

Christian Fundamentalism¹

Liberty Baptist Church (and before that, Bible Baptist Church) has historically and intentionally placed itself within the independent, fundamental Baptist movement. Today, the word “fundamental” has taken on considerable negative baggage, which may mislead the casual churchgoer. It would be beneficial for members and friends of Liberty Baptist Church to understand what historic fundamentalism is, where it came from, what it stands for, and why we uphold that tradition.

Lesson 1: The Biblical and Theological Bases for Fundamentalism

The goal of this lesson is to examine the foundations of the fundamentalist movement against the standard of God’s Word. In doing so, we’ll attempt to define what fundamentalism is.

I. Definition: What is Christian Fundamentalism?

One’s definition of fundamentalism depends somewhat upon whom he asks. For example, critics have defined fundamentalism as, “an evangelical who is angry about something.”² However, we can define the movement or idea more accurately.

A. Definitions from prominent historians and theologians

1. George Dollar:³ Historic Fundamentalism is the literal exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes.
2. Larry Pettegrew:⁴ Historic Fundamentalism is the religious movement that believes in the literal exposition of the basic doctrines of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical expositions of the basic doctrines.
3. David Beale:⁵ The essence of Fundamentalism ... is the unqualified acceptance of and obedience to the Scriptures.
4. Kevin Bauder:⁶ Fundamentalism is essentially a doctrinal and ecclesiastical reaction against unbelief masquerading as Christianity.... Fundamentalists insist that no Christian fellowship can exist or should be pretended with people who deny the gospel.

¹ This material originally produced by (unknown). Modified by Brad Anderson, Liberty Baptist Church, Antigo, WI, spring 2015.

² George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). 1.

³ Dollar (1917-2006) was a leading fundamental Baptist pastor, conference speaker, and author. He taught at Dallas Theological Seminary, BJU, Piedmont Bible College, and CBTS in Minneapolis.

⁴ Pettegrew taught at Pillsbury, DBTS, CBTS, the Master’s Seminary, and currently is dean at Shepherds Theological Seminary near Raleigh, NC.

⁵ Beale has taught church history at BJU for over 35 years.

⁶ Bauder is the past president of CBTS, now (2015) serving as research professor there.

5. Gerald Priest:⁷ Fundamentalism is a movement committed to belief in and affirmation of the historic biblical doctrines essential to the Christian faith and insistent on separation from all forms of apostasy and ungodliness.

Fundamentalism, then, is both a historic perpetuation of biblical orthodoxy and a reaction to the modern enemies of Scripture. It is an affirmation and an attitude—an affirmation of belief in absolutes and an attitude of loyalty to Christ and his Truth, which only can set men free to submissively serve their Creator (John 8:32).⁸
6. Rolland McCune:⁹ Historically, fundamentalists have held to a certain core of biblical teaching, mainly concerning Christ and the Scriptures, with the added doctrinal distinctive of ecclesiastical separation. These, coupled with the practice of militancy, have formed the essence of fundamentalism as a movement.
7. George Marsden:¹⁰ an American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores.

B. The “fundamentals” of Fundamentalism

1. Commitment to the essential, core doctrines of historic Christianity: Fundamental Christians believe in the verbal, plenary (full) inspiration of the Bible; the sinfulness of man; the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ; the deity of Christ; salvation by grace through faith; eternal reward for believers; and the eternal punishment of the wicked. Fundamentalists believe the Bible is literally true and accurate, the only rule for faith and practice. These doctrines define Christianity, and without them you no longer have “the faith.” Those who deny these doctrines have no right to think of themselves as Christians.
2. Separation from sin and false doctrine/teachers: Fundamental Christians emphasize separation from the world and promote holiness of lifestyle. They also insist on separation from wrong doctrine and from those who teach it. They refuse to cooperate with those who deny important biblical doctrines. A primary emphasis of fundamentalists is their desire to expose error and separate from it. Practical holiness in life and doctrine is the essential distinction of Fundamentalism.
3. Boldness or zeal (i.e., militancy): Fundamental Christians are assertive in their defense of the truth and in their exposure of error. Fundamentalism tends to be combative in contending for the faith (Jude 3) and in exposing error.

⁷ Priest taught church history at DBTS, BJU, and other fundamental institutions for many years.

⁸ Priest, “Early Fundamentalism’s Legacy: What Is It and Will It Endure Through the 21st Century?” *DBSJ* 9 (2004): 307.

⁹ McCune taught systematic theology at CBTS and DBTS for many years. This series of lessons will follow McCune’s three-part definition of fundamentalism.

¹⁰ Marsden is a historian who has written extensively on the relationship between Christianity and culture. He’s taught at Calvin College, Duke, and Notre Dame.

- C. Note two recurring themes in the above definitions—truth and error, belief and unbelief. In other words, fundamentalism is both positive and negative. It is positive in its approach to God’s truth—it affirms the doctrines of the Bible. However, it is also negative in that it stands aggressively against compromise of the truth.

What is fundamentalism? Commitment to the core doctrines of the faith, separation (non-cooperation) with all theological compromise of the faith, and a firm commitment to the truth while exposing error. These commitments usually also result in cultural and political conservatism, modest behavior, and a partial withdrawal from “worldly” society.

How is fundamentalism different from standard evangelicalism? Evangelicals and fundamentalists hold the same core doctrines in common. However, evangelicals tend to be inclusive; they are unwilling to separate from error and compromise (e.g., Billy Graham’s cooperation with RCs and liberals in his evangelistic campaigns). Instead of separating, they favor inclusion, infiltration, tolerance, and dialog. They also tend to adopt current cultural elements (e.g., music, styles, fads) into church and family life. They tend to be more engaged in the “world” and less concerned about contamination from it. And evangelicals attempt to avoid offending unbelievers and apostates while seeking approval and respect within the culture. In other words, evangelicals reject separatism.

We’ll consider the history of fundamentalism as a movement later in this series.

II. The Bases: What Biblical Principles Lead to Fundamentalism?

Fundamentalism is built upon two pillars: explicit biblical teaching and reasonable theological arguments based on that teaching. Some would claim that only the explicit statements of Scripture should serve as a basis for belief and behavior, but this is short-sighted. Students of the Bible develop theological arguments through interaction with God’s truth. Secondary arguments are thus legitimate to the degree they accurately describe truth (e.g., the Trinity—not a biblical word, but a biblical idea).

A. Explicit Biblical Teaching

1. Regarding the fundamentals of “the faith” and the truth of Scripture

Christianity is a faith built on the truth. A Christian is one who knows the truth, trusts the claims of the Bible, and lives by “the faith” taught by Christ and the apostles.

- a) Christianity is “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3; cf. also Acts 6:7, 13:8, 14:22, 16:5; Rom 10:8; 1 Cor 16:13, etc.). The Scriptures of use the term “faith” in an objective sense, as a set of core beliefs or doctrines. “The faith” is a set of nonnegotiable beliefs, taught by Christ and the apostles and passed on to the church. Only those embracing “the faith” can be considered Christians.
- b) “Truth” is another term the NT uses to describe the doctrinal core of “the faith.” One author writes, “Truth is often used in the New Testament to designate the Christian message in general...Here we

can see the development of a body of authoritative Christian teaching to which believers have to give their allegiance.”

Many NT verses mention “the truth” in this sense: John 4:23-24, 8:32, 17:17, 19; Romans 1:18, 25, 2:8, 15:8, etc.

- c) The faith and the truth are the great “deposit” (2 Timothy 1:12) left to the church by Jesus and the apostles. It is a discernible, objective set of core beliefs/doctrines, without which Christianity would cease to exist.
- d) Paul demonstrates a concern that his readers pass on the apostolic deposit to the next generation (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:2; 4:6, 11, 15, 16; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2; Titus 1:9). Again, this implies that Christians may recognize, know, and teach the apostolic deposit. Furthermore, securing obedience to Christ’s commands is part of the church’s Great Commission challenge (Matthew 28:19-20). Certainly Christ understood that His teachings were both discernible and authoritative.
- e) Recognizing and affirming the core, “fundamental” teachings of Christianity would seem to be required of all professing Christians. Admittedly, some doctrines are more important than others (e.g., Christology vs. angelology). Christianity has parameters or boundaries, and fundamentalists insist that one cannot compromise on the core beliefs of Christianity and still think of oneself as a Christian.
- f) The New Testament is filled with warnings about false teachers (Matthew 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Corinthians 11:13; Galatians 1:6-7; Galatians 2:4; Titus 1:10-16, etc.). The warning is not so much against the pagans but against those who taught “another Jesus...a different spirit...or a different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4; cf. Galatians 1:6). In other words, the NT is warning the early church about falsehood among those claiming to be Christians. These NT references assume that the believer must be able to determine truth from error when tested against the standard of God’s Word.

2. Regarding the need for separation from error

Several of the following lessons will define and defend separatism.

3. Regarding an aggressive attitude in fighting for the truth and in exposing error

A following lesson will define and defend militancy.

B. Theological Arguments

If the explicit statements of Scripture were not enough, we also must consider theological arguments favoring a particular approach to life and ministry.

