

The Doctrine of Biblical Separation

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Biblical Separation from denominational heresy and apostasy (nowadays including homosexual immorality) is no longer widely followed by evangelicals. Evangelical Anglicans remain in their deeply corrupt denomination no matter what; the Evangelical Alliance happily harbours numerous people who deny penal substitution; and even the former British Evangelical Council has changed into 'Affinity' – an organisation soft on biblical separation. But the commands to stand clear of false doctrine, immorality and worldliness are still in the Bible, and the warnings of *Revelation* chapters 2 and 3 stand over us if we persist in disobedience. The loss of separation has already led to a weakened, worldly, psychological evangelicalism in Britain, and the situation will grow worse still without a return to former standards of loyalty to Christ and his Word.

What follows is a brief article published in the *Sword & Trowel* early in 1971, soon after the Metropolitan Tabernacle had seceded once again from the Baptist Union. It had done so before, in 1887, but in 1955 rejoined, during a 'low' period of the church. When the present pastor arrived at the Tabernacle in October 1970, the remaining members were fervent for secession, which was unanimously resolved at a church meeting held on 22nd February 1971.

Sword & Trowel 1971:

TO LEAVE a denomination is regarded in some quarters as being a totally negative, defeatist thing to do. One runs the risk of being classified as a misfit committing a deliberate, unfriendly act towards brethren.

Some go so far as to charge seceders with the sin of schism. Certainly there is a stigma, a branding, and a great deal of ill-feeling surrounding any secession. It is not easy to convince some friends who remain in the denomination that the act of secession involves no breach of fellowship whatsoever with true evangelical brethren.

Why do we leave the Baptist Union? Why do we have no hope that it can be restored to an evangelical position? Why are we against the ecumenical movement? Is there a positive, constructive purpose in our decision?

Before answering these questions, a word about 'our decision'. It has been a decision which, in our view, no church meeting can take in its own judgement and wisdom. It is a decision which, we believe, has already been taken for us in the Word of God. As we have looked at the Scripture on this subject over a period of time, there has been a growing certainty that 'this is the way – walk ye in it'.

So our decision is a deeply-felt response to what we conscientiously believe is the command of the Word. We have many, many faults and weaknesses as a family of God's people. We have no merit which would entitle us to criticise brethren who do not feel as we do on this issue. Rather, we would like to assure them that we want to maintain the closest fellowship with all the Lord's people and to add our efforts to those of evangelicals striving for a new evangelical unity.

These are, broadly stated, the reasons for our separation from the Baptist Union:

FIRSTLY, we have been deeply concerned with the participation of the Baptist Union in the so-called ecumenical movement. Great biblical principles are at stake in this, for the ecumenical movement seeks to unite all major religious denominations irrespective of what their member churches may or may not believe.

Ultimately the movement's goal is union with Rome and a World Church. At the top of the ecumenical movement is the World Council of Churches, which links together thousands of churches, most of which are utterly opposed to our evangelical beliefs. It includes those who deny the virgin birth of Christ and reject his divine nature and co-equality with God the Father; who scoff at the infallibility of the Bible, dismissing it as a collection of myths; and who denounce the atoning, sacrificial death of Christ.

The World Council accepts all, from Unitarians to Roman Catholics, and stands for the view that doctrine counts for nothing.

The Baptist Union is a member of this World Council of Churches (as confirmed in recent years by an overwhelming vote in Assembly). We believe the Scripture clearly directs Christians not to be associated with such a movement. And to be faithful to our historic Baptist evangelical position we must obey the following Scriptures:

Principles of Biblical Separation

2 Corinthians 6.14-18. 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them...and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

Acts 20.28-31. 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch...'

Matthew 7.15. 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.'

Titus 3.10. 'A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.'

2 John 9-11, speaking of the qualifications for Christian fellowship, says: 'Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.'

As we consider our involvement with the ecumenical movement through the Baptist Union in the light of these scriptures, our reaction echoes the words of *Revelation 18.4*— 'And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.'

SECONDLY, we have had to face up to the hard truth that what is true of the ecumenical movement is true of the Baptist Union itself. No longer is the Union an evangelical denomination. Neither has it been for many years. While there are a number of fine evangelical churches in its membership (with an unusual number in South London), nevertheless the vast majority of its churches have gone a very long way from the evangelical faith of the Bible.

There are many, many ministers who preach 'another gospel' and many who even strenuously oppose the Truth. Yet we are joined in fellowship with such.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon withdrew from the Union when he discovered that there was no basis of faith strong enough to restrict membership to evangelical believers. He was deeply grieved by the influx of modernists into the denomination. Today the position is far worse, as the denomination has been practically completely taken over by non-evangelicals.

