

HEART DISEASE IN CHRIST'S BODY

by Dr. Jack Van Impe

Please Note: This review was written in 1884 when Dr. Van Impe's book repudiating Biblical separation first appeared in print. At the end of the review there are some additional observations made in light of more recent developments.

From: NEW ENGLAND NEWSLETTER (New England Regional of the IFCA) - July 1984
Evaluation by George Zeller (Middletown Bible Church, Middletown, CT)

DR. VAN IMPE'S NEW BOOK

Earlier this year, Dr. Jack Van Impe published a 328-page book entitled, Heart Disease in Christ's Body (published by Jack Van Impe ministries, Box J, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068). In this book he expresses his concern over the divisiveness within the church, and he makes a strong plea for broader fellowship among brethren based on love and doctrinal toleration. The book is a virulent attack against the "neo-fundamentalists" or the "extreme separatists" of our day. Dr. Van Impe characterizes these "neo-fundamentalists" as those men who separate from "any brother in Christ who shakes hands with the third cousin of a compromiser" (p. 158).

What then is Dr. Van Impe's position on separation? "Rexella and I vowed before the Lord that LOVE FOR ALL THE FAMILY OF GOD would be our new position until Christ calls us home" (p. 114). Believers "must obey approximately 300 of God's plain commandments to fellowship with and love the brethren" (p. 256, and on the next 20 pages he cites scores of verses on love, forgiveness, etc.)

Dr. Van Impe believes that true fundamentalists should be united on the basis of five points of historic fundamentalism (p. 109):

1. The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.
2. The Deity of Christ.
3. The Virgin Birth.
4. The Substitutionary atonement.
5. The physical resurrection of Christ and His personal, bodily return to earth.

Furthermore he firmly maintains that nothing should be added to these five points as a basis of fellowship and cooperation. If a brother holds to these five points, he should be received with open arms.

Precisely stated, Dr. Van Impels position on separation is as follows:

1. Believers must separate from unbelieving liberals or apostates—from those who do not hold to the five points listed above. See in his book, pages 128, 139-152.
2. Believers must separate from immoral brethren (1 Cor. 5:11). See pages 156-158.
3. Believers must separate from lazy brethren (2 Thess. 3:6-15). See pages 158-161.

4. Believers must separate from “neo-fundamentalists” and “factious separatists” (this is based on Titus 3:10). See pages 161-163. Dr. Van Impe suggests that the “heretic” of Titus 3:10 should be identified with the neo-fundamentalist of today (men such as Bob Jones, etc.), and that we should “reject” and separate from such.

Space in this newsletter permits only a brief evaluation of this book and the position it espouses. Perhaps the following points will be of help:

1. Dr. Van Impe points out many, failures and inconsistencies and even moral problems in the lives of many separatists. Certain fundamentalist leaders have at times brought reproach upon Christ and His cause by their unloving, unreasonable, unbalanced and unethical actions under the guise of Biblical separation. Yet as M. H. Reynolds, Jr. reminds us, “the failure of fallible men to properly represent any Biblical position in no way negates the believer’s responsibility to hold that position.”
2. Dr. Van Impe greatly errs in his interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 in this identification of the “disorderly brethren” which he limits only to lazy brethren (which we admit was the problem that the Thessalonica church had to deal with). The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that we are to withdraw from every brother who does not walk “after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6) and this “tradition” is explained in 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Therefore, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 demands separation from every believer who is “disorderly” in the sense of being willfully DISOBEDIENT TO APOSTOLIC TEACHING.

The problem of laziness and the failure to “work with your hands” and carry out God-given responsibilities was exposed and condemned by the apostles, but this is only one aspect of apostolic teaching. The teaching of the Apostles covered many other crucial subjects including one of the major themes found on the pages of the New Testament epistles: the need to separate from and expose false teaching and false teachers. Dr. Van Impe agrees that the Apostles taught much about the dangers of false teachers and the need to separate from false teachers and apostates (pages 129-152). Therefore, the true separatist is obligated, based on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, to withdraw from every believer who is disobedient to the apostolic commands pertaining to separation from false teachers. As M. H. Reynolds, Jr. has said, “True fundamentalists believe that all brethren who fellowship with false teachers are definitely disobedient and are walking disorderly.” We must not be united with and companions to those who do not keep God’s precepts (see Psalm 119:63) unless they repent and amend their ways in view of the clear commands of Scripture.

3. Separation and love for the brethren are not incompatible. Biblical separation is based on love (2 Thess. 3:15). Jehu loved King Jehoshaphat so much that he strongly rebuked him (even though the king held to the “5 fundamentals”) because he was helping and cooperating with the ungodly (2 Chron. 19:2). Believers who help, support and cooperate with those who deny the faith need to hear some strong “Jehu-type” rebukes!
4. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Van Impe believes, based on Titus 3:10, that we should “reject” and separate from all neo-fundamentalists (which would include such men as Bob Jones, Dr. Rodney Bell, Dr. B. Myron Cedarholm, etc.). Dr. Van Impe seems inconsistent here. His argument against the separatists is that we are to “love all the brotherhood” and fellowship with all who hold to the “Five Fundamentals.” Yet according to his understanding of separation we are to “reject” certain separatists who seemingly are true brethren and who firmly hold to the five fundamentals. Why doesn’t his “doctrine of love” apply to them also? If Van Impe himself separates from true believers who hold to the “Five Fundamentals,” then how can he condemn certain separatists who do the same?

