Categories of Truth vs. Categories of Exegetical Certainty: What really matters and how much does it matter?

Introduction

Fundamentalism as a movement is perhaps not "in crisis," but it is certainly in something of a predicament. Its predicament arises from, among other issues, the fact that an unhappy number of its young minds believe its *raison d'etre*, the *idea* of fundamentalism, untenable. As one who spent nine years both as student and faculty/staff at Bob Jones University I have had the opportunity to know personally a number of young minds who have strayed from fundamentalism, others who have stayed, and yet others who straddle the fence. At the same, I was uniquely situated on the inside of the institution's faculty/staff circles to hear what is said there.

In addition to being a fundamentalist, I am a member of what is called the Conservative Holiness Movement. Theologically, I identify with the theology of Jacobus Arminius and John Wesley; practically, I believe the Bible teaches and the pursuit of God-loving holiness necessarily produces a life moving in the opposite direction of most of modern culture. The similarities between these two movements of which I am a part strike me with repeated forcefulness. Both movements suffer from imbalances in past leadership, the loss of some of their brightest youth, an ethos of suspicion toward those who do not share their particularities, and a certain insularity that appears to be the perennial bane of conservative movements. Yet, I believe both movements represent biblical truths that are vital to the Church.

"A Fundamentalism Worth Saving"

In February, Dr. Kevin Bauder addressed the question of what kind of fundamentalism is worth saving for the next generation of leadership. He proposed that a sober fundamentalism is worth saving, a fundamentalism that is serious about doctrine,

---

[1] This version of the paper was revised slightly to conform to they way in which I read the paper.

the fallen human condition, learning, meaning, piety, and separatism.[2] And, of course, it is primarily about separatism that younger fundamentalists have serious questions.

This paper attempts to extend elements of Dr. Bauder's second reason why fundamentalism must take separatism seriously. Allow me to quote his statement in context.

> We must make the case for separatism all over again. That brings me to the second reason why we must take separatism seriously, and that is that a comprehensive defense of separatism remains to be written. Please don't misunderstand me—I deeply value the contributions of writers like Moritz and Sidwell and especially Pickering. They are good works and I require my students to read them. But they are deficient in three areas. First, they tend to be parochial, speaking from assumptions that are not necessarily shared even by all fundamentalists. Second, they have left separatism open to objections because they have failed to integrate it into a larger ecclesiological vision that deals comprehensively with the nature of the church and of Christian unity. Third, they have not adequately defined the limits of separatism or provided a mechanism by which one can distinguish legitimate from illegitimate separations.[3]

In other words, a comprehensive defense of separatism must not only be exegetically rigorous and logically coherent, but it should also be (1) non-parochial—it must operate from assumptions that are necessarily shared by all who fit the definition of "fundamentalist"; (2) ecclesiologically sound—it must integrate organically with and arise from a comprehensive biblical theology of the nature of the church and of Christian unity; and (3) practicable—it must provide a set of objective criteria by which one may apply this doctrine and by which one may discern misapplications.

Dr. Bauder's assessment of Moritz, Sidwell, and Pickering intrigued me, so I pulled them off my shelf and reread them—more or less.[4] I found, a bit to my surprise, reason to agree with his critique. Not all are equally deficient in these three areas. Yet, I identified, among other things, parochial assumptions about dispensationalism, re-

---

[2] Kevin T. Bauder, "A Fundamentalism Worth Saving," an address given to the American Association of Christian Schools and Seminaries; February 2, 2005. Available at *www.centralseminary.edu/publications/AACCS.htm.*

[3] Bauder, "A Fundamentalism Worth Saving," 11.

[4] Fred Moritz , *"Be ye holy": The Call to Christian Separation* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994); Mark Sidwell, *The Dividing Line* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1998); Ernest D. Pickering, *Biblical Separation* (Minneapolis: Regular Baptist Press, 1979); *The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of the New Evangelicalism* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994).

formed theology[5], and the obviousness of certain interpretive conclusions.[6] Some authors delimited from discussion the nature of the Church and/or Christian unity; others sketched them lightly. Objective criteria for determining appropriate issues for application of the doctrine of separation, particularly from a Christian brother, were less objective and fewer than I remembered.