Some evangelicals would say that we should stay in the Union to win it back. While we acknowledge this policy to be sincerely meant, it has never been successful whenever it has been tried in the history of the Christian Church. Once a religious denomination has gone into such serious decay that the majority of its members no longer believe the biblical faith, it has never been possible to save it.

More important still is the fact that God has told us what our course of action should be in this situation. We are not at liberty to use our human wisdom and say 'we must remain in it – to win it', for the Word of God has already bidden us to come out of it. (The same scriptures just quoted in connection with the ecumenical movement speak to us on this matter also.) Should we go on having fellowship with modernists; giving monetary support to liberals; and identifying our message with that of non-evangelicals? We believe the Lord has clearly given us our instructions for Biblical Separation in his Word.

A further source of guidance to us has been the clear example of our Lord Jesus Christ in his dealings with the Jewish religious parties of his day (who believed more of the Bible than many of the modernistic Baptists with whom we are in fellowship).

In studying our Lord's encounters with such, and particularly the occasions when he met with them in the Temple and in the synagogues, we realised that his attitude was always the same:

- (i) He made it very plain to them that they had no genuine spiritual standing as God's children.
- (ii) He made it very plain to them that their teaching was entirely wrong; they greatly erred. Every meeting resulted in strong controversy.
- (iii) He permitted no basis of fellowship or co-operation with them for spiritual work – even when they offered (Clear example of the doctrine of separation.)

We believe that our Lord's attitude was mingled with that love which always characterised his dealings with men, except when they deserved his righteous indignation. Nevertheless his attitude brought out their hostility, even attempts to take his life. We believe, whatever the consequences, that our Lord's conduct is our example and we must follow him. How can we be in membership of the Baptist Union with Christ's conduct as our example? Clearly we must obey the doctrine of Biblical Separation without delay. It is a union of churches, largely non-evangelical, in which we:

- (i) Recognise one another as true churches in God's sight even though in our hearts we do not believe many member churches are;
- (ii) Give acknowledgment to one another's spiritual work and teaching, even though we believe it is wrong;
- (iii) Co-operate together in spiritual work, even with those we believe are unsaved. All this is the very opposite of our Lord's conduct and as a matter of conscience we cannot belong. It is our duty to try to reach non-evangelicals with the Gospel, not to embrace them in pretended fellowship. Again we stress that our attitude is against being joined with unbelievers. We assure our fellow evangelicals that no breach with them is implied at all.

THIRDLY, on a more positive note, we have become increasingly concerned about obeying the Scriptures in joining more decidedly with our evangelical brethren. We must not be joined with unbelievers, the Word exhorts, but we must walk in fellowship with the Lord's true people (*John 13.34-35*).

We note the great prayer of our Lord and Saviour 'that they all may be one' in *John 17*. The ecumenical movement takes this text to join together heretics of every kind, but we believe that Christ was referring to unity among his true people only, for he describes them as those who believe the Bible (v6) and belong to him (v 6, 9, 10).

We acknowledge ourselves to be disobedient to the Scripture at this point. While we should be actively promoting unity with evangelical people, our first commitment and first loyalty is to a union of churches which is mainly non-evangelical. There are more evangelical Baptists outside the Union than there are within it – far more. We find ourselves at present cut off from active fellowship with these other Baptist evangelicals.

We desire to join in the efforts of those who are trying to build greater unity between evangelical churches. We desire to co-operate in evangelism, missionary labours and mutual support exclusively with true brethren. We see the ecumenical movement gathering momentum and we long for the day when, in obedience with the Scriptures' doctrine of separation, a distinct evangelical Baptist testimony will emerge in this land. Perhaps then, when the man in the street looks at the churches, instead of seeing a confusion of teaching, he will see evangelicals as a distinct body of churches, no longer submerged in various non-evangelical, Rome-ward bound denominations.

FINALLY, we feel we must be true to our heritage as a church. We enjoy facilities laid down over the centuries by one of the oldest Baptist causes in London. This church was formed in the days when all Baptists were evangelicals. We still stand on the *Baptist Confession of Faith* of 1689 (Benjamin Keach, our Pastor at that time, was one of its co-authors). The Baptist Union of today is not in the slightest degree representative of the Baptist denomination of those days. (If the theological opinions commonly held today had been expressed in the first Baptist Assembly of 1689, there would have been some very prompt expulsions.)

The true Baptist denomination to which we belong consists of all evangelical Baptist churches whether in the Union or out of it. We are part of that denomination (with a small 'd') – joined in principle to all evangelical Baptist churches whether they are persecuted, unregistered congregations in Russia, or wherever.

This was the position taken by our great forebear Charles Haddon Spurgeon when he withdrew from the Baptist Union so long ago. We stand with him today. We believe it is our duty to defend the faith once delivered. May the Lord grant us courage to bear the malice of those who will decry us; strength and heart to deepen our fellowship with all fellow evangelicals; and the privilege of bearing much fruit as we hold forth the Word of Life.