

PRAISE FOR *KEEP THE FAITH*

“In a day of trendy trails and nondescript names, Dr. Chappell encourages us to ponder the path of our feet and to embrace our biblical heritage as Baptists. *Keep the Faith* is a clarion call to faithfulness, and all of us would do well to read and heed. I love the author, I love the book, and I love the spirit in which it was written.”

Dean Herring, Pastor, South Valley Baptist Church,
Kuna, Idaho

“This book is not the result of a few hours or days; it has been lived over a lifetime. I’m thankful Dr. Chappell wrote it. I’m thankful for the thought and prayer he has put into it. And I believe it will have a great influence for the good of the gospel.

Don Sisk, Director Emeritus, Baptist International Missions, Inc.
Chairman of Missions Department, West Coast Baptist College,
Lancaster, California

“*Keep the Faith* is a must read for every believer and every spiritual leader. In these pages, Dr. Chappell gives a clear call for biblical ministry. This is sound direction from someone who has walked this road for decades.”

Dean Miller, Pastor, Front Range Baptist Church,
Fort Collins, Colorado

“Throughout *Keep the Faith*, Dr. Chappell maintains an emphasis on the truth of God’s Word and encourages each reader to stand true to the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. This book is both informational and instructional as he reminds us of our heritage and calls us back to the God of our fathers.”

Tim Rabon, Pastor, Beacon Baptist Church,
Raleigh, North Carolina

“*Keep the Faith* is a window into the heart for pastors and Christian ministry workers that Pastor Chappell has modeled for decades. I am convinced that this book will transform the way you lead in ministry.”

Dave Delaney, Pastor, First Baptist Church,
Long Beach, California

“*Keep the Faith* challenges a new generation of Bible-believers to take a strong and gracious stand for the truth. Dr. Chappell makes a compelling case for biblical separation while navigating the complexities of contemporary trends. *Keep the Faith* will prompt needed changes within our movement.”

Tyler Gillit, Pastor, Worth Baptist Church,
Fort Worth, Texas

“I appreciate and admire Pastor Chappell’s continual investments to influence the next generation of Christian servants. In these pages, you will find reasoned, biblical, and needed instruction for pastors and Christian servants in this generation and the generations to follow. May God use this book to help a multitude of men and women who desire to keep the faith for a lifetime!”

Ryan Thompson, Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church,
Newport Beach, California

“Some books are helpful. Some are challenging. Some are timely. A few are timeless. Dr. Paul Chappell’s new book *Keep the Faith* is all of these. It may be the most important book written in a generation. It is certainly vital for our generation and those to come. Every pastor who loves the truth should read this invaluable book.”

R. B. Ouellette, Pastor Emeritus, First Baptist Church,
Bridgeport, Michigan

“Remember the advertisement, ‘When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen’? Well, when Dr. Paul Chappell writes, I read! This excellent book gives a helpful, historical summary of vital Baptist history, current issues trending in Baptist circles, and a way forward for sincere believers and faithful Baptist churches. I encourage you to read it carefully. It will help you to keep the faith.”

Jerry Vines, Previous President of the
Southern Baptist Convention;
Pastor Emeritus, First Baptist Church,
Jacksonville, Florida

PAUL
CHAPPELL

KEEP

THE

FAITH

STANDING FOR BIBLICAL TRUTH
DISCERNING MINISTRY TRENDS
REACHING FORWARD WITH THE GOSPEL

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DEDICATION

To my students—past and present—of the
Practical Theology class at West Coast Baptist
College. Your questions prompted this book, your
heart to serve the Lord encourages me, and your
desire to change the world with the
gospel thrills me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THERE ARE MANY WHO HELPED in the compilation of this project, and I am grateful to each.

I would especially like to thank our West Coast Baptist College administrative and Bible faculty for their review and comments throughout early editions of this book.

Special thanks to Monica Bass and my daughter, Danielle Mordh, of Striving Together Publications for their help with writing and editing.

Finally, thanks to the many pastor friends who reviewed and commented on this manuscript. It is a privilege to labor together with you for the faith of the gospel.

