fellowships with this "New Image" group.

None of us would give anyone the time of day if they continually tried to convince us of a

"biblical principle" and they could not clearly show from Scripture how that principle was derived both exegetically and theologically.

Why are we so willing to accept the premise of second degree separation when it is not and is not being clearly articulated based on sound exegetical and theological methodologies?

--Joe Fleener

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**Dave Doran's response:**

Joe:

It was not that I was ignoring your question because I don't have an answer for it. I honestly thought that this was a given since: (1) Phil Johnson had acknowledged the principle of secondary separation (based on 2 Ths 3) in his workshop at Shepherds (and he was the main one with whom I was conversing); (2) you had acknowledged on Adam Bailie's blog that you agree with the concept of what I called secondary separation (even though you don't like the name); and (3) I honestly don't think there is an exegetical mystery to this matter--the meaning of the text is very clear, the debate is on its significance to the matter of believers outside of one's local church and how ecclesiastical entities relate to one another.

Let me clarify that last point. By significance I mean the implications or application of this text beyond its immediate reference. To deny that it has any significance beyond a particular local church is to handle poorly those parts of the text which suggest larger application (v. 6 "tradition", cf. 2:15; v. 7 "our example"). And it engages in a process of interpretive reductionism that limits the passage in ways that are inconsistent with how, for example, the Apostle Paul himself used Scripture (think "muzzle not an ox" applied to paying those who preach the gospel, 1 Cor 9, 1 Tim 5). It seems very self-evident that the principle taught in this passage about handling a disobedient brother within the local church would have ramifications for all relationships among believers. The real debate is about the nature and extent of those ramifications, not whether there are any.

I would encourage you to go over to Adam Bailie's blog again and find the material laid out there on 2 Ths 3 by Brian Collins. Bruce Compton (a prof here at DBTS) has also covered this exegetically. I will email you a copy of his work on it.

Regarding your second comment about Dr. Bauder, I believe that you err in making the label the issue (something that I haven't done). Since Bauder and I agree on separation, I would have no problem fellowshipping with him. If he or I were to apply the same principles differently, that's no big surprise (although I imagine that there would probably be very little difference in our applications).

I have a personal aversion to discussion boards for the very thing that I find myself engaged in, multiple discussions that run in multiple directions with multiple people. I have stayed in this one because Phil and I were having something of a give and take discussion. I have erred by injecting myself into other discussions or responding to people other than Phil. I need to tidy up some things tonight and then will limit myself to my original intent. In my mind, I have tried to tidy up a little here and am done. Thanks.

DMD

March 17, 2005, 05:27 AM

**Joe Fleener** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Feb 2005

Location: PA

Posts: 16

### Still Searching & Working

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dave Doran**

*Joe:*

*It was not that I was ignoring your question because I don't have an answer for it. I honestly thought that this was a given since: (2) you had acknowledged on Adam Bailie's blog that you agree with the concept of what I called secondary separation (even though you don't like the name);*

Thank you for taking the time to respond. Since you are leaving the discussion I doubt I will get a response to this, but I will enter my comments anyway.

You are correct, I did acknowledge on Adam's blog that I agreed with the concept of what you called "secondary separation" but did not like the term. Two things have happened since then.

1. I am doubting my belief.

2. (This one is more important since it has the potential of changing #1 for me.) Since Adam's blog I have seen 2 Thes 3 used more and more and actually called to "primary" text for secondary separation. I am not convinced that the exegesis I have seen supports this. - See below.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dave Doran**

*and (3) I honestly don't think there is an exegetical mystery to this matter--the meaning of the text is very clear, the debate is on its significance to the matter of believers outside of one's local church and how ecclesiastical entities relate to one another.*

This is probably where we differ. I have seen Dr. Compton's paper he presented at, I believe, a pastor's conference there @ DBTS. I will argue later that his conclusions are not as clear as you seem to indicate.

Is Dr. Compton's understanding of secondary separation as exegeted from 2 Thes 3:6-15 (which I assume you would hold to) as clear as the teaching in Scripture on the mode of baptism (which I would assume you believe is immersion)?

If it is then how can a separatist Baptist fellowship with a separatist Presbyterian who denies a teaching of Scripture that you as a Baptist believe is clear and without debate?

If the understood teaching of 2 Thes 3:6-15 does not teach secondary separation as clearly

as Baptists believe Scripture teaches mode of baptism then how can we elevate it to the same level and make it an issue of fellowship?