1. *Sola Scriptura*: This term means Scripture alone, and it was part of the Reformation rallying cry—Christianity is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, as found in Scripture alone. This theological maxim is derived from the fact that Christianity is a revealed religion. Man cannot discover God by himself. God did so in a clear and understandable way by giving mankind His Word. God revealed his Word in such a way that the human mind can process and genuinely know what it means. The Reformers believed this to be the case and subsequently considered God’s Word as the only rule of faith and practice. This is what Baptists mean by when they refer to the Bible as their authority. *Sola Scriptura* implies and incorporates the principle of a closed canon (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Hebrews 1:1-2).
2. Clarity (“perspicuity”) of Scripture: Scripture is essentially clear (cf. Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Psalm 119:105, 130; 2 Peter 1:19). The basic teachings of the Bible are not cryptic or mysterious. Perspicuity is based in the fact that words can only mean one thing at a time. This requires the Scriptures to have inherent meaning in line with the intent of the author. Furthermore, perspicuity requires that the Bible is one correlated, non-contradictory network of divine truth. This means that Scripture must interpret Scripture (the reformers called this “the analogy of faith,” but we might more precisely call it “the analogy of Scripture”).
3. Self-Witness of Scripture: Because Christianity is a revealed religion, the Bible makes no appeals to outside authorities to justify its truth claims. The Bible is God’s absolute authority whether one accepts that authority or not. In other words, one cannot delegate authority to the Bible, he can only submit to it. McCune writes, “The Bible bears its own marks of inspiration and authority; the human options it leaves are faith or unbelief.”
4. While other theological principles can be employed to defend the fundamentalist cause, the above principles are at least a core of tenets which support fundamentalism. What is fundamentalism, then? Fundamentalism is simply apostolic Christianity. One author notes, Fundamentalism is primitive [i.e., original] Christianity...Without a doubt the position of Fundamentalists is that of the New Testament Christians, and the faith they hold is the same gospel which [the Apostles] preached, which even then was a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, but proved itself the power and wisdom of God to all who believed.¹¹
5. Even theological liberals have to agree with this assessment, as the following quote by notable liberal Kirsopp Lake clearly demonstrates.

¹¹ Frank Goodchild, *Twenty Questions: What, Why and How?* (n.p.: General Committee on Fundamentalism Within the Northern Baptist Convention, 1924), p.7.

It is a mistake, often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind: it is the...survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. ... The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* [i.e., the body of theological truths] of the Church is on the Fundamentalist side.

A final quote: Both friends and foes have regarded Fundamentalism as the lengthened shadow of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and the apostles, of Augustine and Calvin, of English Separatists and Puritans, of Wesley and Whitefield, of the German Pietists and the English Brethren, of London's Spurgeon and Princeton's Warfield—and of all whom continue loyal to its principles and genius.¹²

6. Christians today should gladly claim the name and heritage of fundamentalism and preserve the biblical faith for the next generations.

¹² David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), 3

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Lesson 2: Is God the Great Separatist? (Separation and the Holiness of God)

The first lesson examined the foundational elements of fundamentalism: 1) commitment to the essential doctrines of the faith, 2) separation from evil and exposure of error; and 3) militancy or assertiveness in standing for truth. Of these three, the primary factor distinguishing fundamentalism from other movements is the belief and practice of separatism.

In regard to this matter, Dr. Ernest Pickering has written:

Separation, both personal and ecclesiastical, is grounded in the nature of God. God is the great Separatist. He is absolutely separated from all evil and error. Do His people err in emulating Him?

Fundamentalists answer, “No. God is holy, and He requires us to be holy.”

We’ll begin our study of separation by considering what leads us to emphasize that principle—the holiness of God.

I. What is Holiness?

A. The basic idea for both the Hebrew and Greek terms translated “holy” or “holiness” is that of separation or uniqueness. The apartness found in these biblical texts can be summarized into three categories.

1. Consecration: Something devoted especially to God or set apart for God’s use is sacred, special, set aside for a particular use. For example, objects set apart for worship (Lev 5:15-16), the produce from the land (Lev 19:24), and spoil acquired from war (Josh 6:19) are holy, i.e., set apart for God. These objects were considered holy because of their connection to the “Holy One of Israel.”
2. Transcendence: Transcendence or “majesty-holiness” has reference to God’s absolute distinction from all His creatures. God is unique, special, and distinct, not like His creation in many ways. God’s majestic holiness speaks of his very distinction from the created order—His very Godness as it were. Hence, God’s name is Holy (Isaiah 57:15). This transcendent picture of God fills the pages of Scripture (1 Samuel 2:2; Exodus 15:11; Psalm 99; 2 Chronicles 20:21; Psalm 22:3; 30:4; 33:21; 68:17, 35; 98:1; Isaiah 52:10; Ezekiel 39:25; Revelation 3:7; 4:8; etc.).

One of the great examples of God’s majestic holiness is seen in Isaiah 6 where the seraphim, though they are sinless, must still cover their feet and faces from God while they cry—“holy, holy, holy.” In comparison with even the most holy of created beings, God’s holiness is infinitely transcendent. It is this view of God that the church needs to regain.

3. Ethical or moral purity: One theologian calls this aspect of God’s holiness God’s “self-affirming purity.” This means that God’s holiness is not simply

the absence of sin, but also the possession of positive moral purity and righteousness. In other words, God's holiness is an expression of His nature. The idea of self-affirming purity is that God's holiness is the highest motive and end. McCune writes,

Persons are holy when they will and determine as God wills. God is the Holy One because He wills in conformity with His being. God wills the good because it is good (in Himself), and it is good because He wills it (His self-affirming purity).

Christians have long held that holiness is the primary governing moral attribute of God.

- B. For God, then, separatism is a way of life and is essential to His nature. Furthermore, God's demands of separatism on the lives of His creatures arise out of His essential being and are therefore good. The essence of Satan's lie is the denial of God's goodness, and hence His holiness.
- C. The moral purity of holiness, then, is an expression of the goodness of God. In this light, holiness can be truly beautiful. John Owen, a Puritan theologian and pastor understood this when he wrote, "Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing and realizing of the gospel in our souls." Truly, holiness is the key to the Christian life (1 John 3:1-3).
- D. What we conclude from all of this is that holiness demands separation. God, then, is the "great Separatist," as Dr. Pickering has noted. For the believer, this means that separation has both a positive and negative aspect. Positively, separation is directed toward God. Negatively, separation is away from the world and its system.

II. Separation Illustrated

The Old Testament provides a great foundation and illustration for the doctrine of separation.

- A. God's election of Israel to be his Holy nation illustrates separation (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:1-11).
- B. The Mosaic code illustrates separation. God gave many lifestyle laws in the Mosaic code to remind the people of their holy status (Deuteronomy 22:9; Leviticus 11; cf. Leviticus 20:24-26). The laws were given to demonstrate that God wanted his people's lifestyle to reflect a separation unto him. Dr. McCune writes,

Separatism was a way of life, not just a matter of food, seed, animals, and garments. Their relationship to God and the other nations was depicted in these graphic visual aids. What probably provoked scorn and ridicule from others was a badge of honor for them. The principle of separation was woven by God into their social structure, into the very warp and woof of everyday life.

Welch's comments are appropriate.

God embedded reminders of his character in what his people ate, how they dressed, where they went, how they planted their fields, how they cut their

hair, [etc]. In other words, the Hebrews needed hourly reminders of the character of God. Apparently, we can never have enough reminders of God's extraordinary character. We can never meditate on it too much.

- C. While separatism is often viewed from a negative perspective, separatism is in reality a positive expression. In other words, separatism is simply an expression of the holiness of God—an expression of God's character which is the highest goal and the highest good. For the Christian, separatism is an expression of his chief end—to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

III. Personal Separation

Having established that separation is a positive expression of the character of God (especially of His holiness), one must then ask how do individuals reflect God's character. In other words, how does holiness express itself in practical theology? The answer is really quite simple—if God's holiness causes Him to be “the great Separatist,” then those who seek to reflect God's being will likewise be separatist in their behavior. This means that holy living requires the practice of personal separation.

Personal separation is generally associated with a list of do's and don'ts (i.e., don't play cards, go to movies, drink, dance, etc.). However, true, biblical separation in one's personal behavior is rather to be viewed as an issue of the heart. Simply stated, personal separation is an expression of the heart that prizes God above the pleasures of this world. Stated in this way, then, one must ask if it is possible to be a believer and not practice personal separation?