As I read, an additional descriptor of a comprehensive defense of separatism suggested itself: *hermeneutical transparency*. By hermeneutical transparency I mean, first, an explicit delineation of the presuppositions and principles that guide its development of the doctrine and practice of separation. Second, such a defense must openly acknowledge the uncomfortable reality that equivalent degrees of exegetical certainty cannot be obtained for all aspects of the doctrine and practice of separation. All conclusions regarding what the Bible teaches about separation do not have the same level of contextual, linguistic, or logical support. Some conclusions are direct readings of the text; others are inferential. And, to be sure, some of the applications of our conclusions are inferences from our inferences. Third, the applications this defense advocates must transparently reflect the tiered nature of our exegetical certainty. In other words, where exegetical ambiguity or inferential uncertainty exists, our applications should be more suggestive and less conclusive.

A definitive exposition of separation that is exegetically rigorous, logically coherent, non-parochial, ecclesiologically sound, practicable, and hermeneutically transparent would indeed be a publication worth hailing. I do not think it impossible; in fact, I hope it is already in the minds of some here, if not already in the works.

In response to Dr. Bauder's insightful critique, the following sections explore the issue of hermeneutical transparency, a potential framework for determining legitimate and illegitimate applications of separation, and ways in which the fundamentalist classroom may more effectively teach biblical separatism.

---

[5] For example, "all conduct toward false teachers should be based upon the truth that an apostate gets only progressively worse in his doctrine (2 Tim. 3:13) and that there is no scriptural evidence that an apostate ever returns to Christ (Heb. 6:4-6)" (Sidwell, 50). Some among us would probably deny the possibility of a truly regenerate person apostatizing; others, myself included, would argue theologically that it is possible for an apostate to repent and be restored to Christ.

[6] "We should … denounce [charismatic doctrine] as an unbiblical error. … The charismatics are wrong in their views of the Holy Spirit and His work. Their position should be rejected and Christian people should be taught that charismatic theology and practice are contrary to Scripture" (Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise*, 45). Personally, I disagree with most of what charismatic theology teaches and practices. However, Pickering's statement appears to have cessationist assumptions underpinning it (p. 102). My reading of 1 Cor. 14:39 constrains me to argue that speaking in tongues should not be forbidden but carefully guided by the Scripture's parameters. (No, I don't have the gift of tongues.)

Hermeneutical Transparency: Are Parts of the Dividing Line Dotted?

Of the books previously mentioned, I found Dr. Mark Sidwell's treatment of separation the most clearly stated. I recognize that Dr. Sidwell made no claim to be writing a comprehensive defense of fundamentalism. He specifically states that *The Dividing Line* provides "brief discussions" "to supplement, not supplant, other studies," and that he wrote the book to provide an "introductory work on the topic that laymen can profitably use."[7] Precisely because of its directness and clarity, *The Dividing Line* affords a helpful foil for examining the issue of hermeneutical transparency.

The Hermeneutics of Fundamentals

Dr. Sidwell begins his chapter on separation from false teachers with a definition of fundamental doctrine:

> A fundamental doctrine is a clear scriptural teaching that the Bible itself indicates is an important truth of Christianity. It is a teaching so essential to Christianity that it cannot be denied without destroying Christianity. The fundamentals of the Faith do not include those points of doctrine that are matters of particular interpretation. Good men have differed with each other on many points of doctrine, but they agree on the fundamentals.[8]

In his chapter on separation from disobedient believers, he concludes from 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15:

> If any brother's practice or teaching in *any* point does not agree with the teaching of Scripture, believers are to withdraw from him. … Anyone who refuses to abide by any apostolic teaching (3:14) is subject to church discipline.[9]

The juxtaposition of these two statements highlights the need for our doctrine of separation to grow out of a carefully articulated theology of the Church and Christian unity. If, as Dr. Sidwell concludes and I believe, we must ultimately withdraw association from anyone, brother or false teacher, whose practice or teaching disagrees with Scripture "in *any* point," how do we justify the distinction of fundamental doctrines from other Scriptural doctrines? The breadth of the second statement appears to be in direct conflict with the narrowness of the first. Doesn't this necessarily imperil the idea of non-denominational fundamentalism? Whose reading of Scripture shall we consider

---

[7] Sidwell, v. My use of Dr. Sidwell's book as a foil in this paper in not intended to cast any reflection upon him or upon the value of his work. His willingness to dialogue with me in the process of writing this paper is much appreciated.