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FOREWORD

BY DAVE DELANEY

LET ME WARN YOU UP FRONT: while there are many books written to convince you of why you should abandon biblical truth for a more trendy approach to ministry, this is not one of them. Dr. Chappell's work, *Keep the Faith*, is unmatched in terms of its doctrinal richness, biblical commitment, pastoral perspective, and cultural insights.

My first interaction with Pastor Chappell was as a staff member. My wife Amanda and I came to work at Lancaster Baptist at the age of twenty-one. What we saw being put into practice at Lancaster Baptist Church was exactly the kind of ministry philosophy that was rooted in biblical exposition, disciple making, generous hospitality, servant leadership, and soulwinning that we wanted to motivate us.

What I was not prepared for though, was how serving with Pastor Chappell would alter the trajectory of my life from that time forward. I am now thirty-eight years old. I have pastored for just over ten years,

and not a day goes by that I do not put into practice the ministry models I learned from Pastor Chappell. I thank God for using Pastor Chappell to help me and so many others understand the significance of striving together for the faith of the gospel. The cumulative impact of his life and ministry will only be revealed in eternity and can only be enjoyed as a gift that God alone gives.

Keep the Faith is a window into the heart for pastors and Christian ministry workers that Pastor Chappell has modeled for decades. Spiritual leaders will be fortified as they benefit from this wisdom at a time when many are wrestling with the external influences and internal pressures to compromise many of the church's long standing tenets. I am convinced that this book will transform the way you lead in ministry. Thanks be to God!

PASTOR DAVE DELANEY

First Baptist Church of Long Beach, California

FOREWORD

BY DON SISK

A LITTLE OVER SIXTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, I preached my first sermon. I have been preaching on a regular basis ever since.

I've had the privilege of serving as a pastor of churches in Kentucky, an associate pastor in Illinois, a missionary in Japan, the Far Eastern Director of Baptist International Missions, Inc. (BIMI), and then as the General Director of BIMI. After my wife Virginia and I "retired," we had the privilege of teaching missions at West Coast Baptist College in Lancaster, California, for well over fifteen years. In recent years, I've had the privilege of continuing to preach in churches, Bible colleges, and conferences all over the world. All that to say, the Lord has enabled me to serve Him for a long time in a variety of capacities, which has led to having a wide perspective of the challenges and trends for gospel-preaching labor.

This generation of Bible believing preachers faces great challenges. And that is why I am grateful Dr. Chappell has written *Keep the Faith*.

When I think back to the early years of my ministry, I was greatly helped by godly pastors and friends in formulating convictions and making decisions that helped me set a direction oriented toward Christ and His truth. Perhaps the greatest challenge in my early ministry was knowing how to respond to the growing modernism in the convention of which I was a member. (Dr. Chappell shares a little of my story from that time in this book.) I'm grateful for the mentors who gave me guidance and helped me through those turbulent times. The challenges of today are largely different from those I faced. But they are not less threatening to the future of a leader's ministry. I believe what Dr. Chappell shares in these pages will be helpful not only to young preachers, but also to older preachers. I'm eighty-seven years old, and it was a great help to me.

Many of the decisions we face in ministry are determined by the convictions that we hold. This is one reason I'm grateful that in the early years of my ministry, the Lord helped me understand principles from Scripture regarding biblical separation. Based on those principles, I have been a Bible-believing separatist for many years now. I'm certainly not an isolationist, but I am a separatist in the sense that there are areas of personal and ecclesiastical separation I have held through the years. Even so, I have never been a fighter. It has been my goal to contend for the faith without being contentious.

This spirit of contending without being contentious is something I have appreciated about Dr. Chappell since I first met him nearly thirty years ago. He was a twenty-something-year-old pastor who had a great heart for souls and was beginning to see the Lord greatly bless the church he was pastoring.

Over the years, the Lord has closely knit Dr. Chappell's and my hearts. It has been my privilege to not only serve together with him as a co-laborer, but also to watch him continue with the same heart, the same focus, and the same convictions in the path on which he started. And it has been my great amazement to watch him continue on this path with deepening wisdom and insight into the various challenges and trends of ministry.

Over the past several years, Dr. Chappell has often mentioned to me his burden for the book you are now reading. This book is not the result of a few hours or days. It has been lived over a lifetime and has been in the making now for some time. I'm thankful he wrote it, I'm thankful for the thought and prayer he has put into it, and I believe it will have a great influence for the good of the gospel.