A. Do Christians Have to be Holy?

1. Sadly, the broad spectrum of Christianity presently views holiness as optional for believers. What a contrast from the New Testament church when believers were referred to as saints, literally “holy ones” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; see also Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Hebrews 3:1). The biblical material concerning the need of holiness in the believer's life is really quite overwhelming.
2. Consider a few relevant texts (read)
 - a) Romans 6:19-22
 - b) Romans 12:1-2
 - c) 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
 - d) 2 Corinthians 6:14-7
 - e) Ephesians 1:4
 - f) 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
 - g) 2 Timothy 1:9
 - h) James 4:4
 - i) 1 Peter 1:14-16

- j) 2 Peter 3:11
 - k) 1 John 2:15-17
3. Note a couple associated concepts flowing from the need for personal holiness.
- a) Holiness prohibits worldliness. The two ideas are contradictory—i.e., they cannot be harmonized (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). In other words, a worldly saint is truly an oxymoron. Richard Baxter, an old Puritan preacher writes,

Are you heartily willing to take God for your portions and had you rather live with Him in Glory, in His favor and fullness of love, with a soul perfectly cleansed from all sin, and never more to offend Him, rejoicing with His saints in His everlasting praises, than to enjoy the delights of the flesh on earth in a way of sin and without the favor of God? ... You must know that His laws reach both heart and outward actions, that they command a Holy, Spiritual, Heavenly life, that they command things so cross and unpleasing to the flesh that the flesh will be ever murmuring and striving against obedience....
 - b) The real issue in sanctification (holy living) is one of the heart. The believer is one who loves God while the unbeliever loves the world (1 John 2:15-17). What is worldliness?
 - (1) Worldliness is a disposition (love for the world) first, which is then demonstrated in action (lust of flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life).
 - (2) A worldly person's main concern is pleasing himself by fulfilling all his bodily appetites. He is driven by personal lust (i.e., desire) and pride (i.e., selfishness). God is irrelevant to such a person.
 - (3) A worldly person operates on a purely human level and has no spiritual dimension to his existence. His affections are all centered on the world; he has no love for God or spiritual things ("the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John 2:15). Such desires are stimulated by the sensations of his body.
 - (4) Worldliness is the result of such an attitude. Worldliness is love of the world and the things in it. Essentially, worldliness is a matter of worship. What is the ultimate object of concern? God or myself?
 - c) To summarize, then, personal separation is simply the expression of the heart's desire to prize God by reflecting God's holiness in the daily experiences of life.

B. Deviant Forms of Personal Separation

Those who reject the doctrine of personal separation generally do so because they do not like the exclusive demands of God upon their lives. Their hearts have gone after idols. However, some end up rejecting personal separation because they have interacted with deviant forms of the true biblical doctrine.

1. Self-righteousness: This form of separation exists simply to demonstrate one's own merit. In other words, a self-righteous attitude is most concerned with demonstrating how good one is, rather than how good God is. It amounts to spiritual pride. This is the approach that thinks that one's holiness is earning merit before God. Self-righteousness often leads to pride in one's ability to keep rules.
2. Isolationism: This form of separation seeks to remove oneself, one's family, or one's church from any contact with the corrupt world. Isolationism develops a "fortress mentality" which strictly limits interaction with non-believers and even with not-as-separated believers. Yet God has commissioned the church to reach the world, an impossible goal for isolationists, as is the duty to "let your light so shine before men..." (Matthew 5:14).

Both self-righteousness and isolationism are aberrant and are unscriptural (cf. John 17:13-21; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Galatians 2:16; 3:1-5).

C. Applications of Personal Separation

1. Admit your depravity.
 - a) Man's depravity has reference to the built-in disposition to love sin and hate God. Man is born with such a propensity (i.e., born in sin) because the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to him (Romans 5:12-17). The Bible describes this depravity as being total or holistic, meaning that sin affects every human capacity of the whole person (Isaiah 1:6; Ephesians 4:17-19). This depravity, then, includes the body, mind, will and heart.
 - (1) Body—Romans 8:10; Ephesians 4:19.
 - (2) Mind—Romans 8:5-7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Titus 1:15; Ephesians 4:17-18.
 - (3) Will—John 8:34; Jeremiah 13:23.
 - (4) Heart—Jeremiah 17:9.
 - b) While Christians are no longer totally depraved (God has given them a new heart—new disposition, new nature, etc.) he must still wrestle with, fight against, and wage war with the depravity of his heart (Romans 8:5-14; Ephesians 6:10f). Christians are called upon to be vigilant in guarding their hearts (Proverbs 4:23).
2. Evaluate your heart.

The ability to evaluate what is pleasing to God requires God-centered commitment in living and thinking (Romans 12:1-2). In the process of determining what is worldly and what is godly, the believer must be committed to live solely for God's glory and to therefore seek to think God's thoughts after Him. Everything in life must be viewed in its relationship to God (Romans 11:36).

3. Consecrate yourself to God (i.e., separation unto God)

The New Testament expects believers to present themselves as a "living sacrifice" unto God, one that is holy and acceptable (Romans 12:1). Such is the believer's "reasonable service" (KJV) or "spiritual worship" (ESV). The believer strives to walk worthy of his calling (Ephesians 4:1) and to please God in all things (1 Thessalonians 4:1). He no longer lives for himself, but for Christ who died for him (2 Corinthians 5:15). He no longer yields to the pressures of sin; he yields himself unto God (Romans 6:13). His main task is to glorify God in every sector of his life (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:31). His intentional goal, never quite achieved, is to "sin not" (1 John 2:1).

Note: It's an error to think that a one-time, final act of dedication/consecration will enable the believer to overcome the desires of the flesh. There is no release from the struggle against sin this side of heaven. We need God's mercy everyday (Lamentations 3:22-23). The Christian life requires repeated and regular repentance and recommitment.

4. Extricate yourself from the World (i.e., separation from sin)

Rather than participating in the "unfruitful works of darkness," the believer "reproves/exposes them" (Ephesians 5:11). He refuses to yoke up with unbelievers in any spiritual endeavors. Instead, he "comes out" from among those teaching error and separates himself from them (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). He refuses to partake in the disobedient behavior of the lost (Ephesians 5:7). He now avoids the "excess of riot" (1 Peter 4:4) and the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21) that formerly characterized his life. He's actively putting off the old man and putting on the new (Ephesians 4:22f). He seeks to abstain from every form (or appearance) of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). He pursues a pure and undefiled faith and keeps himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

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Lesson 3: Separation from Unbelief (Ecclesiastical Separation)

As we noted in the last lesson, the Scriptures have given a resounding message of the need for personal holiness. Likewise, the Scriptures are quite clear in their testimony concerning the need for ecclesiastical separation (Ephesians 5:25-27).

It is truly unfortunate that all professing Christians do not hold a common, uniform, orthodox understanding of faith and practice. Imagine the testimony and effectiveness of a single, unified organization composed of all genuine believers lovingly cooperating together to fulfill our Lord's commands! Alas, such is far from the case and probably never will materialize this side of glory. Among those who call themselves Christians are many and diverse forms of belief and behavior. Some of these differences are minor, while others are major. Some are merely traditional or cultural, but others center on significant doctrinal considerations. Due to these differences and disagreements, professing Christians often find it necessary to separate from one another, at least on some levels.

What precisely is ecclesiastical separation? McCune writes,

Ecclesiastical separation usually takes place on the organizational level, where religious leaders and groups interact. Broadly speaking, it is the refusal to collaborate with, or the withdrawal of fellowship from, an ecclesiastical organization or religious leader that deviates from the standards of Scripture or that does not believe and obey the Word of God in doctrine and practice.

Ecclesiastical separation has traditionally been handled under two broad categories—separation from false teachers/apostates and separation from disobedient brothers.

I. Separation from Apostasy

A. What Is Apostasy?

1. Apostasy is religious defection. It implies the removal from or forsaking of a person or a system of thought (cf. Acts 21:21). Apostasy is a direct repudiation of divine truth to which one has been clearly exposed and which one has professed. When one withdraws from the faith and turns his back on it, he is an apostate. Apostates are confirmed in their rejection of the truth. They will not repent of their errors and return to the fold (1 John 2:19). They are spiritually dead and doomed to judgment (Jude 12-13).
2. Sometimes we use the word “heresy” to describe false theology (2 Pet 2:1). One who teaches false doctrine is often called a heretic (Titus 3:10). The word also refers to those who spread division and discord.
3. Note that such false teachers/apostates are not merely mistaken believers. Even genuine Christians may have blind spots and weaknesses, which may result in some faulty ideas. The false teachers in view here are not genuine believers, but are anti-Christian deceivers who are both calculating and intentional in their wicked schemes.

B. What are the Characteristics of Apostates?

Various characteristics of apostates are given in the New Testament. Some of them are as follows:

1. They repudiate the organized system of revealed truth—the faith (2 Tim. 3:5).
2. They are motivated by demons (1 Tim. 4:1).
3. They are not truthful (1 Tim. 4:2).
4. They are deceptive (2 Peter 2:13).
5. They oppose divine authority (Jude 8).
6. They are spiritually dead (Jude 12).
7. They have a form of religion without power (2 Tim. 3:5).

C. When Does an Organization Become Apostate?

1. Simply stated, any organization that denies the gospel cannot be recognized as legitimate. If a church teaches unbelief in its official documents, or if it tolerates apostasy among its people and ministers, it has become apostate. This is not to suggest that the mere presence of unbelievers makes a ministry apostate. All genuine churches will be reaching out to the lost, and some may attend the church or even be members. But when unbelief and error becomes entrenched within the organization, and nothing is done to root it out, the organization is apostate and genuine believers should leave it.
2. We must recognize that different levels of accuracy and error exist in every church. Some errors have a much larger set of consequences than others. We might envision a scale or spectrum we can use to evaluate errors:

Truth—mistaken opinion—isolated error—systemic error—apostasy
3. Based on this scale, one has to either limit his message or limit his fellowship. When disagreements occur, one may ignore them and fellowship anyway, or admit them and not fellowship. Integrity demands that degrees of separation increase as degrees of agreement decrease.
4. Where does one draw the line for separation? Each organization will have to decide that on a case-by-case basis. Minor instances of mistaken opinion and isolated error are evident and tolerated in even the best ministries. But when error becomes rampant throughout an organization, genuine believers must separate from it.