[8] Sidwell, 42.

[9] Sidwell, 60-61. Emphasis his.

authoritative? The Nicene and Constantinopolitan creedal formulations alone? The BJU creed? Whose reading of justification by faith and to what degree the inferences of their reading? Luther's? Calvin's? Arminius's? Wesley's?

In Statement 1 a particular set of hermeneutical presuppositions and principles lies barely mute beneath phrases such as "clear scriptural teaching," "important truth," "matters of particular interpretation," and "good men." "Clear" to whom? What criteria determine clarity? How does the Bible itself indicate "an *important* truth of Christianity?" If there are "minor matters" in Scripture, as Dr. Sidwell affirms,[10] how does Scripture identify them? What constitutes a "particular interpretation," and how will we know one when we see it? Is our application of the doctrine of separation from disobedient believers a fundamental or is it a "particular interpretation?" Who is a member of the set "good men?" Would any conservative evangelicals qualify as "good men?"

It is precisely at the level of hermeneutics that we must reforge a consensual understanding of the criteria a doctrine must meet to be considered fundamental or non-fundamental. I know of Reformed brothers who believe that their understanding of unconditional election, irresistible grace, and limited atonement *are* part and parcel of the Gospel, the heart of Christianity. To teach contrary to such doctrine is to deny the Gospel itself. On the other hand, I know some Arminian brothers who would regard those of a Reformed persuasion as equally Gospel deniers. The fact that fundamentalism exists testifies that we reject such equations. But, on what grounds do we reject them? Just because we do? or have we clearly and forthrightly articulated the basis for declaring some doctrine and practice essential to Christian unity and others matters of differentia? If so, where? Frankly, I do not expect our conclusions regarding which doctrines are fundamental to change. However, a carefully articulated explanation and defense of the grounds used to determine 'fundamentals' would have both apologetic and polemic value.

Hermeneutical Transparency and Disobedient Believers

In Dr. Sidwell's treatment of separation from disobedient believers, he makes it abundantly clear that he has in view "a professing Christian who *deliberately refuses* to change some aspect of his conduct to conform to the clear teaching of Scripture."[11] In order to qualify for this definition, a Christian must (1) affirm that X doctrine/practice is

---

[10] Sidwell, 63. Moritz uses the same language: "[2 Thess. 3:6-15] clearly teaches separation from brethren in Christ who are openly and willfully disobedient to the written, revealed Word of God and is not limited in its application to the lazy brother only" (*"Be ye holy"*, 79).

[11] Sidwell, 56. Emphasis mine.

the clear teaching of Scripture, (2) disbelieve, contradict, or disobey X, and (3) do so in the face of repeated entreaty to repent and do what he knows is right.

That may seem easy enough until we confront a "disobedient" brother and discover that he, in fact, does not believe that X doctrine or practice is the clear teaching of Scripture. Quite the contrary, he denies that Scripture teaches X and affirms that it clearly teaches Y. If this were true only for passages such as 1 Cor. 11:2-16 or 1 Pet. 3:18-22, we could pass this off and go blithely on our way. This hermeneutical dilemma, however, invades some of the passages most essential to our understanding and practice of biblical separation. Consider, for example, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

From a survey of ten conservative, evangelical commentators on 2 Thessalonians, I found only one of them explicitly arguing that this passage establishes a general principle of disciplinary separation from brothers who disobeys any Pauline teaching.[12] Several commentators explicitly argue against this interpretation.[13] Others deal only with the issue of the *ataktws* brothers, implying that Paul intended his remarks specifically and only for such disorderly individuals.

My point is not that we are wrong in our interpretation of this verse. I believe our argument for a principle of separation from disobedient believers from this passage (as well as 1 Cor. 5:9-11) to be plausible, perhaps even probable. My point is that hermeneutical honesty and love for fellow believers ought to compel us to take this difference

---

[12] Knute Larson appears to argue for this position in a couple places (*I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 9, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000). Regarding 2 Thess. 3:6, he writes, "The offense was idleness and the intentional rejection of teachings which Paul had given the church" (127). Under his Life Application section, he states: "Disobedience among believers should not be ignored. Church discipline should be imposed, especially in cases of willful waywardness" 132.

