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Are you a window-dressing for error?

An extract from an article entitled "Bible Separation" by Fundamentalist Presbyterian stalwart, the late Dr Charles Woodbridge, (1902 -1980), which deals with the topic of "Secondary Separation".

The original article was written about 1970.

Advocates of Mere "First Degree" Separation

Mr. Jack Wyrzten, of the Word of Life Fellowship, writes that he has "never gone along with secondary separation." Dr. Tim La Haye, Baptist pastor of San Diego, California, confesses: "We consider ourselves rock ribbed uncompromising first degree separationists," although he admits he does "share" a few second degree separation convictions!

Doubtless many other pastors and Christian leaders agree with the position championed by Mr. Wyrzten and Dr. La Haye. Note carefully that both men, quite independently of each other, try to distinguish between degrees of separation. From New York to California this hopeless effort is being made!

But perhaps the leading evangelical minister who seems to disapprove of "secondary" separation while seeking to maintain "primary" separation is Dr. John R. Rice, editor of *The Sword of the Lord*. In his editorials he has repeatedly asserted that as long as a man believes the Bible, accepts the Christ of the Bible and is a soul winner, he can in good conscience have fellowship with him. Dr. Rice has taken pains to elaborate this thesis. In view of the fact that his pen wields influence perhaps his position should be examined more closely.

In a message delivered by Dr. Rice in 1959 he raises the question of fellowship, for example, with a man in the Southern Baptist Convention who is supporting the Convention program.

If you have kept up with what has been going on in the Southern Baptist Church during the last few years; if you understand that the denomination has been steadily declining theologically; if you have watched its shift in moral values, evidenced, for example, in its worldly telecast "Tell It Like It Is", -- if you have done all these things then you would probably expect to hear that Dr. Rice would have no fellowship with supporters of the Southern Baptist program.

Instead, and perhaps to your amazement, you discover that Dr. Rice states that if such a supporter is "for Christ and the Bible", and if he is right on certain basic Christian doctrines, and does not make any "divisive issue" over his support of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Rice would go right along with him.

I am aware that Dr. Rice uttered these words in 1959. But his subsequent editorials have made it plain that his views in this area have not changed.

The Fallacy of the Distinction

The effort made by these men and others to differentiate between "first degree" separation and "second degree" separation, while it may appeal to undiscerning souls, is contrary to the Word of God. I make this assertion fully expecting it to be contradicted but confident that it is true !

To be separate from means to be separate from! To hate evil means to hate evil! There must be no linguistic gymnastics or spurious verbal compromise here. Our authority is not human opinion but the everlasting Word.

In Dr. Rice's message he quoted at the outset a powerful verse of Scripture, - a verse which should have settled the matter for him once for all. This is how his message commenced: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63). In other words, the Psalmist's fellowship was with those who were characterized not only by their fear of the Lord but also by their obedience of



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The word "keep" in Hebrew means to "hedge about", i.e. to guard, to attend to, to be circumspect, to observe. The test of fellowship for the Psalmist was not only reverence towards God, but, as already intimated, obedience as over against His revealed will.

The obverse of this is also true. A believer can have no true fellowship either with those who do not really fear God or with those who walk in disobedience. His separation extends beyond a primary relationship. It extends to a secondary, or tertiary, -- or to any relationship in which disobedience to God is involved.

Do you remember the Levitical laws of cleansing as they are recorded, for example, in Leviticus 15? According to these laws and their basic principle has never changed-when a man for one reason or another was unclean every- thing he touched was unclean. No one was to touch him ("first degree" separation). But by the same token no one was to touch the bed on which he lay or the chair on which he sat ("second degree" separation). Why this stringent command? Because the Lord God wanted His cleansed people really to be separated from contamination.

Jude is equally explicit. The believer is not only to avoid contamination with foul flesh ("first degree" separation), but he is also to hate "even the garment spotted by the flesh" ("second degree" separation). Study Jude 23.

The apostle Paul deals with the subject too. He writes: "Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6). This is the Pauline concept of Biblical separation.

Bear in mind, please, that Paul is not discussing unbelievers but "every brother", i.e. every Christian who is walking disorderly before God. What exactly does the apostle mean? In the effort to escape the severity of his command, some have reasoned that he was referring only to lazy members of the early church, to those who refused to work and had become busybodies (read 2 Thess. 3:7-12).