D. What Action is Required Regarding Apostates?

What ought to be the believer's attitude toward false teachers? Should one cooperate with them, encourage them, or treat them like genuine believers? Should one watch their TV shows or listen to their radio broadcasts? Should one support a false prophet financially? Obviously not. What if they are present in one's church? Believers should take the following steps against them.

1. Evaluate them against the standard of the Scriptures. Believers must “test the spirits” to detect those who are false (1 Jn 4:1). Jesus said that we would know false teachers “by their fruit” (Mt 7:15-20). Also, the better you know the Bible, the better you will be able to evaluate your teachers. Read Acts 17:11.
2. Expose them. Show them for what they really are. Do not allow their sheep’s clothing to prevent others from seeing their pernicious ways.
3. Rebuke them. Stand against them verbally or in writing.
4. Warn others about them. Try to prevent them from continuing on in their deceiving ways.
5. Separate from them. Have nothing to do with them. Do not cooperate with or support them in any way. If a church ignores them, allows them to teach or in any way supports them, leave that church.

Fundamentalist leaders have always held that the proper response to false teachers and their teaching is separation. Note McCune’s comments:

Christianity is first and foremost a set of beliefs. It is a series of truth-claims that make some absolute demands. There is a certain core of truth that must be presented by the preacher/teacher and accepted by the sinner with whole-souled trust and commitment or he will perish in Hell forever. There is only one Gospel and only one way to Heaven. All religious experiences, or claims to such experiences, must conform to the biblical pattern and be tested by the biblical revelation. If they do not conform, they must be judged as spurious, misleading, and totally invalid and unchristian at that point.

Read the following texts in this regard:—1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:16-19; Revelation 2:14-16.

6. Defend the faith from them. The Scriptures place a heavy emphasis on the defense of the faith (Jude 1:3). Christians are called upon to guard the truth deposit that was entrusted to them. In other words, ecclesiastical separation is God’s strategy for us in the effort to preserve the truth with which the church has been established. The preservation of apostolic doctrine, the faith, requires the believer to separate from the cancer of false teaching.

E. What About Recovery from Apostasy?

1. We try to be optimistic regarding any organization that has historically affirmed the truth, even if it turns away from the truth and embraces error. We may exhort the wayward organization to change its ways and return to orthodoxy. Sometimes it happens. Read 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

2. If repentance and revival seem to be potential outcomes, we may continue to pray and work toward that end. However, given an appropriate amount of time and opportunity, when a church or organization continues on an erroneous course, the time comes for genuine believers to “abandon ship” and leave the institution. In the worst case scenario, a time comes when “Ichabod” (1 Sam 4:21) must be assigned to the group.
3. Evangelicals are known for their desire to stay within a compromised organization in efforts to turn it around. Instead of “jumping ship,” they attempt to seize control and guide the organization back to orthodoxy. Is this a good strategy? Is it biblical?

II. Separation from Professing Believers

A. What Would Cause Us to Separate from Professing Believers?

Most Christians recognize the need to separate from apostates and their false teaching. But is there ever a need to separate (i.e., withdraw cooperation and fellowship) from genuine believers? Yes, unfortunately, when believers disagree on significant issues, separation often results.

1. Genuine believers are not immune to false teaching. In some cases, people who are saved promote or tolerate error. In such cases, churches often withdraw from cooperation and fellowship with those promoting such beliefs and/or practices. Such errors are not soul-damning heresies. Nevertheless, they are significant enough to prevent close fellowship and/or cooperation. E.g., those who practice infant baptism (but not baptismal regeneration)
2. Some forms of separation are more practical than doctrinal. That is, certain factors simply prohibit or hinder close association, not primarily on doctrinal considerations, but because of other distinctions. It’s not so much a matter of doctrinal error as of Bible interpretation and/or application. Organizations simply have different viewpoints or commitments, and that fact hinders or prohibits cooperation/fellowship.
 - a) Denomination: if one is committed to a certain set of characteristics associated with a denomination, it follows that he would associate only with those within that group. For example, Baptists have historically held certain doctrinal and practical distinctions. Those not holding those same teachings may not enjoy close fellowship with Baptists.
 - b) Polity: those valuing congregational church government will likely not enjoy close fellowship with those who endorse a Presbyterian or Episcopal polity.
 - c) Theological issues: various theological commitments often hinder fellowship between churches. E.g., covenant theology vs. dispensationalism, Arminianism vs. Calvinism, Lordship salvation vs. easy-believism, KJOism.

- d) External standards of conduct: some churches emphasize high standards of personal piety, while others take a more casual approach to appropriate behavior. Those espousing one view may not get along well with those who take a different position.
- e) Philosophy of ministry: churches generally promote a certain style of ministry. This style or character is reflected in the type of music used in worship, the type of sermons the pastor preaches, the type of people who attend, and other similar factors. It is rare that churches on opposite ends of this spectrum welcome close fellowship between them.

B. Doesn't Unity Among Believers Prohibit Separation?

- 1. The common mantra of those who reject biblical separation is that the Bible calls for love and unity among believers, not hostility and opposition. How do we defend the practice of separation in view of biblical calls to unity?
- 2. Unity must always be based on a common commitment to truth. Unity is possible only for those in agreement (cf. Amos 3:3). Hence, the one who actually causes the fracturing of unity is the one who deviates from the truth (Jude 1:19).
- 3. John 17 teaches that unity is possible for believers (vv. 6, 11, 20) in distinction from the world (vv. 14-19) who are unified by the truth of God (v. 17-20). In fact, a spiritual unity exists among all genuine believers no matter what might separate them in other ways.
- 4. Ephesians 4:3 indicates that believers are to seek after the unity of the Spirit, and verses 4 through 6 indicate that such unity is based on a particular set of truths. Truth must always be the basis of unity.
- 5. There really is no contradiction between love/unity and defense of the faith. Those who are unwilling to separate from false teaching/teachers are actually causing division and hostility. Lack of unity comes only when truth is denied or compromised. Seeking peace and unity at the expense of truth ultimately undermines the faith.

C. What Does Church Discipline Teach about Ecclesiastical Separation?

- 1. The need for church discipline suggests the practice of ecclesiastical separation. The argument here is from the greater to the lesser—if the Bible instructs the local church to be diligent in its discipline of disobedient brothers, then certainly it would require the church to be diligent in its associations with other churches, mission groups, colleges, camps, etc. The Bible's teaching on church discipline reveals that we do not associate with disobedient groups.

2. The Bible is very clear regarding the need for and practice of church discipline (cf. Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Timothy 5:22; Titus 3:9-11). If individuals within churches must avoid association with error, it follows that churches and larger organizations must likewise separate from error.
- D. How Might Separatism Among Brethren be Abused?
1. The primary dangers of separation are applying it needlessly or not applying it at all.
 - a) Needless separation: Too often, churches refuse to cooperate or even recognize one another because of fairly minor disagreements. Churches whose faith and practice are almost identical and who could cooperate (or at least get along) remain at odds over secondary issues.
 - b) Neglected separation: Many churches seem to apply little discernment in their associations. They fellowship with virtually any organization that appears to “love Jesus, that is doing “good work,” or is “enlarging the kingdom.” It does not matter to them that the group may be deeply compromised in its theology or practice.
 2. Given the definition of ecclesiastical separation from above, we should limit our separation to those who genuinely deviate from or disobey Scripture. To the extent that a group or church is unbiblical, we must limit our fellowship with it.
 3. Too often, what should remain as secondary issues assume a place in the fundamentals of the faith. Disagreements on such issues amount to doctrinal compromise or worse for those who strongly advocate for their understanding of the issue. Examples: KJO, Calvinism, music, dress
 4. It’s unfortunate that churches that differ so little find it impossible to enjoy Christian fellowship. Disagreement over relatively minor issues like these need not prevent churches from at least recognizing one another as legitimate. They should be able to enjoy at least a basic level of fellowship in spite of their different views.

Some (wrongly) argue that ecclesiastical separation is merely evidence of spiritual pride. They claim that this kind of attitude is hurtful and merely prevents unity within the body of Christ. While it is certainly possible for a believer to act in pride in this matter, one could equally argue that the failure to practice separation is an act of pride and disobedience. Tolerance of apostasy is a rejection of God’s clear revelation. God’s Word is abundantly clear on these matters. The practice of ecclesiastical separation is ultimately a matter of loyalty to the Lord. Spurgeon wrote,

To separate ourselves from those who separate themselves from the truth of God is not alone our liberty, but our duty.

Christian Fundamentalism

Lesson 4: Militancy—Should Christians Fight for the Faith?

The 1960's saw a revolt against absolutes in nearly every area of life. Today's generation is reaping the rotten fruit of that revolt in that everything is held to be a matter of personal preference or of one's own values. Furthermore, all such value options are considered to be equal. Values of twenty-first century culture have been tolerance, multiculturalism, pluralism, and diversity. The church has adopted these values to some degree. The desire to present a positive front to the world has caused many to adopt a tolerant spirit toward error or "diversity." Many pastors and churches have become "kinder and gentler" in their response to spiritual challenges, desiring to be peaceful and unified, not critical or divisive.

Is such a tolerant, indifferent, harmless attitude toward error biblical? What should the Christian's stance be towards false teaching? Fundamentalists have traditionally understood it to be one of militant confrontation and opposition, not benign neglect. This lesson will seek to define and examine the biblical legitimacy of the believer's militant opposition to error.