[13] I. Howard Marshall: "The context [of 3:14] undoubtedly suggests that Paul [is] thinking of the command about the idle given in 3:6-13 and not the instructions given in the letter as a whole. This latter view is improbable because the other commands in the letter are few and are concerned with holding fast to traditions concerning the *parousia* and with praying for Paul. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, in *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 226-27. D. Michael Martin: "The 'instruction in this letter' is a sufficiently ambiguous phrase to cover a multitude of apostolic commands. *Logo* is singular and could easily refer to the entire body of apostolic instruction contained in the letter. Second Thessalonians, however, does not contain an abundance of exhortation. The church is admonished not to give credence to false teachings about the day of the Lord (2:3) but 'hold to the teaches' delivered by Paul and his coworkers (2;15). But would failure in this area call for the exercise of church discipline? Such seems highly unlikely. The exercise of discipline in other Pauline letters consistently relates to ethical, not doctrinal, issues. The only ethical issue addressed in the letter that might require such extreme action is that of the behavior of the *ataktoi*." *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 285. So also Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 272.

of opinion seriously. Taking this difference seriously would mean initiating sustained scholarly defenses of our position in the major evangelical journals—not to prophetically denounce assumed deliberate disobedience, but to provide winsome, yet cogent interpretations that should be embraced by all believers. It is my impression that fundamentalist exegetes have generally not given serious attention to rebutting evangelical arguments against their position *in forums where evangelicals listen*. It is appropriate to defend our position in our own journals. But, how can we say we are obeying Paul's command to "admonish" them as brothers when we don't write (or present) where they are listening (2 Thess. 3:15)? And how do we explain the fact that our practice of separation from disobedient brethren consistently fails to produce repentance and restoration?

Taking this interpretive difference seriously should also mean that we reject calling those whose interpretation and therefore application of this and similar passages differ from ours "disobedient brethren." We may argue that they are wrong. We may choose not to associate our ministries with theirs because we think they are wrong. But we cannot honestly label them as deliberately disobedient, when they reject our separatist applications because they are not convinced by our interpretations.

Returning to our need to be forthright about our hermeneutical method, as I read 2 Thess. 3:6-15, the original context addresses a congregation-to-offenders relationship under the auspices of apostolic authority. It seems to me that we have applied this passage to the entire gamut of ecclesiastical relationships (e.g., believer-to-believer, believer-to-congregation, parachurch-to-parachurch, church-to-parachurch, etc.) without carefully arguing the hermeneutical grounds that justify such a broad application. The fact that Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 treat analogous problems in ways that differ significantly suggests at least the possibility that our broad-brush use of 2 Thess. 3:6-15 needs to be nuanced.

Further, the Thessalonian epistles imply an extended process preceding the commanded temporary non-association: Pauline oral instruction (2 Thess. 2:15), a first written letter addressing the issue again (1 Thess. 4:11), a second letter requiring congregational participation in the non-association and admonishment process (2 Thess. 3:14-15). This was not a decision by a single person about another person. It was an apostolic decision carried out by the community. In our circles, however, it is not unusual for the decision to separate to be made without due process or even a fundamentalist consensus. All it takes for a person or ministry to be branded "compromised" is for one pastor or parachurch leader to make a public denouncement of compromise, and all those under his leadership are supposed to agree or face the censure of compromise themselves. This is wrong. We must be as committed to maintaining the biblical proc-

esses preceding and accompanying separation as we are to the biblical principle of redemptive, restorative separation from disobedient believers.

Toward a Framework for Determining Legitimate Applications of Separation

This section explores one framework that has been proposed as a guide to determining legitimate applications of separation and then suggest ways in which it might be made more serviceable.

Categories of Truth vs. Categories of Interpretive Certainty

Dr. David Innes of Hamilton Square Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA, has done more than anyone I know to provide a practical framework for determining legitimate applications of the doctrine of separation. I had the privilege of working with him to prepare a video course on fundamentalism for BJU. He has developed a chart entitled "Categories of Truth" in which he distinguishes four categories of truth as they relate to doctrine, practice, fellowship, and separation. I have attached the chart as Appendix A to this paper for easier reference. (Please look at it with me.)