You may or may not agree with everything that is written here. However, I have always felt that if I could gain something from the writings of others that would help and encourage me, it was worth my time and energy. This book, in particular, is worth your time.

I trust and pray that you will receive this work with the same gracious, prayerful attitude in which it was written.

DR. DON SISK

Director Emeritus, Baptist International Missions, Inc.
Chairman of Missions Department, West Coast Baptist College

INTRODUCTION

STRIVING TOGETHER

SINCE THE LORD BROUGHT my wife Terrie and me to Lancaster Baptist Church in July of 1986, our church’s theme verse has been Philippians 1:27: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

Some years later, when I began hosting preaching and training conferences across the country, I called them “Striving Together Conferences.” The website our ministry hosts for collaborative encouragement and resources is ministry127.com, based on the Philippians 1:27 reference about striving together for the gospel. And our church’s publishing ministry is named—wait for it—Striving Together Publications.

In case you can’t tell, it is my desire to partner with others for the spread of the gospel. I love the heart of the apostle Paul expressed in

Philippians 1 as he implores this church to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

- **One spirit** can only come through the filling of the Holy Spirit within individual Christians. This is true of the spirit within a local church as well as among Christians from various churches.
- **One mind** can only come as individual minds are aligned to the same center—Christ. It is as our minds are saturated with His Word, focused on Him, and embracing His truth that we have unity.
- **One goal**—the faith of the gospel—can only come as we truly make Christ’s last command our first priority. Our “striving together” is not for the sake of nebulous unity or simply enjoying camaraderie. It is because together we can do more for the furtherance of the gospel than any of us can do alone.

In recent years, I’ve been encouraged by the desire among leaders for greater collaboration and striving together. I love pastors and have willingly poured my time and strength into encouraging and helping them into and in the ministry.

In particular, I thank the Lord for the leaders a generation and more younger than me. I see many incredible strengths in these leaders. Those I talk to deeply desire Christ-centered, authentic ministry. They want substance over show. They value teamwork. And while they appreciate past heritage, they want to see greater things in the future. Specifically, they want to reach their generation with the gospel. These qualities thrill my heart.

But at the same time that I’m encouraged by these strengths, I’m troubled by some of the weaknesses, specifically an unwillingness to separate from those whose doctrine is unbiblical. While I’m deeply thankful for the renewed desire among fellow independent Baptists for greater teamwork and unity, I’m concerned by a seeming lack of

understanding of or convictions for biblical separation—a principle I'll define more clearly in the coming pages. It has been this concern that has birthed this book.

I started writing this book ten years ago. First a few memos—notes to myself in the midst of wakeful nights. Then a yellow pad, sketching out what should be included and how it should be arranged. Over the following weeks, I tweaked the outline and scribbled out more memos.

I knew this project was vital. I was watching good men, men whom I love and in whom I had invested, walking dangerous bridges of compromise. Some of the sleepless nights were spent in prayer and concern for them.

At one point, my schedule and these concerns along with trials of health in our family became too much to carry. I stepped back to get rest, and I unplugged. I learned to pray more and worry less. Through this experience, the Lord renewed in me a learning how to leave ministry concerns with Him and how to pace myself in service for Him. (The more tangible results were the books *Stewarding Life* and *The Burden Bearer*.)

As I prayed more, I gained both a renewed trust in God and a renewed burden to write this book. That burden has only grown.

Additionally, over the past several years, I've listened more. Although the core content of this book hasn't changed from what it would have been if I had completed and published it ten years ago, I believe I understand better the questions younger leaders are asking. I've had countless discussions with younger men who desire to know *why* rather than to simply be told *what*. They ask good questions and value substantive answers. I appreciate that. I trust this book reflects my heart to listen and come alongside with answers to the questions that are being asked.

Many of the trends and terms we'll discuss in the coming pages first came to my attention through students at West Coast Baptist College

asking for my take on them. In the Practical Theology class I teach, I encourage questions and have enjoyed the resulting conversations with young minds who are still forming their ministry philosophy. They see the trends, hear the buzzwords, and want to be sure they are preparing to build a ministry that honors God, is faithful to His Word, and reaches people with the gospel. In part, it has been their questions that have prompted me several times over the past several years to return to this manuscript and both enlarge and complete it.