But a careful exegesis of verse 6 makes it plain that Paul links "disorderliness" in this context with the "tradition" which he faithfully transmitted to the Thessalonians in which they in turn had received. This "tradition" extended far beyond laziness! It embraced the whole counsel of God which Paul loyally proclaimed wherever he went. What he is telling the Thessalonian church this: "Withdraw yourselves even from Christian brethren if they are cheating in contravention of the holy purposes of God."

This command has never been repealed. For the simple reason that the God of the twentieth century is still the holy and righteous One who inhabits eternity and who will still countenance no dealings whatever with that which offends His unsullied name.

The Bible knows nothing whatever about "degrees" of separation from evil! The Christian is to remove himself as far as it is humanly possible from all forms of evil, whether they be peripheral, pivotal or relatively ancillary. To hate evil means to hate it in all its forms--its ancestry, its immediate presence and its progeny!

May I present to my readers Governor Nehemiah, wonderful Hebrew servant of the living God, who had never heard of any distinction between "first degree" and "second degree" separation? He believed in complete, absolute separation in accordance with the mandates of the Lord! Read his record carefully. Be not swayed by the dictates of "half-way" separationists! During Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem open iniquity brazenly installed itself in Jerusalem. The inhabitants of the city were desecrating the Sabbath. Nehemiah returned and testified against the people (Neh. 13:15). But merchants from Tyre continued to sell their wares in the city on the Sabbath, Nehemiah acted swiftly. He drove the merchants out, shut the city gates and posted guards to halt the unwarranted traffic.

The slamming of the gates might lightly be called "first degree" separation! But Nehemiah did not stop there. He believed in genuine, full-orbed, totalitarian, Biblical separation! The merchants of Tyre, excluded from



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the city, lodged near the wall, ready to pounce upon the populace with their fish and other merchandise as soon as the gates were opened.

What did Nehemiah do? Did he reason thus: "After all, they are without the gates; it is none of my business that they are lurking in the shadows"? He did not. He was a "secondary", "tertiary" (and as many other numerical adjectives as are needed), obedient separationist. He threatened to lay hands on the merchants (Neh. 13:21), even though they were "extra-mural"; and they retreated in disarray!

Paul tells us that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning . . ." (Rom. 15:4). May we learn from the example of Nehemiah!

This new, ephemeral, imaginary, non-Biblical distinction between "first" and "second" degree separation is a deadly menace.

If a villain enters your home with his pistol pointed at your wife and murder in his eye, what do you do? Put him out and close the door. This is "first-degree" separation. But if you see him later through the window crouching on the lawn, priming his pistol, preparing for a second intrusion, do you piously argue: "First degree' separation, yes; 'second-degree' separation, no!" You do not. You telephone the police! And if perhaps you have had lingering negative thoughts which delayed your action, you summon an ambulance!

I am reminded of what is happening in America's national life. It is tragic. We will not hobnob with the Vietcong on the battle field, for we believe in "first-degree" separation! But we will have rather cheerful fellowship with Russia, which is supplying the Vietcong with bullets to kill our boys! Why? Because national sentiment frowns upon "second degree" separation!

The Consequences of this Untenable Distinction

Why in the world do some of our hitherto trusted leaders reject "second-degree" separation? We must not examine their motives, which are known only to themselves and God. But the results of their strange philosophy are distressing indeed. In my opinion at least, they are weakening the defences of the Faith and confusing pastors, missionaries, evangelists and students who are trying to contend for the integrity of the Word of God.

How does this come to pass? Well, here for example is a servant of Christ who for years has been contending for the Faith. Then the pressure of the conflict begins to crush him. He begins to capitulate to the enemy. He condones New Evangelicalism. He supports ecumenical evangelism. He thus betrays the cause of rugged, unyielding orthodoxy. But he is not dismayed. His friends who are still resisting the New Evangelicalism will not rebuke him. They believe only in "first degree" separation. They will still welcome him with open arms as though he were not a defector. They will still promote him as though he were no compromiser. Thus, in spite of his new attitude of appeasement toward the enemy, he has lost little if any of his prestige and reputation for orthodoxy.

Then why not pull down our flags and surrender our convictions? We shall not suffer thereby!

Moreover, the emphasis upon "first degree" separation and the rejection of "second degree" separation not only provides a cozy refuge for compromisers. It also furnishes would-be compromisers with a philosophical (but not a Biblical) platform or basis for compromise. Perhaps they begin to feel that it is no longer necessary really to hate evil. One may "hate" it in its most obvious and virulent forms, but ignore it in its relatively "innocuous" forms! This is not the teaching of the Word of God. The practical, down to earth effects of making the distinction between "degrees" of separation are devastating!