Analysis of Dr. Innes's "Categories of Truth" Chart

As you can see, Dr. Innes sets up four "categories of truth": (1) very clear, (2) not so clear—logical conclusions, (3) speculation, and 4) petty personal preference. The two primary strengths in Dr. Innes' chart I see are, first, he clearly recognizes that not all doctrine is equally important or grounds for separation. In this regard, I particularly appreciated the implementation of hermeneutical transparency in his "special note" beneath the chart: "These categories of truth should never be taught or preached with the same level of authority. Truth must be preached 'out' of the Scriptures, not 'into' the Scriptures. It is dishonest to preach our own logical conclusions and speculations with the same 'thus saith the Lord' as we would with truth which is very clear." Second, Dr. Innes recognizes the importance of integrating doctrinal distinctions into his application of the doctrine of separation.

While I believe many if not most of the important considerations are present in Dr. Innes' chart, at least implicitly, there are a number of problems with it. The first problem I see with this chart is that it confuses or mixes categories of truth with categories of interpretive certainty (cols. 1-3) and personal preference (col. 4). There is no category of truth that is "not important" (col. 3) or "absolutely immaterial" (col. 4) Rather, *all* truth is important; though some truth *is* more important than other truth (cf. Mat. 23:23). Second, the chart seems to imply that only fundamental doctrines and practices (col. 1) would be grounds for separation. For example, I don't see how separation

from a brother because he is idle fits neatly in category 1 (e.g., "absolutely fundamental and essential to Christian Faith," "defines a fundamentalist"). Third, the chart appears to collapse all levels of separation into the same level accorded false teachers ("repudiation, denunciation, confrontation"). This fails to account for the distinct ways in which Paul handled the 1 Cor. 5 and 2 Thess. 3 situations.

A Revised Chart: Categories of Interpretive Certainty

I have attempted to address some of the weaknesses of Dr. Innes's chart in Appendix B. (Please look at it with me.) Rather than distinguishing categories of truth, I believe we need to distinguish categories of exegetical certainty regarding our understanding or interpretation of biblically revealed truth. On the left you see the first row is labeled "Phraseology." This row addresses what I believe must be our first level concern: hermeneutics. Although space and time forbid me to layout even a comprehensive summary of the hermeneutical assumptions and principles that should guide our formulation of Category 1 truths, I can perhaps mention key ideas that point toward such a summary. For example, a correspondence theory of truth, the reality of Divine revelation, the knowableness of God, the adequacy of human language to communicate truth despite its fallenness, the adequacy of fallen human reason aided by the Spirit's illumination to understand much if not all of God's revelation, the necessity of a grammatical-historical interpretive approach, and so on.

Category 1: The Fundamentals of Faith and Practice

Operating within that sort of a hermeneutical framework, we still need some criterion for distinguishing categories of interpretive certainty. Historically that criterion has been consensus. With regard to Category 1, these are matters which historical investigation demonstrates have been the consensual interpretive conclusions of the Christian Church. By "consensual" conclusions I am not appealing directly to the Vincentian formula—what has everywhere, always, and by all been believed (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*)—since it seems, without careful definition, to lead to a reductionistic rather than a truly catholic faith. Instead, I am thinking of the implications of the church being the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). There is a discernible catholicity or universality to what we call the 'fundamentals,' including even justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

This Christian consensus should serve as a checkpoint for keeping non-fundamental doctrines and practices from being elevated to the level of Category 1. As is often the case in theology, the principles and practices that fit this category seem to be best defined through negative affirmation: one cannot knowingly deny or practice these

things and be in right relationship with God. It is significant that the biblical separation required for disbelief or disobedience to Category 1 truths is not monolithic. Scriptural commands describe at least two ranges of kinds of separation: one for issues of orthodoxy and another for issues of orthopraxy. This aspect of the biblical data is one I never recall hearing discussed in any presentation on Biblical separation, and one that deserves careful attention.

Another aspect of the biblical data that often gets relegated to discussions of church discipline is the processes through which the various kinds of separation are implemented. We are all familiar with the process Jesus outlines in Matthew 18. That is not, however, the only process described or implied in Scripture that, if unsuccessful, eventuates in separation. Just as we must do the hermeneutical groundwork necessary to extend the biblical principles of separation beyond their original ecclesiological context to ours, we must also give more attention to discerning the processes that should precede and accompany the practice of separation.

