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Guilt by Association, or Burned by the Second Degree

Edward Hindson

Liberty University, ehindson@liberty.edu

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FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY



by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson

Guilt by Association, or Burned by the Second Degree

Many Fundamentalists, attempting to maintain separation from Liberalism, have degenerated into condemning each other because of what they view as wrong associations. This has led to the concept of guilt by association.

What Should I Do?

1. Should I cancel my subscription to the *Sword of the Lord* because the magazine does not stand for storehouse tithing? YES NO
2. Should I send students to Bob Jones University when they openly invite unsaved artists to entertain ("culturally") their student body? YES NO
3. Should I invite Jerry Falwell to speak in my church when his political organization, Moral Majority, includes Catholics, Mormons, and Jews? YES NO
4. Should I attend a Shepherding Conference at John MacArthur's church when he is not an advocate of Baptist polity? YES NO
5. Should I use "Evangelism Explosion" in my church when it was developed by a Presbyterian? YES NO
6. Should I invite Ian Paisley to speak in my church when he is a Five-Point Calvinist and practices infant baptism? YES NO
7. Should I encourage my people to attend Bill Gothard Seminars when no attempt is made to control Charismatic expressions in the audience? YES NO
8. Should I speak at a Southern Baptist Church that may designate its giving to the Cooperative Program? YES NO
9. Should I invite a musician who has appeared on a Charismatic television program to minister in my church? YES NO
10. Should I show James Dobson's family films in my church when he is a Nazarene? YES NO

Each of these questions brings differing responses. The issues concern basic personal preferences and are not characteristics of apostasy. An apostate is someone who denies the person of Christ and the gospel of salvation and from whom we are commanded to separate (2 John 9-11). On the doctrinal absolutes of the faith (the "fundamentals") there can be no compromise. However, the 10 items listed above are matters of personal preference, not cardinal truths that divide the saved from the lost. While one pastor may prefer a certain

style of music (such as gospel quartets vs. Peterson cantatas), others should not judge him a "weak-kneed, liberal compromiser" because of his musical preference. The same can be said for the speakers he invites, the singers he uses, the films he shows, or the books he reads!

Secondary Separation-Isolation Cycle

The issue of separation from unbelief (2 Cor. 6:14-18) has always been essential to the Fundamentalist movement. It is the basis of the Fundamentalist withdrawal from mainline denominations and ecumenical or cooperative evangelism. However, in their quest for what they considered biblical, some Fundamentalists began to call for separation from Evangelicals who were viewed as being too tolerant of Liberals and even from other Fundamentalists who were viewed as being too tolerant of some Evangelicals. That led to others separating from Fundamentalists who were perceived as tolerant of other Fundamentalists who were too tolerant of some Evangelicals. This led to the separation-isolation cycle.

Separation

1st degree:
from an apostate

2nd degree:
from a compromising brother

3rd degree:
from a friend of a compromising brother

4th degree:
from a friend, of a friend, of a compromising brother

Isolation
from a friend, of a friend, of a friend, of a compromising brother

In many cases the issue of secondary separation led to an excessive intolerance of any deviation from one's approved list of singers, speakers, schools, missionaries, and evangelists. In essence a Protestant Inquisition was formed identifying

each new defection from true Fundamentalism. Those who disagreed were quickly labeled neo, pseudo, liberal, and sometimes even apostate. Some have gone as far as to denounce all schools as "deceived and apostate." Pastors found themselves being judged acceptable or non-acceptable by the school they attended, the music they used in their church, the magazines they read, and the meetings they attended.

Guilt by Association

Among extremist Fundamentalists an attitude of "guilt by association" prevails. If a pastor has ever been seen in the company of one who is considered suspect, he is automatically judged as being guilty of the beliefs, practices, and preferences of the other. By this reasoning process, to speak in a particular Southern Baptist Church makes one guilty of everything associated with the entire Southern Baptist Convention.

Yet these same extremists will deny that speaking at a school which advocates segregation makes one guilty of supporting racism. To them, for a Baptist to speak at an interdenominational school does not mean he is advocating interdenominationalism. Further, they never would say that speaking at a Free Will Baptist Church makes one guilty of denying eternal security. In other words, the same rule of "guilt by association" does not always apply.

Parable of Pastor Average

Consider the case of Pastor Average. After weeks of personal struggle, he finally decides to attend a Bill Gothard Pastors' Seminar with a fellow Fundamentalist pastor who offers to drive. That morning he stops at the church to check his mail and discovers a copy of the *Sword of the Lord* with an article against storehouse tithing. He leaves it on the desk when his secretary tells him that his ride has arrived. When he goes out into the parking lot, he is shocked to discover that the other Fundamentalist pastor, without warning, has brought a local Southern Baptist pastor as well. What should Pastor Average do?

1. Insist that he drive himself.
2. Ask the Southern Baptist to get out and drive himself.
3. Ride with them and ignore the Southern Baptist.
4. Ride with them, but be careful what they talk about.