I. What is Militancy?

- A. The general definition of militancy is "engaged in warfare or combat...aggressively active (as in a cause)." McCune's comments are appropriate:

Militancy has to do with being aggressive, forceful, and firm. It has far less to do with personality than practice, less with ability than attitude. Fundamentalists have always fought for biblical truth and against error.

George Houghton¹³ observes:

Militancy springs from one's values, is expressed as an attitude, and results in certain behavior. One's values are those things in which one strongly believes to be fundamentally important and true. From this comes an attitude which is unwilling to tolerate any divergence from these fundamentally important truths and which seeks to defend them. It results in behavior which speaks up when these truths are attacked or diluted and which refuses to cooperate with any activity which would minimize their importance.

Gerald Priest suggests:

Fundamentalists are angry, or more appropriately, righteously indignant, over the invasion of infidelity into Christian institutions and the attack by liberal activists on Christian values and symbols.¹⁴

¹³ Houghton has taught at Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary (Ankeny, Iowa) for many years.

¹⁴ "Early Fundamentalism's Legacy: What is It and Will It Endure Through the 21st Century?" *DBSJ* 9 (2004): 303–343.

- B. A core value of fundamentalism has always been its commitment to revealed (i.e., Scriptural) truth. Preaching the truth and refuting error are the ways Bible-believers have always expressed their spiritual commitments. Defending the truth and exposing error are necessary aspects of fulfilling Christ's commands to the church. Those committed to truth are necessarily opposed to error. They dare not ignore significant challenges to the faith.

Fundamentalists have also recognized that every affirmation of truth demands a corresponding repudiation of error. Hence, fundamentalism is a polemical [i.e., positive argumentation] as well as an apologetical [i.e., defense, answering critics] movement.¹⁵

- C. From these core values flows an aggressive, even combative, attitude in support of the truth and opposing error. Tolerance is certainly appropriate in many cases when people of good will hold different opinions. But in cases where ultimate truth is involved, we dare not tolerate unvarnished error. Differing opinions can be maintained within orthodoxy (e.g., eschatological opinions vary without being heretical). But we absolutely refuse to cooperate with (i.e., we separate from) those promoting or endorsing genuinely and significantly erroneous doctrine or practice.
- D. While a militant attitude may appear arrogant to some, it is ultimately one of true humility. The only reason we contend for the truth and refute error so strenuously is that we humbly submit to the revelation God has given (1 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:19-22).
- E. Core values (truth and doctrine) lead to a particular attitude (aggressive) which must result in behavior (contending for the faith). Marsden notes this behavior when he writes

Fundamentalists are a subtype of evangelicals and militancy is crucial to their outlook. Fundamentalists are not just religious conservatives; they are conservatives who are willing to take a stand to fight.

Bob Jones Jr. captures the idea of militancy when he wrote,

You cannot preserve truth without fighting for it...One does not defend truth with soft words but with the sharp sword of Scripture.

¹⁵ Priest, 307.

II. Is Militancy Biblical?

- A. To many believers the whole idea of a believer “fighting” seems carnal if not downright sinful. According to this thought, conflict is unspiritual and should be avoided. Those who hold such positions tend to want their message to be strictly positive—i.e., void of any negative information, teaching, preaching, and/or “judgmental” actions or statements. Accordingly, this mindset emphasizes love, gentleness, forgiveness, and warm-hearted compassion for those who stray from the truth.
- B. But does a tolerant, complaisant, indulgent attitude toward error follow the biblical pattern? Has fundamentalism been wrong in its aggressive, militant, combative spirit in opposing and confronting error? Two New Testament characters seem to indicate that militancy and spirituality are not incompatible.
1. Christ, who was perfect humanity and was known for his holiness, harmlessness, and gentleness (Matthew 12:20; Hebrews 7:26), was very aggressive against apostasy, error and willful disobedience (Matthew 23). Christ had no qualms casting sinners out of the temple (he did it twice; John 2:14-16; Matthew 21:12-17), confronting heresy and hypocrisy (Matthew 22:33), or using strong language to describe his opponents (Matthew 23).

We readily admit that Jesus showed grace and mercy toward notorious sinners like the woman at the well (John 4), the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11), or even the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). Yet none of these was guilty of teaching error. They were relatively ignorant of truth, and Jesus dealt with them gently and graciously, as we should also do when we encounter people of this type.
 2. Likewise, Paul had no reservations in strongly condemning those who were opposing the truth he proclaimed (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16) even if they were a fellow brother or apostle (Galatians 2:11-14).
 3. Militancy was a feature of biblical Christianity from the church’s very beginning (cf. Acts 2:23, 36; 3:14–15, 26; 4:12, 19–20; ch. 7; 8:20–21; chs. 22–26). Fundamentalists have found security in the company of a Peter at Pentecost or a Paul at Mars Hill. Furthermore, they have not ignored their duty to rebuke other Christian leaders in the manner of Paul’s correction of Peter in Galatians 2:11–14. Fundamentalists have historically and persistently warned against the sin of sympathy with unbelief. What is needed is the voice of a prophet declaring divine ultimatums.¹⁶
- C. A complaisant, lax, tolerant attitude toward sin and error is simply not biblical. Those emphasizing only love, gentleness, and warm feelings are not following the biblical pattern. They risk “being more Christian than Christ and more positive than Paul.”

¹⁶ Priest, 314, 317

- D. Has militancy been abused? Yes, we readily admit that some are too caustic, too belligerent, and too prone to fight. Certainly, any movement that involves human beings will be fraught with error and abuses. There may have been leaders in the past and present that were pugnacious, mean-spirited, and overly-aggressive, sometimes taking positions on issues which lack Biblical support. However, these admitted weaknesses do not invalidate the underlying principles at stake. One need not be needlessly offensive and obstinate in defending the truth and/or in refuting error, but one must display some sanctified backbone. Standing aggressively for the truth is no sin.
- E. Those who charge fundamentalists with being too aggressive are violating their own commitment to tolerance and positive thinking. They are being judgmental in their spirit towards their fellow believers, which is precisely what they decry when fundamentalists level criticism at others. They will tolerate anything but intolerance.
- F. The real issue for today's believer is obedience. The Scriptures teach that doctrine matters and that we must "contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). A spirit of gentleness is certainly required in many cases (cf. John 8:3-11; Galatians 6:1); but when truth is on the line, we must stand strongly, aggressively, even combatively.
- G. Fundamentalists have always taught that the fight for the faith must be carried out in a spirit of kindness, but firmness. To divide these two as mutually exclusive options is to divide what God has placed as dual requirements for godly living.

Closing Thoughts

Historic fundamentalism is simply first century, New Testament Christianity that has preserved the faith by means of a militant spirit and the Biblical doctrine of separation.

If we lose the militancy that has characterized God's faithful servants from Moses until now, then the salt has lost its savor and is no longer of any value in preserving the truth and holding back corruption.

You need not preach heresy to weaken and ruin a local church. Simply refrain from preaching against sin and error, and in time the erosions will take place. To perpetuate religious purity, evil and error must be exposed by God's Word. This is why it is so important for fundamentalism to resist any tolerance of error and compromise and to maintain its militant spirit.

Christian Fundamentalism

Lesson 5: Historical Overview (Part One): The Development of Autonomous Thought

How did we get to be where we are today? To answer this question, we must consider the historical events that led to our current situation. Biblical and historical reasons led fundamentalists to their current position. Additionally, the historical context of the origins of fundamentalism provides an important backdrop to the continued struggles against error and compromise. Today's struggles gain added poignancy in the light of the historical battles for the faith. The next two lessons will, therefore, try to establish the historical backgrounds for the formulation of liberalism, fundamentalism and new evangelicalism.

I. The Path to Liberalism

- A. The period following the Reformation (roughly 1517-1648) was one of doctrinal formulation and clarification. The battles over the religious truths of the day, often termed “Wars of Religion,” had the effect of leaving “people in Europe in a state of weariness and religious fatigue and toleration.” Against the backdrop of religious tolerance the philosophies of the times crept into the religious sphere.
- B. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, witnessed the beginnings and growth of systems of thought antithetical to Biblical Christianity and to that for which Puritans and Pilgrims stood. Gradually these ideas began to dominate, particularly in some institutions of higher learning, and ‘modern religious liberalism’ (modernism) was born.
- C. The developing philosophies of the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a profound impact on western culture. When biblical truth was combined with modern philosophy the result was a loss of orthodox Christianity. The philosophies of the day influenced Christianity in the following arenas.
 1. Autonomy of Human Reason
 - a) Autonomy (lit. “self-rule”) holds that man has the capacity to think for himself and live in whatever way he chooses. He is independent, not accountable to anyone but himself. Human reason, not divine revelation (i.e., the Bible) stands as the final source and arbiter of truth.
 - b) Many philosophers and theologians held this view, but perhaps the most notable thinker to teach the independence of human reason was the English thinker John Locke. He declared that Christianity must be acceptable to human reason—i.e., the divine truths must be believable by human standards. The Bible must be made to conform to human reason.