Given my previous discussion of 2 Thess. 3:6-15, you can imagine that I struggled with whether to place it in Category 1. I choose to do so on the grounds that it is undeniable that the passage teaches that those who persist in a disorderly life must be disciplined by the church through social shunning and admonishment. Personally, I would place any more generalized principles and applications from this passage in category 2. As such disagreements over the application of this passage may result in practical dissociations, but they would not qualify for Category 1 separation.

Categories 2-4: The *Adiaphora* that Divide

To Category 2 belong those doctrines which are the stuff of systematic theology and the practices that derived from our conclusions regarding lifestyle issues. I would place much of the debate over how the Old and New Covenants relate (classic dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, covenantal approaches, theonomic approaches) in Category 2 Principles. Many of the life-related conclusions that flow from the previously mentioned systems belong to Category 2 Practices. For example, though I am a strongly committed sabbatarian (Lord's Day transition included), I regard this as a Category 2 issue.

Admittedly many interpretations are inferential in nature; therefore, the distinction between Categories 2 and 3 is not as clear as between Categories 1 and 2-4. However, practically we all know that theological consensus does not equal affiliational consensus. There are as many stripes of Arminians as there are stripes of Calvinists or Lutherans.

I can't escape the irony that despite our united allegiance to the fundamentals, the non-fundamentals often loom larger in our considerations of Christian fellowship and unity than do the essentials. Frankly, I rejoice in the spiritual edification and theological cross-pollination that gatherings such as this provide. No, I don't long for a non-denominational ecumenicity even based on the fundamentals. But I do long, especially along the boundaries that divide our respective theological and affiliational communities, for greater willingness to listen to one another and learn from each others strengths.

<p style="text-align:center">Suggestions for Further Research</p>

Since Scripture prescribes a graduated approach to separation based upon the seriousness of the issue, I believe a thesis level examination of the following four questions needs to be written: First, what are the levels of importance the Bible assigns to the truth it reveals? This examination should trace at least the following lines of investigation. From the Old Testament, one should consider levels of punishment within the Israelite theocracy, the grounds for prophesied judgments on the gentile nations as well as the severity of judgments handed down, type of sacrifice required for kinds of sin, restitution levels, and actions receiving God's curse. From the New Testament levels of importance may be derived from affirmations and denials. Affirmations include the first two commandments—loving God and loving others—as well as statements like Matt. 23:23 and Luke 11:42. Denials may be inferred from the Pauline anathemas (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 16:22), commands to reject those who teach/practice X, commands to excommunicate certain individuals (2 John, Matt. 18), commands to dissociate from certain individuals but to still regard them as a brother (2 Thess. 3:6-15), and commands to censure/rebuke certain beliefs or behaviors (e.g., Tit. 1:13).

Second, what are the theological grounds (stated or implied) for the Bible's weighting of truth? Third, how do the New Testament's calls for various levels of separation relate to the levels of importance that Scripture assigns to truth? Fourth, can we create a systematic theological matrix that allows us to determine the implications of the Bible's weighting system for the application of separation in the modern ecclesiological milieu?

<p style="text-align:center">Refreshing the Fundamentalist Classroom Ethos</p>

The paragraph of Dr. Bauder's address that motivated this paper began with the statement, "We must make the case for separatism all over again." I concur. But we should perhaps refine the ways in which we make our case, lest the same process produce the same product. What follows are some pedagogical suggestions that may

contribute to greater success in making the case for our understanding of the biblical doctrine of separation.

My first suggestion relates to the instructor's attitude toward the doctrine. We must have what I would call a "buy-the-truth-and-sell-it-not" approach. By that I mean that the instructor's primary allegiance is to the truth of Scripture and not to a particular doctrinal formulation. If genuine, this allegiance permits the instructor to be open dispositionally to challenges, critiques, and questions regarding the doctrine. When I was a seminary student, I quickly discerned which professors reacted negatively to questions that challenged the conventional wisdom and those who invited such question as an opportunity to provide good reasons for their position. Professors who enjoy dissecting students and displaying their ignorance publicly not only stifle the students' willingness to be open about their real question, they also damage their own credibility as one committed to helping others find the truth.