I've arranged the book in three sections:

- **Part 1: Standing for Biblical Truth**—In these chapters, we look at the importance of truth, the biblical practice of ecclesiastical separation, and the historic practice of those who have stood through the centuries—including the original fundamentalists and then the beginning of the independent Baptist movement.
- **Part 2: Discerning Ministry Trends**—In these chapters, we examine a few current ministry trends—doctrinal and practical—and their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Part 3: Reaching forward with the Gospel**—In these chapters, we look to the future and our commission to reach the world with the gospel.

Another way to break these sections down is this comparison:

- **Part 1**—Ministry *practice*.
- **Part 2**—Ministry *philosophy*.
- **Part 3**—Ministry *motivation*.

This book deals with questions related to keeping the faith in a day when many depart from it, so naturally, the focus of it will lean toward biblical separation. But my heart is for unity and the furtherance of the gospel. Due to the subject matter, my heart to encourage comes through most clearly in the final chapters. I hope you'll stay with me until then.

In the pages that follow, I hope to convey that unity and separation are not opposite ends of a spectrum in which one must find balance, but they are the opposite sides of the same coin that faithful servants of God have held through the centuries. The fact is, biblical separation is not a negative; it is a positive trait that allows for true unity. Separation is not punishment— withholding fellowship until someone conforms to my way; it is a choice to walk with others who are aligned with God’s revealed truth.

I have friends who are not independent Baptists. I’ve been encouraged by many of their books and ministries and, in some cases, a cup of coffee and prayer together. I rejoice in every soul that is saved through the efforts of ministries not just like mine. But all of us have to determine what our ministry philosophy is, who we will allow to deeply influence us, and with whom we will platform and partner.

This book is not advocating separation over preference or personal standards. In fact, it is not even about ministry style or personal standards. Although we will touch on the biblical basis for holiness in our personal lives, I don’t argue in this book for the specifics of how that plays out. These are personal and local church issues.

This book is not about me dictating who is “separated enough” or who should preach for whom (as if my opinion even mattered). I don’t intend to tell you what you can read or with whom you should fellowship. I recognize the need for each of us to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in these matters.

In some ways, writing a book like this is a no-win. Some may think I’m not specific enough or including enough material on personal separation. Others may think I’m too conservative and criticize my stand as being judgmental. But I’m not writing this book to win; I’m writing to help.

I write primarily to theologically-conservative Christians who share Baptist doctrine and a concern for contending for the faith once delivered

to the saints. Anyone who identifies with that statement will hopefully find helpful material. I suppose, however, that even more specifically, I write to younger men in ministry who have been taught or seen some of the issues related to separation, but have questions about how, when, where, why, and if practicing separation is biblical or an isolation strategy sure to kill the power of the gospel. I trust you'll find many of your questions answered in these pages.

In the bibliography, you'll find books with much greater detail and depth than this one, which is in no way exhaustive. I hope you'll reference and read some of the other books I've studied. I will quote in this book from different sides of an issue, including using support quotes from authors I don't agree with on other issues. Some of the quotes I'll use are from men or movements that once stood with much more clarity.

Also, I hope that you'll read this book in context with my previous books. Two are especially relevant: In *Guided by Grace* (which I wrote while in my thirties), I made an appeal for servant leadership among independent Baptists. I encouraged grace-based, rather than fleshly-driven, leadership in the local church as well as in our interactions with one another. In *The Road Ahead*, I wrote about imbalances in independent Baptist ministry and implored a return to humility and unity where there is no doctrinal compromise. I'm not oblivious to the weaknesses among independent Baptists, nor do I consider myself free of weakness or error. But I am grateful for my heritage, and I hope to pass on our biblical practices.

Ultimately, I long for revival in our midst. I don't write to restore "glory days" to a movement. I write to lift up Christ, to join with those who promote and contend for the faith, and to encourage you in the spread of the gospel. To these ends, I pray this book is useful and successful.