He greets them and reluctantly gets into the car. As they begin talking he discovers that the Southern Baptist is really upset about the article in the *Sword of the Lord* and the other pastor agrees with him. However, when the conversation gets heated, the driver inserts a Bill Gaither tape in his cassette player in order to change the subject. The Southern

Baptist remarks how much he loves Bill Gaither's music. Pastor Average does not like it at all. What should he do?

1. Sit there and endure the music.
2. Talk louder than the music.
3. Condemn Bill Gaither.
4. Ask the driver to turn off the tape.

They finally arrive at the auditorium, register, receive their materials, and select their seats. When they are seated, a Lutheran pastor (with a collar) sits in the vacant chair next to Pastor Average, who tries to ignore him. Before the seminar begins the Lutheran tells Pastor Average how excited he is about the "Evangelism Explosion" program he has initiated in his church and how they have had 42 people saved in just six weeks. He then asks Pastor Average how many he has had saved in the last six weeks. What should he do?

1. Tell a lie!
2. Change the subject.
3. Ask: "What is 'Evangelism Explosion'?"
4. Condemn "Evangelism Explosion."

After the morning session, the three Baptist car-mates go to a local restaurant for lunch. Relieved to be rid of the Lutheran, Pastor Average and companions sit at a large table. Just as they are about to ask the blessing two Charismatics and a Nazarene ask to sit at the same table with them. During the blessing, he notices that one of the Charismatics has his hands raised. Just as they finish praying, Pastor Average looks up, only to see the alumni director of his alma mater standing across the room, arms folded, staring right at him. What should he do?

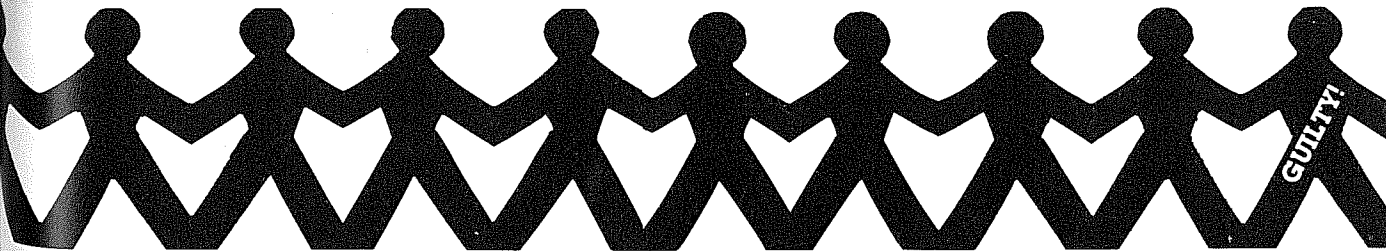
1. Go to the alumni director and explain the situation.
2. Ignore the alumni director.
3. Take his meal to another table.
4. Quickly exit to the restroom and stay there!

As they are driving home after the afternoon session, the Southern Baptist invites Pastor Average to preach in his church sometime. What should he do?

1. Accept.
2. Refuse.
3. Ask how much the Southern Baptist pastor's church gives to the Cooperative Program.
4. Wish he had never gone to the Bill Gothard Seminar.

Under intense pressure, beleaguered and confused by the complex chain of events he has experienced that day, Pastor Average walks slowly into the family room hoping for some peace and quiet. As he reaches the doorway, he is shocked to

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discover his wife actually watching the "PTL Club"!

Conclusion

Admittedly, the examples referenced in this article are somewhat simplistic—if not ridiculous. But that is the point. Carried to extremes, secondary separation can be ridiculous. Unfortunately, these situations are more often fact than fiction. We all draw lines—we just do not draw them at the same places. Whether we admit it or not, some circumstances require decisions based on personal preferences, which vary among genuine Christians, and no one is entirely consistent in his decision making. These preferences are not to be confused with valid issues, such as associating or cooperating with apostates in religious efforts.

But beyond the matter of personal preference is the problem of assumption. Because many people assume the

worst when they see or hear about certain associations of other Christians, we tend to be very careful—if not paranoid—about our associations. Christians should assume the best and give one another the benefit of the doubt. Instead, we are in a cycle of action-reaction-action, where we assume that others will assume the worst, and we act accordingly. Isn't this an indication of our spiritual immaturity?


An oft-quoted verse is 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." What does this verse mean? We surely do not allow fellow Fundamentalists much liberty, and therefore impose bondage on ourselves as well as others. Maybe that means we do not have a genuine spirit. If we do not allow liberty in our life in Christ, we surely are not going to allow others to exercise their liberty in areas of preference.

Are we caught in the unhealthy position of judging others by our standards? We must be sure our actions and

attitudes are based on biblical teachings and proper interpretations of those teachings. If we cannot, in all honesty, back our judgmental mind-set with Scripture, we had best default to Scripture. □

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