Related to fostering a spirit of open inquiry is a willingness to admit that ambiguity exists where it does. Few things are more frustrating to a student than for a professor to act as though all his conclusions are equally unassailable and irrefragable. Honesty and humility should be hallmarks of our pedagogy. Honesty may express the level of personal certainty with which one holds a view, but humility will forthrightly acknowledge the reality of interpretive ambiguity and the possibility of being wrong.

Finally, I would encourage us to be proactive on the seminary level about raising the hard questions when dealing with this subject. If the students aren't informed enough to see where real *cruxes* lie, we should open their eyes to them. Sooner or later they will find them, and then they will be inclined to conclude that the fact we did not discuss them may mean we didn't know about them. (Patently absurd conclusion, I know, but true nonetheless). We should also reject the urge to label and dismiss those who do not find our answers immediately convincing.

I will never forget the front-row freshman in my Greek I class who confidently asserted that he had read a great deal about the issue of textual criticism and knew quite well that the TR was the only legitimate text. Internally, sorry to say, I dismissed him as an ignorant loud-mouth. Externally, however, I listened and tried to give him enough intellectual space to do a u-turn in the future. I am gratified to say that six years later, he came to talk with me about how he could help the people from his KJV-only church achieve a broader spirit and understanding of the complexity of textual criticism as well as help them move away from a blind allegiance to the TR. I was glad I had left him

some room to grow. We have all been wrong. And I for one appreciate those who stuck with me long enough to help me see the light.

Conclusion

I have written this paper as one committed to pursuing holiness in "all manner of conversation," including my ecclesiological "conversation." I find the *idea* of fundamentalism fully consonant with a plain reading of Scripture. However, I need the benefit of sustained dialogue on the issues I have raise regarding separation and hermeneutical transparency as well as a framework for determining legitimate applications of the doctrine of separation. I respectfully submit this paper in the hopes that it will foster a constructive interchange which will serve to extend my own understanding of this vital matter.

Appendix A
Categories of Truth We Teach and Preach[1]

	VERY CLEAR	NOT SO CLEAR — LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS	SPECULATION	PETTY PERSONAL PREFERENCE
As to doctrine this becomes	A conviction — a belief for which we would die	A preference though strongly believed	A mere preference	No obligation at all
Essence of doctrinal belief	Belief of a clear statement	A matter of interpretation	A matter of supposition	Totally immaterial
As to practice this becomes	A Divine command with no option	An option though strongly believed	Totally optional	No obligation at all
Essence of practice	Necessary obedience	A sincere desire to obey	A desire to be sincere	Totally immaterial
Denial of this category of truth is	Heresy or willful rebellion against God	A disagreement of some consequence	A mere disagreement	Not worth talking about
Biblical command that applies to denial	Command of repudiation and separation	Command of love and harmony	Command of love and unity	Command to avoid foolish questions and contentions
Biblical response to denial of this category	Denunciation and separation Confrontation	Toleration and Christian charity Accommodation	Toleration and Christian charity	Ignore
Level of importance	Absolutely fundamental and essential to Christian Faith	Not fundamental or essential but important	Not important	A hindrance rather than a help
Level of fellowship agreement allows	Personal fellowship and limited church fellowship	Closer church fellowship and joint participation	Unlimited fellowship and participation	Has a negative impact on fellowship
Level of fellowship lack of agreement allows	None	Limited	Unlimited	Impact on fellowship
Agreement of belief indicates	A true Christian brother	A Christian brother of like faith and order	A rare find	Does not exist
Ultimate Significance	Defines a *Fundamentalist*	Defines denominational distinctives	Defines denominational idiosyncrasies	Defines personal idiosyncrasies

"SPECIAL NOTE: These categories of truth should never be taught or preached with the same level of authority. Truth must be preached "out" of the Scriptures, not "into" the Scriptures. It is dishonest to preach our own logical conclusions and speculations with the same "thus saith the Lord" as we would with truth which is very clear."

---

[1] David C. Innes, "Categories of Truth We Teach and Preach," available online at *http://www. hamiltonsquare.net/articlesCategories.htm*. Accessed 7/26/2005.