PART ONE

**STANDING FOR
BIBLICAL TRUTH**

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRUTH

WE KNOW THAT EVERY WORD of Scripture “is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), but I will admit that the pastoral epistles are my favorite. In recent years, I’ve preached verse-by-verse messages through 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus with our church family. But when I had the recent opportunity to visit the island of Crete where Titus was ministering when Paul sent him the epistle written to him, there was one verse in particular that kept coming to mind: “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).

No one knows exactly how the gospel first reached Crete. It may have been through the witness of Cretians saved in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. It may have been through one of Paul’s missionary journeys. (Acts 27:7–8 tells us he stopped at Crete.) But however the gospel first came, there was a lack of sound teaching and doctrine among the

Christians scattered across the island. So Paul left Titus in Crete to “set in order the things that are wanting” (Titus 1:5). I tried to imagine what it must have been like for Titus as Paul charged him with bringing order and leadership to these congregations. And then what it was like for Titus as Paul sailed away.

While visiting Crete, I hired a van to go to the southern part of the island, just north of Libya and Egypt, where we toured the ancient settlement of Gortyn. There we learned of a history that stretches back to at least 1050 BC and includes advanced Minoan settlements and eventually a flourishing and well-fortified Greek city that was the capital of Crete.

In the ruins of the old city, archaeologists discovered the Gortyn Code (or the Great Code), which is the oldest and most complete known example of a written code of ancient Greek law. Carved into the stone wall, its many columns of text are truly impressive to behold.

To me, however, even more amazing than running my fingers along the inscriptions of the Gortyn Code or seeing the ruins of the Basilica of Gordys (a Byzantine church dedicated to Titus and believed to have been built over the place where Titus was martyred), was the enduring legacy of Titus and the pastors he trained. If Titus was indeed martyred, it would be consistent with the legacy he left for other pastors who were also willing to give their lives for Christ.

Titus ministered in Crete around AD 56, and tradition says he continued there longer than half a century, until AD 107. His mission was to train pastors, and as Paul had instructed him, he challenged them to hold “fast the faithful word” that they would “be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).

The test of faith for Titus’s ministry, however, reached beyond his lifetime. In fact, it was AD 250 when the Roman emperor Decius demanded sacrificial worship under the penalty of death for those who refused. The

local governor (who was also named Decius) rounded up ten pastors from throughout the island of Greece who refused to obey the edict and had them tortured for thirty days. Their agony was extreme. They were scourged, racked, dragged upon the ground through dung heaps, stoned, spat upon, and starved. When they remained strong in their refusal to worship the emperor, they were martyred.

As I stood outside the old city of Gortyn in the Roman amphitheater where these ten pastors were beheaded, I wondered, “How many years after my preaching ministry will those whom I’ve led to Christ and their descendants still be keeping the faith?”

Here in America, we’ve enjoyed religious freedom. Not only is that changing, but our entire culture is following the path of the Romans. Any hope I have for our country lies in my hope for a spiritual revival. Short of a national revival, I believe our country is headed to complete paganism.

So as I stood there where these ten spiritual descendants of Titus were martyred for their faith, I thought of the direction of compromise and entitlement-oriented ministry in America. And I wondered, “Will the teens in our youth groups stand under the pressure of paganism? If the Lord does not return first, will the churches today that are following culturally-approved paths produce Christians whose allegiance to the Lord will be strong enough for martyrdom? Will this trajectory of ministry hold firm 150 years from now?”

Making disciples and building an authentic New Testament church is not about following popular leaders or “shock jock” preaching trends. I believe Titus would tell us that the direction of ministry that will stand the test of time must be the direction of a Christ-centered commitment to biblical truth.

WHY THE TRUTH MATTERS

We enter ministry with a passionate desire to share the truth. We know that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). We preach it, share it one on one, and labor to disciple young Christians and help them become grounded in their faith. We watch the Holy Spirit transform lives through His truth.

But in a world where any claim of absolute truth is despised and where a growing number even of Christians believe that truth itself is too controversial, there is tremendous pressure to position our ministries relative to culture rather than to truth.

But that’s not how New Testament Christianity works. The history of the world is a history of man’s position to the truth. From the Garden of Eden until now, Satan attacks the truth and deceives hearts through his lies. We who know Christ and hold the truth *must* be committed to it—personally and ecclesiastically. Any ministry endeavor with long-term significance for Christ and lasting fruit will be centered on truth—Jesus Himself and the written Word of God.