Let me clarify. I firmly believe we should separate from false teachers and false teaching. I also have no problem fellowshiping with many of my Presbyterian (and other) brothers.

My point is that if I am going to make second degree separation a determining factor for fellowship then I better be able to clearly defend my position from sound exegesis and theological development. If God's Word is the final authority on faith and practice then, "What says the Lord?"

I know you say it is clear in 2 Thes. 3:6-15 and that Dr. Compton and others have articulated this already. I am not convinced on its clarity. Maybe after my own study of the passage I will be.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dave Doran**

*Regarding your second comment about Dr. Bauder, I believe that you err in making the label the issue (something that I haven't done). Since Bauder and I agree on separation, I would have no problem fellowshiping with him. If he or I were to apply the same principles differently, that's no big surprise (although I imagine that there would probably be very little difference in our applications).*

I never thought you would separate from Dr. Bauder. However, I don't understand.

If Dr. Bauder identifies a group of people who do not practice second degree separation and still calls them fundamentalists, then I assume he has not separated from them. If he has not and you say that this same group are not fundamentalists because they do not practice second degree separation, then in what way do you and Dr. Bauder agree on separation?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dave Doran**

*I have a personal aversion to discussion boards for the very thing that I find myself engaged in, multiple discussions that run in multiple directions with multiple people. I have stayed in this one because Phil and I were having something of a give and take discussion. I have erred by injecting myself into other discussions or responding to people other than Phil. I need to tidy up some things tonight and then will limit myself to my original intent. In my mind, I have tried to tidy up a little here and am done. Thanks.  
DMD*

Boy I hear you on this one. I ended last week telling my wife that I needed to get off here because it is taking so much time. I started this week saying, "I can't leave yet." Is there a support group for discussion board addicts?

--Joe Fleener

March 17, 2005, 06:25 AM

**Dave Doran** 

Junior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Posts: 14

#### Follow up w/ Joe (with something for Anne too)

I actually checked back in order to put in a link to Dr. Compton's article, but since you have it I won't. I am not sure how to state this gently, but the fact that you are not convinced is not directly proportional to the clarity with which this passage has been handled. I am sure you agree that other factors always play into the equation. Probably the more direct way to state your point is, I don't agree with what I have seen. And perhaps you should do the counter exegesis out in the open for all to evaluate.

Re: the Presbyterian question, it is not a problem for me since on that point I do practice some form of separation from them. The real issue, again, is application--at what level of relationship are we talking? Since I know you followed the discussion at Adam's blog, I will simply remind you of what I said there by copying it in:

"(1) I would not argue for full fellowship between the two separatists, only that which is on the level of fundamentalist issues (cf. Kevin's earlier discussion re: fellowship and truth); (2) from my perspective, separatism "ranks" higher in the order of concerns than other matters simply because it is essential to the defense of the faith (which also ties to #1, i.e., fundamentalist unity is a unity in the defense and propagation of fundamental doctrine, not areas of interpretive difference)."

In other words, these are issues of application. How does this principle apply in this kind of context. That does not change the principle at all.

Perhaps I was unclear in my answer about Dr. Bauder, but my basic point is that since I don't base my separation decisions on some kind of fixed labeling system, but on what people believe (and display in practice), the problem you suggested in the earlier post is moot in my mind. I know what Dr. Bauder believes and practices, so there is no problem there. If he makes some decisions with which I might disagree (or vice versa), that is a long way from the issues we have been discussing. I have spent a lot of pixels trying to be clear that I disagree with the caricature that separation works by some long chain reaction, yet that is precisely what your question presupposes.

Anne, this is the answer to your question too. Both of you seem, at least as I read your comments, to be operating from a crooked understanding of what I have written (based perhaps on your understanding of how separation has been practiced or caricatured or both). I have stated exactly the principles upon which I base separation decisions, and they do not lead inevitably to some colossal chain reaction. Some have operated that way, but it is not inherent in the principle.

Of course, I will qualify my statement by adding: (1) that all cooperative ministry beyond the local church is voluntary, so each local church is free to determine the extent and standards for its cooperation; and (2) I am talking, in this context, about the preservation of essential biblical doctrines, not all of what I believe (and some of what I believe narrows fellowship on differing levels).

Joe, I will do my best from this point on to not contribute to your addiction!

DMD