

American Council of Christian Churches
69th Annual Convention, October 19–21, 2010
Hope Baptist Church, Hanover, PA
“Resolution on Together for the Gospel”

The theological and ecclesiastical confusion that has its roots in the middle of the 20th century and that has been flourishing in the first decade of the 21st century springs from the willingness to forsake the Biblical doctrine of separation. The “new” evangelicalism of dialogue and cooperation with those who deny the Gospel departed decades ago from the old evangelicalism, also known as Fundamentalism, which stressed the need for the people of God to maintain separation from those who depart from Biblical truth (Eph 5:11).

Early in the 21st century, another movement has begun as an effort to counter the dilution of Gospel doctrine by the marketing schemes concocted to make church growth easier to generate and consolidate. Part of those schemes emphasized the need to avoid any heavy emphasis on doctrine, particularly doctrine that could make seekers uncomfortable. A certain group in evangelicalism sounded the alarm that some churches, at least, had opted for the road of less resistance and had weakened the Gospel message to such an extent that it was practically devoid of any direction to show people how to be saved or even that they needed to be saved.

In the middle of the century’s first decade, four men agreed to establish a movement that they called Together for the Gospel. Initially, its main purpose was to organize conferences every two years, beginning in the spring of 2006, which they hoped would attract those who had become alarmed at the weakening of the evangelical message. Since then, it has developed into the desire for a loose affiliation of individuals and churches that have been involved in the conferences. The founders of the movement were J. Ligon Duncan III, who until this past June was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.; C. J. Mahaney, who served for 27 years as pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, MD and who now leads Sovereign Grace Ministries; and Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Those men drafted a constitutional document for their movement that they called Affirmations and Denials in which they sought to clarify the purposes they were trying to achieve. They began by saying, “We are brothers in Christ united in one great cause – to stand together for the Gospel. We are convinced that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been misrepresented, misunderstood, and marginalized in many churches and among many who claim the name of Christ. Compromise of the Gospel has led to the preaching of false gospels, the seduction of many minds and movements, and the weakening of the church’s Gospel witness.” They added, “We are concerned about the tendency of so many churches to substitute technique for truth, therapy for theology, and management for ministry.”

These statements along with many other parts of the document express sentiments for which Fundamentalists have been contending for years. The doctrinal affirmations and denials of Together for the Gospel reflect sound orthodoxy. For examples, Article VII maintains, “We affirm that salvation is all of grace, and that the Gospel is revealed to us

in doctrines that most faithfully exalt God’s sovereign purpose to save sinners and in His determination to save his redeemed people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to His glory alone.”

However, there is one vital element of Biblical truth that is missing from the document. There is no call to adhere to the Biblical doctrine of separation. Instead, Article XV states, “We affirm that evangelical congregations are to work together in humble and voluntary cooperation and that the spiritual fellowship of Gospel congregations bears witness to the unity of the Church and the glory of God.” However, what constitutes an evangelical congregation is not readily apparent. It is even less apparent when considering that two of the signers of that document, Albert Mohler and J. Ligon Duncan III, are also signers of the Manhattan Declaration that pointedly affirms that Roman Catholics and adherents of Eastern Orthodoxy are fellow Christians.

The appeal of Together for the Gospel is undeniable. The 2010 conference attracted an attendance that numbered in the thousands. The potential for harm, however, is just as real. The idea that cooperation can be a function of agreeing on the Gospel without referencing the historic lines of Biblical separation sounds eerily like the philosophy of the “new” evangelicalism from the late 1940s and onward. The inclusion of so-called Reformed Charismatics as speakers in the conferences, notably C. J. Mahaney, has been justified by describing them as continuationists as opposed to other speakers who are called cessationists. This assumption that there is a place for charismatics in the evangelical tent is not a new error, but the use of the affirmations and denials makes the argument for that place more attractive to those already inclined against Biblical separation.

This new movement, then, follows previous error in neglecting the Biblical doctrine of separation that has always marked Fundamentalism. Sadly, some fundamentalist institutions have begun to welcome as co-laborers some conservative evangelicals associated with efforts like Together for the Gospel. If such trends continue, what has been known as historic Fundamentalism, with its emphasis on Biblical separation, personally and ecclesiastically, will be seriously eroded if not rendered irrelevant.

Therefore, the delegates to the 69th annual convention of the American Council of Christian Churches, meeting October 19–21, 2010 in Hope Baptist Church, Hanover, PA resolve to remind God’s people that Biblical separatism is a watershed doctrine that has its source in the attribute of God’s holiness and determines what kind of legacy we will leave to the generations that follow our own. Undermining separatism for the purposes of cooperation with those who either define the doctrine more loosely or do not hold it at all has proven costly in the past, and it will do so again. Faithfulness from generation to generation requires that we do not surrender the ground that has been defended by those who have gone before us lest those who come after us have no ground left to defend.



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