In recent decades, post-modernism has been overtaking America. Today, it flourishes to the point that our society is easily and accurately described as a post-Christian society.

What has contributed to this regression? Is it a corrupt government? Is it because the “moral majority” has sunk to a minority? Is it because many of our government leaders no longer publicly affirm Christianity and often belittle Christian values? No, I believe it is because local churches do not stand for the revealed truth of God and have been unwilling to contend for the faith.

The reason we have entire denominations that deny the deity of Christ, ordain homosexuals, and refuse to preach against sin is that Christians have forgotten the value of truth and the command to stand for it. And it

didn't happen overnight. It happened as, over time, leaders downplayed truth for expediency, often under the stated intention of not offending a lost world.

This is a problem Francis Schaffer wrote about over thirty years ago: “Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely accommodation: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age.”¹

Schaffer's word for it is *accommodation*. Another word is *compromise*. As another author pointed out, “A great part of the evangelical community has transferred authority from *Sola Scriptura* to *Sola Cultura*.”²

When churches become more concerned with how truth is received by unsaved people steeped in a godless culture than they are concerned with the truth itself, compromise is sure to follow. Compromise then leads to an accommodating theology that eventually leaves lost people the same as they were before they started—steeped in a godless culture without biblical truth. Vance Havner said it this way:

Some Christians who once championed sound doctrine beat a retreat once in a while and from stratospheric heights announce that they do not ‘stoop to controversy.’ When a man contends for the faith in New Testament style he does not stoop! . . . Contending for the faith is not easy. It is not pleasant business. It has many perils. It is a thankless job. And it is highly unpopular in this age of moral fogs and spiritual twilights. It is a day of diplomats, not prophets. It is nicer to be an appeaser than an opposer. It is the day of Erasmus, not Luther; of Gamaliel, not Paul.”³

1 Francis A. Schaffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1984), 37.

2 Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 65.

3 Vance Havner, “The Forgotten Anathema,” *Sword of the Lord*, January 7, 1955.

Indeed, we are living in a day of much dialogue and little standing. Truth matters. Especially when it's gone.

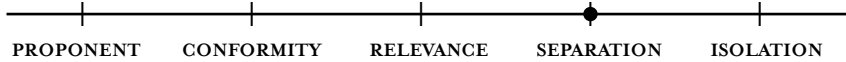
THE GRADUAL SLIPPAGE FROM TRUTH

Truth, of course, is not relative. Jesus *is* the truth: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). God’s Word also is truth: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:160). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Furthermore, the local church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). It is our responsibility to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

The pull away from truth, however, often begins with our associations. A younger pastor recently told me that it is the older generation who is forcing the younger generation to align with evangelical Calvinists and seeker movement leaders because older men are separating from them. While this has indeed been the case in some situations, I have discovered it is not always true. In fact, I’m finding that it is often the other way around. Those who are now identifying with the softer, non-denominational philosophy are moving away (separating) from their own parents, pastors, and mentors in their practice and, in some cases, their faith.

A slippage from the truth does not take place only among those who outright deny the veracity and authority of Scripture, but it also takes place by those who have allowed a series of compromises to pull them from their commitment to God’s Word. It can take place even among Bible-believing Baptists who lose their focus on and willingness to firmly stand for the truth.

The gradual moving away from a position of strongly identifying with truth often follows leftward steps through the positions noted in the following spectrum.



Let's take a closer look at each of these positions.

Isolation: Located on the far right of the diagram above is the *hyper separation* of those who refuse to fellowship with anyone who disagrees with them in any way—even when the person or group in question agrees fully in doctrine and 99 percent in ministry practice. This is where some of the ridiculous and petty separation has been practiced over issues such as slightly different dress or music standards, church architectural styles, whether or not a preacher wears a tie in the pulpit, and so on. Some churches and fellowships today have allowed past hurt or present insecurity to place them in isolation. Not only does this kind of separation not help those who practice it, but it is repulsive to those who yearn for a spirit of teamwork and have a desire to collectively reach their generation with the gospel.