- c) The end result of such philosophy was the out-right denial of the miracles of the Bible. Human reason cannot take the miraculous stories of the Bible seriously, as if they really happened. E.g., Noah's ark, Joshua's long day, Jonah's "great fish," Jesus raising the dead, Jesus' resurrection—these must all be taken as religious legend or myth, not as true historical events.
- d) Human autonomy contradicts the Biblical teaching on the depravity of the human mind (cf. Psalm 10:4; Psalm 14:2-3; Romans 1:21; 3:11; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:3; 4:8; Titus 1:15). Independence from God boils down to idolatry (Rom 1:22-23).

2. The Total Transcendence of God

- a) Philosophers (especially Immanuel Kant) taught that God was "wholly other" and thus not the object of genuine human knowledge. God could be postulated but could not be truly known. All we can truly know is within the physical universe. Everything else is speculation.
- b) The Scriptures maintain a clear balance between God's transcendence (i.e., his position above and other than man) and his imminence (i.e., his ability to dwell with and be known by man). The total transcendence of God clearly contradicts the teachings of Christ (John 17:3) and the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:8).
- c) God has revealed himself to mankind in nature (Psalm 19; Romans 1:20), in the Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), through conscience (Romans 2:15), and through his Son (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2). God is indeed transcendent (above and beyond man, cf. Romans 11:31-33) yet not "wholly" other or unknowable.

3. The Destruction of Divine Revelation

- a) Scholars and liberal "Christians" began criticizing the Bible.¹⁷ It was full of myths, legends, errors, and contradictions. It contained little more than human thoughts about God. One might have an experience of God while reading the Bible, but that was a purely subjective and personal feeling that had no significance for anyone else.
- b) Since human reason was the highest source and guide for truth, since God was ultimately unknowable anyhow, and since the Bible was clearly not the infallible word of God, the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and authority were easily discarded.

¹⁷ Bible scholars differentiate between "higher" and "lower" criticism of the Bible. "Higher" criticism casts doubt on the traditional authorship, dates of writing, composition and contents of the Bible. "Lower" or textual criticism seeks to establish the best or most accurate text among the available manuscripts. One should not confuse the two types of criticism.

4. The Absence of Absolutes
 - a) Evolutionary theory captured the attention of many philosophers and theologians by the mid-1800s. Like everything else, religion was evolving. Truth cannot be changeless (immutable); like everything else, it must develop and evolve. There can be no final and objective word from God. Morality cannot apply to all people in all places and in all circumstances. Absolute truth is impossible, they said.
 - b) Christianity stands in contrast to this philosophy since Christianity is true for everyone (John 14:6; 17:17; 1 Timothy 3:15). Truth is not on a sliding scale, but is objective, public and universally the same (see this fact illustrated by Peter in Acts 2:36).
 5. The Superiority of the Feelings and Experience (over Divine Revelation)
 - a) Some Christians (i.e., Pietists) reacted to “cold” orthodoxy by emphasizing Christian experience, inner feelings, and the individual’s personal relationship to God. Religion was placed in the realm of the sense experience, and the more intense the feelings, the more religious one was. Hence, doctrinal matters and theology were of little importance as long as one felt and behaved a certain way.
 - b) Feelings, experiences and behaviors must be based on a firm foundation; they must correspond to biblical truth to be legitimate. Doctrines and experiences not rooted in Scripture have no authority.
- D. As these philosophies gradually influenced the Christian community, the mainline denominations slowly caved in and lost (i.e., forsook) the orthodox Christian faith. Interestingly, one of the earliest groups affected by liberal thought was the Puritan Congregational church. The Congregational church permitted a spirit of compromise to subtly lead them away from orthodoxy. The issue which led to their spiritual demise was that of the Trinity. Certain Congregationalist became Unitarians (those who deny the Tri-unity of God, and hence, the deity of Jesus Christ). One Unitarian historian notes,
- The progressive tendencies went silently on, and step by step the old beliefs were discarded, but always by individuals and churches and not by associations or general official action....Something of this tendency was also due to the spirit of free inquiry and the rational interpretation of religion that were beginning to make themselves felt.

II. Influential Ideas in Liberalism

- A. The social gospel (i.e., care for the poor, hungry, homeless, “social justice,” etc.) was an attempt to reform society by following Christ’s example. This concept was popularized by the famous novel, *In His Steps* by a noted liberal Charles Sheldon. The father of the social gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch. He defined sin as selfishness, which he defined as a failure to redistribute wealth. Hence, salvation was a social effort to change society, not the application of the biblical Gospel message to the individual resulting in his spiritual regeneration.
- B. Connected to the social gospel was the concern for public education. The American public school system was established and shaped under the leadership of two prominent liberals.
 - 1. Horace Mann, the father of the American public school, was a Unitarian who believed in the natural goodness of man and that man could through compulsory education develop a perfect society.
 - 2. John Dewey, the father of American progressive education, believed in evolutionary pantheism (i.e., that man by cosmic evolution had finally reached a state whereby he could control all future evolution). Dewey applied his evolutionary pantheism to his curriculum and teaching methods.
- C. A final ingredient influencing the progress of liberalism was the teaching of Postmillennialism. This is the belief that Christ will return only after the Christian message has permeated culture and changed everything for the better. Since we are presently in the kingdom (i.e., the church is the kingdom), Christians must develop and install the peace, prosperity, and equality characterizing this era. While Postmillennialism should not be equated with liberalism, it corresponded well with their optimistic understanding of man.

Note: An accurate definition of liberalism in a theological context includes the above concepts (i.e., autonomous human reason, God as “wholly other,” the Bible as unreliable/errant, no absolute truth or morality, the superiority of experience, the social gospel instead of the real Gospel). Liberalism is not merely having different standards of behavior (i.e., dress, entertainment choices, hair length, music, Bible versions, etc.). One should not accuse another genuine Bible-believing Christian of being “liberal.” Only apostates (i.e., Bible deniers) should be called by this name.

III. The Fundamentalist Response

- A. Should Christians of good will simply concede to such ideas? Do we endorse them, accept them, and implement them? Do we tolerate them without comment? Of course not! We must vigorously (i.e., militantly) stand against them.
- B. While many nominal (in name only, not genuine) Christians conceded to the pressures and influences as described above, those tenaciously holding to the truth of God’s Word refused to budge. They realized that compromise with error is deadly. The truths of Scripture are worth fighting for. In fact, any religion not willing to stand up and fight for such truths is not worth having.

- C. The results were that two competing models of Christianity came into existence. Those retaining their traditional commitment to the Bible as the Word of God thought of themselves as the true Christians. Liberals and modernists, while using the same terms and still retaining the name “Christian” did not preach the same truths. Their form of the faith denied virtually all of the doctrines of traditional Christianity while retaining most of the words, rituals, and institutions. Soon a third, almost middle way between the two would appear.

Christian Fundamentalism

Lesson 6: Historical Overview (Part Two): Fundamentalism and New Evangelicalism

In response to the liberalism coursing through the established denominations, those who held to “the faith” as revealed in the Bible banded together for mutual support and to mount a strong offense against liberalism. As these believers began to unite, fundamentalism as a historical movement was born.

- I. A Brief Historical Overview of Fundamentalism¹⁸
 - A. The Period of Conflict and Beginnings: 1876-1919. This period saw various conferences, Bible institutes/schools/colleges, pastors, writers, and other institutions come into agreement on the fundamentals of the faith. Most of those retaining a commitment to traditional Protestant Christian doctrine and practice converged to form historic fundamentalism.¹⁹
 - B. The Period of Controversy and Battle: 1919-1929. During this period fundamentalists were fighting from within their denominations and churches to purge them of liberalism. These fights were primarily found in the northern United States Presbyterian and Baptist churches and denominations.
 1. While these fundamentalists were separatistic in mindset (i.e., they tried to purge the unbelief from the church or denomination), their attempts to “clean-up” their denominations and churches were largely unsuccessful. One author writes, “By the 1930s...it became painfully clear that reform from within could not prevent the spread of modernism in major northern denominations.”
 2. This period saw the fundamentalists lose much of the “furniture” (i.e., buildings, schools, missions agencies) in their efforts to preserve the faith. The liberals held on to the property when the fundamentalists left.
 - C. The Period of Consolidation and Building: 1929-1940s. Having failed to win the day by working from within their churches and denominations, fundamentalist began in earnest to practice biblical separation by withdrawing from denominations, schools, and churches and beginning their own.

¹⁸ Following Dr. McCune’s descriptions.

¹⁹I.e., the Bible Conference movement (i.e., Niagara Bible Conference, Winona Lake Bible Conference, etc.), the training school/Bible Institute movement (i.e., Moody Bible Institute, Boston’s Missionary Training School, Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Northwestern, Philadelphia School of the Bible, etc.), influential pastors and evangelists (i.e., W. B. Riley, R. A. Torrey, A. C. Gaebelien, Bob Jones Sr., C. I. Scofield, A. J. Gordon, etc.), and literature written by the leaders of this new movement (i.e., the *Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Fundamentals*, and a host of periodicals)

II. Characteristics of the Fundamentalists

The primary characteristic for which fundamentalists were known is the commitment to the Scriptures and those doctrines found there in. Since these were examined in previous lessons, this section will consider three other areas which seemed to be common to the early fundamentalists.