Mr. Jack Wyrzten, I feel sure, is honest and sincere in his repudiation of "second degree separation." Note the sad consequences.

On his list of summer speakers is Dr. Bob Cook, President of The King's College. Dr. Cook was president of



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the National Association of Evangelicals. So far as I know he has never renounced his relationship to that new evangelical organization. Moreover, he told me personally that he would gladly have gone along with the Graham Crusade in Los Angeles.

Dr. William Culbertson, President of Moody Bible Institute and defender of ecumenical evangelism, is an honored speaker at Word of Life Camps, and penned the introduction to a book Mr. Wyrzten has recently written.

Dr. Charles Anderson, long a member of the Board of Denver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, widely regarded as new evangelical, is one of Mr. Wyrzten's main-stays. Years ago I be sought Dr. Anderson to resign from the Board. He steadfastly refused.

What is the net effect of this sort of continuous mixed fellow ship? The lines of demarcation between rigid loyalty to the Word of God and placid disloyalty are erased!

Dr. Tim La Haye of San Diego, spokesman for "first degree" versus "second degree" separation, is now reported to have eighteen young people from his church active in Campus Crusade, considered by increasing numbers of informed Christians to be thoroughly new evangelical, and he vehemently defends the use of the Crusade's "Four Spiritual Laws."

And what of Dr. Rice? Why does he promote in The Sword of the Lord Dr. Criswell, a supporter of the Southern Baptist Convention; or Dr. Sam Sutherland, under whose presidency of BIOLA the institution, in the opinion of great numbers of Christians, became new evangelical? Or why does Dr. Rice invite Dr. Culbertson to be the speaker at a Sword of the Lord banquet?

The answer is invariably the same. "These men who are promoted believe the Bible and love souls. Never mind about their entangling compromises! Forget their encouragement of the New Evangelicalism! Our arms of warm fellowship are open to them!"

In the city of Columbus, Ohio, the names of at least two pastors are well-known. Dr. William Ashbrook, brilliant and warm-hearted defender of the Faith, is one of these pastors. The other is Dr. J. Richard Hankins of the Columbus Baptist Temple, a supporter of the Graham Columbus Crusade.

When Dr. Rice came to Columbus, with which of these two pastors did he cooperate, with the defender of the Faith, or with the supporter of ecumenical evangelism? Rejecting as he implicitly does "second degree" separation, he cooperated with the supporter of ecumenical evangelism! And he did so because although he, Dr. Rice, was not personally in favor of ecumenical evangelism, Dr. Hankins "wins many more souls than Brother Ashbrook". Dr. Hankins believes the Bible and wants to win souls. According to Dr. Rice that is sufficient. Dr. Hankins' deadly compromises are relatively unimportant! Dr. Rice has actually written that if Brother Hankins wins many more souls than Brother Ashbrook, then of the two he would choose the one who is the best soul winner as the better Christian and a man more after God's heart!

Incidentally, I have rarely met a greater soul-winner than Dr. Ashbrook. But that is not the point. The point is that when a man repudiates "second degree" separation he has broken down a Biblical wall of defence and the flood- tide of compromise may readily flow into the fortress of the beleaguered remnant of faith!

Bible believers everywhere, beware! Do we or do we not really hate evil in all its manifestations? We yearn to see souls saved. We pour out our very lives in pointing the lost to the Saviour. But never at the expense of compromise!

What Invitations Shall Bible Believers Accept?

Shall pastors, missionaries and evangelists who desire to be true to the Word of God accept invitations to speak in compromising churches and institutions? One possible answer to this question is: "Yes. I am aware that the organization is condoning the New Evangelicalism. But when I go there I can raise a voice for orthodoxy and perhaps convict the compromising leaders of their faults.



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A California pastor who is known as orthodox told me: "I accepted an invitation to this compromising school and in my message I pointed out its compromise and denounced it!"

Over against this specious reasoning the Word of God is crystal clear! If a church or an institution of learning has become theologically unclean what is our duty? "Touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). With as much patience as I could must I pointed out to this pastor that "Touch not" means "Touch not", regardless of the fact that one's purpose might be to tell the "unclean thing" that it is unclean! Obedient servants of Christ must refuse in any way to line up with groups which are abetting the New Evangelicalism.

Have you ever wondered why questionable schools and churches invite defenders of the Faith to speak under their auspices? Could not the answer be that they can then publicize the presence of these fine men in their midst as a proof of their own orthodoxy?

Men of God, are you willing to serve as window-dressing for error?