Separation: In this book, I'll make a case for ecclesiastical separation practiced in a biblical way as being the proper position relative to truth. This separation from error is the only real foundation for unity. Those who obey the Bible commands in how they practice separation do so in a spirit of love with a commitment to contend for the faith.

Relevance: There is a very real sense in which relevance is needed in our articulation of truth and fits in with biblical separation on our continuum. But I use the term here to refer to a *focus* on relevance. Often those who are moving from a position of biblical separation do so while

stretching relevance outside of its biblically-supported role. Relevance is a tool, not a target; and biblical landmarks are needed to keep relevance within the bounds of truth. When relevance becomes more important than the truth that should be driving it, compromise takes place.

Conformity: This is where someone crosses that blurry line between being relevant to today’s culture and conforming to the spirit of the age.

Proponent: From conformity, the next step is becoming a proponent of a brand of grace and ministry that justifies carnal methods and yoking up with those who teach unbiblical doctrines. These proponents, as we will see later in this book, so misinterpret the doctrine of grace that they deny that there is a distinction between what is carnal and spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1), much less a need to repent when we are carnal.

Where it concerns the truth or practices relative to the truth, compromise is always dangerous. The decay produced by compromise doesn’t reveal itself immediately. Sometimes it takes years—perhaps even a full generation—before we can see the decayed fruit of compromise. This is why it is vital that we understand what God’s Word says regarding standing for truth. When we follow the clear commands of Scripture, we do not have to wait for the erosion of time to know if we are on track.

THE CHURCH AS A MENTORING ENVIRONMENT FOR TRUTH

The church must not only hold the truth, but also declare it and model it. In Philippians 4:9, Paul wrote to the church he had planted at Philippi, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

The world is constantly breaking down biblical distinctives and values. As Christians, then, we must teach and model these in our homes and churches with increasing clarity.

John Adams, second president of the United States, gave advice that I wish preachers would follow today:

It is the duty of the clergy to accommodate their discourses to the times, to preach against such sins as are most prevalent, and recommend such virtues as are most wanted. For example, if exorbitant ambition and venality are predominant, ought they not to warn their hearers against these vices? If public spirit is much wanted, should they not inculcate this great virtue? If the rights and duties of Christian magistrates and subjects are disputed, should they not explain them, shew their nature, ends, limitations and restrictions, how much soever it may move the gall of Massachusettensis?⁴

In other words, pastors must not simply take a theoretical stand against sin in general, but we must directly address the issues of our day. I would add that we also must not theoretically promote a gospel-driven and Spirit-led life in general terms, but we must specifically instruct in and model the biblical teaching and living in areas that run counter to our culture.

Although not a comprehensive list by any means, here are a few areas, all mentioned by Paul to Titus, in which churches must specifically provide mentoring and modeling. These areas of instruction were needed in the first century, and they are still needed today.

Order—The stated reason Paul left Titus in Crete was to “set in order the things that are wanting” (Titus 1:5). This included ordaining pastors and setting church polity. As Baptists, we believe that the Bible

⁴ Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Volume IV (Boston, MA: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), 56.

is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16). Young Christians must see a commitment to biblical doctrine and New Testament church structure and function above any personal preferences or peripheral affiliations. They must see holiness in worship, doctrinally-sound singing, and Bible-filled, Christ-centered preaching. When the world tries to paint Christians as hateful or prudish, those within our churches need to understand that our convictions are rooted in Scripture and our loyalty is to Christ.

Integrity—The biblical requirement for a pastor or deacon to be “blameless” (1 Timothy 3:2, 10; Titus 1:6–7) is important in any culture. But in a culture that has become suspicious of anyone in a position of spiritual authority, it is especially vital. First Timothy 5:20 tells us, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Bible-preaching churches cannot sweep criminal or moral failures of leaders under the carpet and expect continuing trust from a broken and hurting culture.

Masculinity and femininity—In a culture that pushes against the stereotyping of gender roles on one hand but then pushes for the crossing of gender distinctions on the other, the church must be the place where biblical, God-honoring gender is modeled in a way that points to our being made in the image of God and that embraces His divine order in the home and church.