- A. Premillennialism/Dispensationalism—The early Bible conferences were often focused on prophecy, and especially a premillennial approach to prophecy.
1. Premillennialism is an approach to interpreting prophecy which understands the church to be removed (in the Rapture) prior to Christ's millennial kingdom.
 2. Dispensationalism is based on a grammatical, historical, theological approach to the Scriptures, literal interpretation of the Bible, a fundamental distinction between Israel and the church, and the glory of God as the rationale for all of God's activity.
 3. Premillennialism and fundamentalism seemed to go hand in hand because they both took seriously man's degenerative depravity (i.e., man would continue to "wax worse and worse"—2 Timothy 3:13) and, hence, the dangers of apostasy and the need to defend the faith.
- B. Counter-Culturalism—Fundamentalists have taken seriously the Lord's instruction to avoid worldliness (1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:1-2). As modern culture turned away from Christian values, fundamentalists opposed those elements of modern culture that seemed particularly hostile to God's moral will. The counter-culturalism of fundamentalism stands in contrast to liberalism's "cultural progression" and new-evangelicalism's "cultural transformation." While other branches of Christianity absorb and adopt popular culture virtually intact, fundamentalists have always been very cautious about importing cultural fads into the church.
- The application of biblical Christianity naturally develops clear boundaries. Traditional Christians knew who they were, what they believed, and how they were supposed to behave. Popular culture, as it developed in the later 1900s, rejected any boundaries of doctrine or behavior. "Do your own thing" and "If it feels good, do it" eventually became the prevailing attitude. Those maintaining traditional Christian values quickly saw that modern sensibilities were threatening to the faith and thus withstood them.
- C. Patriotism—In spite of all the negative changes in American culture, Fundamentalists were often very patriotic toward their country. However, a proper understanding of man's depravity limits the type of government which best serves mankind and promotes the spread of the gospel in our fallen world. Fundamentalists opposed the socialistic/Marxist styles of the liberals and the tolerant spirit of the new evangelicals.

III. Currents within Fundamentalism Today

Fundamentalism is not a single, centralized movement, so it reflects a range of commitments. Self-professed fundamentalists (at least of the Baptist variety) generally fall into one of two categories today. While there is much common ground between them, several factors set them apart.

- A. Historic fundamentalism – Doctrinal essentials, as typically explained in a confession of faith or doctrinal statement, define the parameters of fellowship and/or separation for this group. This type of fundamentalism has much in common with the original movement that stood against the challenges of liberalism. Doctrine and biblical exegesis are most important to this group, rather than impressive statistics or charismatic personalities. This branch values formal education yet still emphasizes personal holiness and evangelism. It also seeks to distance itself from some of the extreme positions within the other branch of fundamentalism. Churches of this variety tend to emphasize reverent worship, biblical education, and theological depth. Various institutions reflect this sensibility, e.g., BJU, MBU, DBTS, CBTS, NTAIBC, GARBC.
- B. Hyper-fundamentalism – Particular issues (e.g., Bible versions, dress standards, musical forms, hair length, personal recreation choices) and powerful, dynamic leaders provide the focus for this group. This branch of the movement tends to be pragmatic, holding that impressive statistics are an indication of God's blessing. Leaders in this category often downplay education and emphasize personal piety and service. Preaching is usually highly dynamic, confrontational, topical, and evangelistic, rather than doctrinal or exegetical. Churches of this variety tend to emphasize excitement, enthusiasm, and informality, often with a "down home" appeal. They typically run bus routes, do door-to-door soul winning, and schedule periodic revivals and "big" days. Various institutions reflect this sensibility, e.g., Hyles-Anderson, BBF, Fairhaven College, Crown College, WCBC, Sword of the Lord.

IV. A Brief Overview of New Evangelicalism

The Christianity of the early 1900's was divided into two major groups—liberals (also called modernists; they were Christians in name only) and fundamentalists (also called evangelicals). As one author writes, "In 1940 it was still quite appropriate to speak of fundamentalists, conservative evangelicals, or 'Bible-believing Christians' when referring to roughly the same group of people." However, the 1940's and 1950's would see a drastic change in the landscape of American Christianity.

Many in the broad spectrum of fundamentalism were dissatisfied with the battles which were waged unsuccessfully against liberalism in the mainline denominations and against secular culture. Dissatisfied with the state of fundamentalism and with the theology of liberalism, this group evolved into a new movement which sought to reform the fundamentalist movement. This movement became known as the "New Evangelicalism." This differed from fundamentalism in its direction (seeking to be mainstream), its basis for that direction (emphasis on love/unity), and its attitude which informed and motivated that direction (positive presentation of the gospel).

When we move from fundamentalism to evangelicalism, we are moving from counter-culturalism to inclusivism. Fundamentalism was a walled city; evangelicalism is an open city. Fundamentalism always had an air of embattlement about it, of being an island in a sea of unremitting hostility. Evangelicalism reacted against this sense of psychological isolation by lowering the barricades and being much more open to the world and the influences of modern culture. The great sin in fundamentalism is to compromise; the great sin in evangelicalism is to be narrow-minded.

A. The Direction of New Evangelicalism—Mainstream

1. Some Christians believed the fundamentalists were too strict in their separation from the culture of the world. Evangelicals began objecting to the whole idea of separation from the world and from errant brethren. Evangelicals valued respect and relevancy. They rejected the isolationism of fundamentalism.
2. This break with fundamentalism was primarily motivated by the desire of certain younger evangelicals to be in the mainstream of culture. Fundamentalism came to be seen as an ignorant, head-in-the-sand, contentious, out-dated approach to the Christian faith. Tired of being marginalized, the new evangelicals sought to be mainstream.

One author writes,

By the 1940s...many more moderate fundamentalists were convinced that their movement had become needlessly marginalized. They longed for the days when evangelical religion really mattered in American culture and decided to rid fundamentalism of its excesses and negative image and create a “new evangelicalism.

3. This desire for mainstream acceptance yielded the following values:
 - a) A friendly attitude toward science (i.e., willing to compromise on the issue of Darwinian evolution)
 - b) A willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit (i.e., open to Pentecostals/Charismatics)
 - c) A more tolerant attitude toward varying views on eschatology (i.e., one’s beliefs about the book of Revelation and end-times events did not matter)
 - d) A shift away from dispensationalism
 - e) An increased emphasis on scholarship
 - f) A more definite recognition of social responsibility
 - g) A re-opening of the subject of biblical inspiration
 - h) A growing willingness of evangelical theologians to dialog with liberal theologians

4. The new evangelicals, in light of their concessions, were very optimistic about the future—"Evangelical Christianity is likely to dominate the future if it can face openly and creatively the certainties, not the doubts, of modern scholarship."

B. The Basis of New Evangelical Direction—Love/Unity

1. The growing group of new evangelicals placed a false distinction between love and holiness. Having rejected the separatism of fundamentalism, the new evangelicals found as the basis for their movement the scriptural injunctions to love one another. Love, in their view, is unconditional and non-judgmental, thus ruling out separation from errant views.
2. This premise was clearly stated in a message given by Billy Graham to the NAE's 15th annual convention. In commenting on the loss of simplicity of love for one to another, Graham states, "The one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy, but love. There is far more emphasis on love and unity among God's people in the New Testament than there is on orthodoxy, as important as it is." Though subtle, this emphasis could be seen in the movement's shift from defending the faith to a "simple" presentation of the gospel.

C. The Attitude of New Evangelicalism—Positive Presentation

1. The new evangelicals were not pleased with the spirit of fundamentalism, in particular, the spirit of militancy in defending the faith. Evangelicals were more interested in preaching the gospel than contending for the faith. They wanted to present a positive message to the world and were not interested in being on the defensive all the time. In other words, the emphasis of the new evangelicals was to be positive as opposed to the negativity of the fundamentalists.
2. In analysis of this spirit, however, it must be noted that the new evangelicals made two fatal errors.
 - a) First, they divided something indivisible—preaching the gospel and defending it. To be "born again" required that one subscribe to a fixed body of truth—the faith. One cannot be saved apart from that "faith," and it was precisely this faith which was under attack by the liberals.
 - b) Second, they defined their position as founded in human experience (i.e., "you must be born again") as opposed to fixed doctrine (i.e., "the faith"). They failed to affirm that experience must be founded on truth. Without this connection between truth and experience, the practice of Christianity has virtually no boundaries.

V. Outcomes

- A. For Fundamentalism—After surging in numbers during the 1960s through the 1980s, the numbers of adherents to Fundamentalism diminished significantly by the early 2000s. Fundamentalists have largely retained their heritage and remain committed to the same core values they’ve held since the beginning of the movement. Unfortunately, infighting among fundamentalists over relatively minor issues (Bible versions, dress standards, music) continues unabated.
- B. For Evangelicals—After attaining great relevancy and even political power in the 1980s through the early 2000s, evangelicalism now appears to be “a mile wide and an inch thick.” Broadly speaking, evangelicals stand for almost nothing and tolerate virtually everything. Most of the enormous mega-churches in the US are of the evangelical variety, and many notable characters in society claim to be evangelical Christians. However, such success seems to have had little positive impact on the culture in general. Evangelicals have succeeded at infiltrating most of society, but the culture seems to have had more impact on them than they had on it. For example, some left-wing evangelicals are now suggesting that the church must become more tolerant toward homosexual conduct and “marriage.”
- C. For Conservative Evangelicals—A middle position between fundamentalism and evangelicalism might be called conservative evangelicalism. This group exemplifies the strengths and weaknesses of both ends of the spectrum. Conservative evangelicals, like fundamentalists, retain their commitment to the Word of God as the inerrant standard for faith and practice. Like evangelicals, they desire to interact in the culture and present a relevant, appealing Gospel message. Conservative evangelicals are somewhat separatistic, not being afraid to criticize those who deny or compromise the Gospel. They tend not to be very concerned about external standards or “worldly” practices. They are less militant and strict than fundamentalists and more loyal to the Bible than evangelicals. E.g., John MacArthur, John Piper, RC Sproul

THE BROAD THEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE 21ST CENTURY – A WORKING TAXONOMY

Names are merely suggestions and may not fit neatly the categories.