According to Dr. Van Impe we must vilify and condemn the extreme separatists of our day and reject them based on Titus 3:10. Yet on the other hand we are to reach out with open arms and offer our fellowship and cooperation to the following groups:

Compromising fundamentalists

Evangelicals who do not practice Biblical separation

Evangelicals who cooperate with false teachers

Charismatics, Pentecostals, 7th Day Adventists and other divergent groups as long as they hold to the 5 Fundamentals

5. Dr. Billy Graham holds to the 5 fundamentals. According to Dr. Van Impe's position there is no reason why we should not cooperate with Billy Graham even though he has been friendly with apostasy for years. Dr. Van Impe's position is that we must accept and fellowship with everyone who believes the five fundamentals (with the exception of the extreme separatists). (Note: See Dr. Van Impe's interesting comment on Billy Graham on page 224.)
6. The facts of history condemn Dr. Van Impe's position. Consider but one of many examples: The founders of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) all claimed to believe the "Five Fundamentals." Like Dr. Van Impe, they were opposed to a strong separatist stand and cried out for "broader fellowship" and "more tolerance" among evangelicals. Today the weaknesses and many compromises of the NAE are very evident. Does Dr. Van Impe want other groups to travel on the same downhill course? Ecclesiastical purity apart from Biblical separation is impossible. When true Biblical separation is not carefully practiced, it is only a matter of time before even the "Five Fundamentals" are eroded away by unbelief.
7. Dr. Van Impe's great struggles and difficulties came primarily as a result of his "city-wide" crusades. From 1948 to 1969 he conducted some 800 local church evangelistic revivals. Then beginning in 1970 and continuing for the next eight years, he started conducting mass, citywide crusades. For such a crusade to be successful there is a need for cooperation among many churches, including some that are strong and some that are weak. It is very difficult to run a city-wide crusade and to work with so many churches without compromising. Looking back we could wish that Dr. Van Impe had stayed with his local church meetings. There is safety in working through a local church and it eliminates so many problems.
8. Dr. Van Impe has nothing good to say about the "neo-fundamentalists" and he has nothing evil to say about those brethren who are on the other side of the fundamentalist spectrum who compromise and refuse to practice Biblical separation. According to Van Impe these men are "good men" (p. 168) and "good brothers" (p. 208), and no word of warning is sounded. It is only the strong separatists who are attacked in this book, never the weak compromisers.
9. The IFCA doctrinal statement says, "that separation from all religious apostasy is commanded of God." If it is commanded of God, then those believers who fail to do this are **DISOBEDIENT BRETHREN** who should be rebuked, admonished and separated from according to the command of Christ given by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. Dr. Van Impe apparently is not in agreement with this position, and as an IFCA member he should very seriously consider whether he can conscientiously sign the doctrinal statement of the movement he claims to be a part of. Certainly the leadership of the IFCA does not hold to his position.

10. Recognizing him as a brother in Christ, a zealous soul winning preacher and respected Christian leader, we would earnestly pray for Dr. Van Impe and beseech him to carefully rethink his position on separation and abandon the dangerous ideas which encourage broader fellowship and doctrinal toleration. These things sound good, but they ultimately lead to doctrinal compromises, a lowering of standards and a minimizing of the importance of God's truth under the protective guise of "love for all the brethren." Failure to carry out Biblical separation and to contend earnestly for the faith in a correct, balanced, loving way will bring great harm and hurt to the body of Christ and open the door for all kinds of poisonous doctrines and influences to creep in. The Biblical warnings and the sad facts of history are ample proof that this is so. May God help us to stand for the God of truth and for the truth of God in these difficult and declining days.

For a helpful set of recordings which shed light on this subject of separation by Dr. John C. Whitcomb, contact *Whitcomb Ministries*, and ask for the messages entitled, "God's Truth Circles."

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

This book review was written in 1984. In 1991 Van Impe revised and renamed the "Heart Disease" book and called it, *Sabotaging the World Church*. The message of the new book is basically the same. He merely softened or eliminated some of his attacks against fundamentalists. The weaknesses in Dr. Van Impe's position have become more and more evident in the years following the publication of his original book. Dr. Van Impe has gradually moved further and further away from a solid Biblical position. He has become more and more ecumenical in his approach, repeatedly emphasizing love and unity rather than truth and doctrine. He has repudiated the Biblical doctrine of separation and he has gone so far as to accept traditional Roman Catholics as being part of the body of Christ, including Pope John Paul II whom he considers to be a true prophet and defender of the faith! For documentation see "Startling Statements of Dr. Jack Van Impe" by M.H.Reynolds (*Foundation--A Magazine of Biblical Fundamentalism*, Sept/Oct, 1993) and "The Van Impe's Downward Slide" by M.H.Reynolds Jr. (*Foundation--A Magazine of Biblical Fundamentalism*, Oct/Dec, 1995).

Other literature available relating to these issues: *The Importance of Bible Doctrine--Campus Crusade Critique* (20¢), *The Biblical Doctrine of Separation* (25¢), *The Beauty of Separation* (20¢), *Billy Graham and Ecumenical Evangelism* (40¢), and *The Difference Between Liberalism and True Christianity* (5¢). Available from **The Middletown Bible Church**, 349 East Street, Middletown, CT 06457. Phone: (860) 346-0907.

These literature items are also available from our website:

www.middletownbiblechurch.org