The church should have ladies who model femininity and modesty. Titus 2:3–5 teaches that the local church is *especially* the place where this should take place. I’m not talking about lace and aprons, but about pure-hearted commitment to honor God’s commands for modesty and to embrace God’s plan for male leadership in the positions of pastor and husband.

The church should also model masculinity. Again, I’m not speaking of a macho man stereotype, and I’m certainly not advocating domineering

leaders. But in a culture that degrades masculinity as toxic, young people and young Christians need to see what gracious, Spirit-filled masculinity looks like (Titus 2:2, 6–8). If the church doesn't model masculinity and femininity, who will?

Compassion—Our society is turning on itself, viciously attacking those who disagree with one's position as bigots or fearmongers. And ironically, all of this is done under the banner of greater inclusivity.

The church should be a place where there is an intense spirit of love for one another (1 Peter 1:22) and a Christ-filled compassion for the lost (Matthew 9:36). It should be the one place where a lost person who may be in complete opposition to every belief a church holds can know that they will be loved and that there will be people who care about them with a Christ-like love.

Our churches don't need less truth, and they certainly don't need to hide the truth behind entertainment-driven services. They need to declare the truth, and they need to cultivate a mentoring, discipling environment where the truth that stands in opposition to the world is presented and nurtured.

GRACE, TRUTH, AND LOVE

There are some Christians who assume that a discussion involving separation will necessarily be absent of love. They point to passages such as John 13:35 (“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”) and suggest that separation between Christians harms the testimony of the gospel and can only be incompatible with a spirit of love.

Indeed, Scripture does command us to have a loving spirit, and too often a stand for truth has been sullied by a disagreeable or

pharisaical spirit. Yet, as surely as Scripture commands us to abound in love, it instructs us that our love is to be governed with knowledge and discernment: “And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent . . .” (Philippians 1:9–10).

The command to love is not the only command we have been given. Scripture also charges, “Buy the truth, and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23). It tells us that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). We are commanded to love, and we are commanded to hold the truth. And we dare not do either at the expense of the other.

Biblical love is not tolerant of sin or false doctrine. In this day when “tolerance” is promoted as something of a Christian virtue, it is good for us to remember that Jesus praised the first-century church in Ephesus for their *intolerance* of false doctrine: “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Revelation 2:2).

Let that sink in. Jesus *commended* intolerance. I fear that in all the dialogue of our day and the attitude of some to cozy up to those of differing views, a generation of Baptists are tolerating doctrine and practice they used to stand against.

A few verses after praising intolerance, Jesus rebuked the church in Pergamos for their tolerance: “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly . . .” (Revelation 2:14–16).

A biblical Christian has an intense loving spirit for others but stands firmly for the truth. While I have for years stood against a spirit of threatening, arguing, and pharisaical pride in ministry, I stand very strongly with those who contend for the faith.

Almost forty years ago, Wayne Van Gelderen, Sr., who is now in Heaven, wrote an article challenging readers that to “contend for the faith” includes genuine engagement that can only be carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I can hear someone say—“But we need to contend without being contentious.” If by that it is meant that we fight without landing a blow, or that we use paper swords, I reject it. We must contend vigorously! However, we need to be careful that we contend in the power of the Spirit and not the energy of the flesh. Carnality will confuse the message to the hearers. This does not mean that sharpness and force cannot be used. Spiritual contending does not mean weakness. Therefore, let us preach the truth in love—but let us be sure it is the truth!⁵

Too many leaders desire the vocational benefits of ministry without being a partaker of the afflictions. They want to be a soldier without seeing combat. Yet, as Paul admonished Timothy, soldiers are partakers of the afflictions, not just the benefits, of the gospel: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).

This book is a challenge to stand for the truth and to stand with others who do. But it is not a call to prideful contention. There is a difference

5 Wayne Van Gelderen Sr., *New Testament Association Newsletter* (Winter issue, January 1982), 1.

between contending and being contentious, and too often the spirit of the latter has hurt the former.

How can we contend for the faith without being contentious? The answer is simple, although not always easy: we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Too often, as Christians wade through topics such as we are about to embark on, there are angry words and hurt feelings on both sides—each accusing the other for both. A mark of spiritual maturity is not the ability to explain away truth; it is the ability to speak the truth in love. I trust this book will be so written—and received.

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