

American Council of Christian Churches
71st Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2012
Cedar View Independent Methodist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee
Resolution on the Doctrine of Separation and the Spectrum of Evangelicalism

A number of recent authors have attempted to analyze the bewildering landscape of American evangelicalism by subdividing the label *evangelical* into categories that form a theological spectrum. David Wells of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, for example, writes about three such categories in his 2008 book, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. According to this author, the fathers of New Evangelicalism were truth-lovers, the classical evangelicals, whose noble cause included the repudiation of the separatist excesses of their fundamentalist forefathers. Marketers and emergents came later, spoiling much of the legacy of a once promising movement that now lacks the courage to be truly Protestant.

In a more recent work, six authors contributed to a Zondervan project called *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (2011), which was designed “to navigate . . . differences and preserve the meaning and mission behind the name we each claim” (p. 17). That name is the label *evangelical*, and the claimants form a self-described spectrum of evangelicalism under the labels *fundamentalist*, *confessional evangelical*, *generic evangelical*, and *post-conservative evangelical*. The conclusion of the book encourages a convergence of the first two categories as close theological relatives that should distance themselves from the last two members of the evangelical family.

Studies like these fail to discern the watershed nature of the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation. A metaphor for the theological significance of a doctrine over the passing of time, a watershed doctrine is one that marks the line at which inevitable theological deterioration begins once it is crossed by a theological position. The importance of correctly marking the watershed for understanding what has happened to American evangelicalism was pointed out by Francis Schaeffer, a man not remembered today as a fundamentalist separatist, in his aptly titled volume, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. While Schaeffer lamented the surrender of Biblical inerrancy in that volume, he was closest to correctly discerning the true watershed issue when he wrote, “evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not” (p. 51; emphasis original).

It is the courageous and faithful application of the convictions of biblical ecclesiastical separation that draws this line. In Schaeffer’s example, failure to draw the line precedes failure to take a full view of Scripture, so it is the failure to draw the line that marks the true watershed point at which inevitable deterioration begins. The apostle John explains why this is true: “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” (2 John 10-11). What John calls *bidding God speed*, Schaeffer called *failure to draw the line*. To fail to draw the line is to become a partaker in the evil theological position orthodoxy opposes. In the context of 2 John, it is to deny the doctrine of Christ by association rather than by message. Consequently, the inspired apostle charges both the false teacher and the bidder of Godspeed with participation

in the evil deed, denial of the doctrine of Christ. As a result, John's readers must now bid Godspeed to neither in order to be faithful to his command.

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches, at its 71st Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2012, in the Cedar View Independent Methodist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee, resolve together to mark the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation as the watershed responsibility of Christian praxis between faithful orthodoxy and the inevitable decline into theological apostasy. Against the revisionist history of recent authors, we remember with grief the new evangelical repudiation of the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation as a point of departure that has done irreparable damage to the American evangelical church. We rejoice together with thankfulness for the courage of our forefathers to resist the temptation to compromise with this form of disobedience, recognizing the privilege of ministering under a legacy protected from it. And we determine by God's grace to remain faithful to our calling to separate over disobedience to the doctrine of separation, whether that disobedience happens in word or in deed.



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