APPENDIX B
CATEGORIES OF EXEGETICAL CERTAINTY REGARDING TRUTH

	Category 1	**Category 2**	**Category 3**	**Category 4**
Phraseology hermeneutics	The Bible **undeniably states**... If language means anything, the Bible teaches ...	We **interpret** / understand the Bible to teach …	We **infer** … We believe the Bible implies …	In my **opinion** … I **feel** I should …
Checkpoint	Consensual conclusions of the Christian Church	Consensual conclusions of our theological community	Affiliational consensus	Non-consensual
Principles beliefs doctrines teachings	(orthodoxy) -- you cannot deny[1] these things and be saved.\n\nSeparation passages:\nGal.1:8-9\n2 John 1:9-11\n1 Tim. 6:20-21\n1 Cor. 5:9-14\nRom. 16:17-18	Principles that are logical conclusions from Scripture and firmly held to be true. Yet one must recognize that good and godly men who agree on category 1 issues, disagree with one another on these issues. (Calvinism/Arminianism)	Principles over which there is widespread disagreement even among those who agree on category 2 principles. Usually regarding eschatology, ecclesiology.	My personal opinions and beliefs that do not fit any of the first three categories. I.e., there is no general consensus on this issue. Tit. 3:9
Biblical Separation required by disbelief	Range includes avoidance (Rom.), excommunication (1 Co.), total shunning (2 Jn), opposition (1 Ti.), denunciation (Gal.)	None. Practically disbelief creates theological communities within which closer fellowship is shared than in category 1	None. Practically disbelief creates Affiliational communities within which closer fellowship is shared than in category 2	None. Disbelief should be no barrier to fellowship.
Practices actions applications of principles	(orthopraxy) -- you cannot practice[2] these things and be saved.\n\nSeparation passages:\n2 Tim. 3:2-5\nTitus 3:10-11\nRom. 16:17-18\n1 Cor. 5:9-14\n2 Thess. 3:6-15\nMatt. 18:15-17	These practices are either logical conclusions from category 1 practices or are logical applications of category 2 principles. They are firmly held as either enjoined by or consonant with Scripture. Yet one must recognize that good and godly men who agree on category 1 *and* category 2 principles disagree with one another regarding these practices.	Practives over which there is widespread disagreement even among those who would agree on category 2 practices.	My personal practices and convictions. It's right for me. Does not fit in any of the first three categories. There is no general consensus on this issue.
Biblical Separation required by disobedience	Range includes shunning & admonishment (2 Th.), avoidance (2 Ti., Rom.), rejection (Tit.), and excommunication (Mt., 1 Co.)	None. Practically non-adherence creates lifestyle distinctions within theological communities, and may result in affiliational subdivisions within a theological community	None. Practically non-adherence creates lifestyle distinctions within affiliational communities.	None. Non-adherence should be minimal barrier to fellowship. Should not create further distinctions.

---

[1] The reason for stating these things negatively is this: One need not know about and believe in the virgin birth in order to be saved. The negative statement makes allowance for ignorance, while denying the possibility of salvation to those who willfully deny these truths. For example, one cannot deny the virgin birth and its corollaries and truly believe in a sinless Jesus who was the God-Man.

[2] Practice is the key word. A person cannot be characterized by the knowing, persistent practice of these items, which are specifically prohibited in Scripture, and be a regenerate individual. See Gal. 5:19-21; 1 John 3:4-10.

WORKS CONSULTED

Best, Ernest. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians.* Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1972.

Bruce, F. F. *1 & 2 Thessalonians.* Vol. 45 of *Word Biblical Commentary.* Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982.

Eadie, John. *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1877.

Holmes, Michael W. *1 & 2 Thessalonians. The NIV Application Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

Larson, Knute. *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon.* Edited by Max Anders; Vol. 9 of *Holman New Testament Commentary.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.

Marshall, I. Howard. *1 and 2 Thessalonians. The New Century Bible Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983.

Martin, D. Michael. *1, 2 Thessalonians.* Vol. 33 of *The New American Commentary.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

Milligan, George. *The Epistles to the Thessalonians.* Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, n.d..

Moritz, Fred. *"Be Ye Holy": The Call to Christian Separation.* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994.

Morris, Leon. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians.* In *The New International Commentary on the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.

Pickering, Ernest D. *The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of the New Evangelicalism.* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994.

Sidwell, Mark. *The Dividing Line: Understanding and Applying Biblical Separation.* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1998.

Thomas, Robert L. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. Vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.

Williams, David J. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Vol. 12 of *New International Biblical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Hendrikson Publishers, 1992.