Radical Non-Orthodoxy	Neo-orthodoxy	Evangelical Left	Broad Evangelicalism	Evangelical Right	New Image Fundamentalism	Historic Fundamentalism	Hyper Fundamentalism
Black Theology Liberation Theology Reminist Theology Process Theology Liberal Theology ←←←←←←←←	Post-conservative evangelicals *Open theism *Emergent Village *Inclusivism ←←←←←←←←		*The Emerging Church Egalitarian	Strongly Calvinist Some Neo-Calvinists Complementarian	Generally Calvinist "The Emerging Middle" ←←←←←←←←	Mixture of Calvinists and Arminians ←←←←←←←←	Strongly anti-calvinist ←←←←←←←←
Little use for the Bible	The Bible contains the Word of God	The Bible is the Word of God but not inerrant	The Bible is the Word of God and inerrant when culturally understood	The Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God	←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←
No concern for orthodoxy	Revised view of orthodoxy ←←←←←←←←	Personal view of orthodoxy ←←←←←←←←	Minimalist view of orthodoxy	Orthodoxy and orthopraxy connected	Orthodoxy and orthopraxy connected	Orthodoxy produces orthopraxy	Orthopraxy elevated over orthodoxy
←←←←←←←←	Separation from those on the right ←←←←←←←←	Little emphasis on church discipline ←←←←←←←←	Little practice of separation	Strong emphasis on church discipline	Some church discipline	Strong emphasis on church discipline	Over emphasis on separation which is unrelated to church discipline
←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	Little concerns for music issues Lots of CCM	Separation from those who oppose the Gospel and from some errant brothers e.g. open theism	Separation from those who oppose the Gospel and from some errant brothers e.g. open theism	Separation from the disobedient an extension of church discipline	Separation from other fundamentalists
←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	Minimization of doctrinal core – e.g. doctrine of eternal punishment	Mixed view of music From CCM to traditional hymnody	Acceptance of some CCM; old Gospel and traditional hymnody	Blend of Gospel music and traditional hymnody little CCM	Mixture of old Gospel and Southern Gospel music; some CCM
←←←←←←←←	What doctrinal core? ←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	Non-cessationist/pro-charismatic	Emphasis on doctrinal core central to the Gospel	Emphasis on doctrinal core central to the Gospel	Emphasis on central issues inclusive of five fundamentals	Expanded central core plus elevation of extraneous issues – e.g. Bible versions ←←←←←←←←
←←←←←←←←	Non-issue ←←←←←←←←	←←←←←←←←	Some expository preaching	Mixed cessationist/non-cessationist Emphasis on expository preaching	Cessationist/anti-charismatic	Some good expository preaching	Topical preaching
Jürgen Moltmann Rosemary R. Beuther Paul Tillich John Cobb	Karl Barth Emil Brunner H. Richard Niebuhr John Franke	Diversity in preaching I. Howard Marshall Stan Grenz Roger Olson Brian McLaren	Billy Graham Bill Hybels Rick Warren Mark Driscoll J. I. Packer	D. A. Carson John Piper Al Mohler John MacArthur Mark Dever	Stephen Davey? Many young fundamentalists	Tim Jordan Matt Olson M. Minnick David Doran Kevin Bauder John Harrold Chuck Phelps	Clarence Sexson David Cloud D. A. Waite
	Smaller group	Largest group	Smallest group	Smallest group	Smallest group	Smaller group	Largest group

Chart by Jeff Straub with input from Kevin Bauder, Dan Brown and Jon Pratt * July 2009

Christian Fundamentalism

Lesson 7: Challenges Facing Fundamentalism

As fundamentalists endeavor to pass on “the faith” to the next generation, disagreement remains among them regarding the precise nature of “the faith” which is being passed on. One would expect solid agreement on these “fundamental” matters among all self-professed fundamentalists, but regrettably such is not the case. Basic doctrinal disagreements hinder close association and cooperation between the different fundamentalist “camps” (i.e., “historic” vs. “hyper,” as noted in the previous lesson).

We will be considering some “deep” theological issues in this lesson, issues that have divided believers for centuries. We must approach such doctrines with a good degree of humility and grace. On some of these issues, people of good will disagree. And even though they may disagree in theory (or theology), they have been able to extend charity to one another and grant that those on the other side of the issue are still brethren (although seriously mistaken!). We would do well to acknowledge our disagreements on these issues and not readily charge those who take a different position with heresy.

Note further that we are describing below what is typical or common for the two groups within fundamentalism. Exceptions exist; we are painting in broad strokes here. Certain individuals within each group may not precisely fit the characteristics ascribed to it. Yet we believe that the descriptions provided here are generally accurate and fairly stated.

Below are several significant theological questions and answers that differentiate fundamentalist groups. These issues are challenging because they remain as issues that divide people within broader fundamentalism.

I. Salvation at Whose Initiative?

While most would agree that salvation is a gift from God (Eph 2:8), parties disagree regarding who initiates the individual work of salvation. In other words, does God choose man, regenerate him and grant him the gifts of faith and repentance, or does man choose God by his own unaided free will? The issues involved in this debate are multifaceted and complex in that they deal with one’s understanding of man’s depravity, God’s sovereignty, election, and freedom.

- A. Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically hold that man is totally depraved (i.e., the effects of sin have reached into all aspects of humanity—body, mind, will, desires, etc.) so that he is dead in trespasses and sins. As a result, man is unable to respond (to will) of his own initiative to come to Christ (1 Cor 2:14). Salvation, then, requires the divine initiative in any person is to be saved. God has to call the individual and even give him the ability to respond. The distinction between those who believe and those who do not is ultimately placed in God’s hands. The entire process, beginning with foreknowledge and culminating in glorification, is God’s domain; man has no control over it (Rom 8:29-30; cf. John 3:8; Rom 9:15-16). Subsequently, man’s freedom is understood as his ability to make choices consistent with his nature. Ultimately, the sovereignty of God means that he can choose to place his love on those whom he desires and leave the rest to go their own way.

- B. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism typically hold that man’s depravity has been somewhat neutralized so that every man is ultimately impartial to God. His depravity has not rendered him incapable of responding to the Gospel call. He is spiritual dead in sin, but not incapable of making the right spiritual choice. Depravity, in this view, is not “total” but partial, or at least has been partially overcome by God’s grace, which is extended to all people. In any case, because man retains some ability, he may either choose God by accepting Christ or reject God by rejecting Christ. The matter is entirely within the scope of the human will. “God votes for you, Satan votes against you, but you hold the deciding vote.” God is sovereign in that he knows what choice man will make (foreknowledge is simply knowing what will happen) and therefore responds to man’s initiative in salvation by electing those who chose him.
- C. Obviously, these two positions are seriously different; they cannot both be right. Either God is sovereign or man is. Either man is unable to make the right choice because of his sin or he is neutral toward God and fully capable of making the right choice. Either God initiates salvation or man does.

II. How does one present the Gospel?

While all parties agree that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17), there is less agreement regarding how one should properly present the Gospel message. What one believes about man’s depravity and God’s sovereignty has significant impact on this task.

- A. Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically hold that a simple proclamation of the Gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, 1 Cor 15:1-5) should be followed by an invitation to respond by repenting of sin and putting faith in Christ. One presents the message and appeals to the audience to accept it. Whether they accept it or reject it is beyond the control of the messenger. The Holy Spirit must do the work of convicting, convincing, and converting. Only the Spirit, applying the “power” of the Gospel (Rom 1:16) can overcome the deadening effects of depravity. Those who accept the message prove that they are among the elect, all of whom will be saved. Ultimately, the choice to accept the Gospel depends on the work of God in the human heart.
- B. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism typically hold that the messenger has a great responsibility in “drawing in the net” within the evangelistic encounter. The eternal salvation of souls depends on how effectively one communicates the Gospel. They affirm that the Holy Spirit must convince the sinner of his need to repent. But, in the final analysis, repentance and faith is a fully human choice, a function of the will. The influence of the Holy Spirit extends only so far and never biases the human will (which would be unfair; man’s will must be “free,” not influenced or compelled in any way). Since the decision for salvation is based on a neutral human will, whatever measures are necessary to convince that will and elicit a positive response from the individual are legitimate. In other words, the ministry of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner is not quite enough to guarantee a positive response to the Gospel. People are fully capable of resisting the Gospel call and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, emotional appeals, scare tactics, and high-pressure salesmanship are valid if the desired decision for Christ is achieved. A drawn-out emotional appeal at the end of an evangelistic sermon is especially effective in eliciting a decision for Christ. Effective preachers are particularly skilled at manipulating audience members into making appropriate decisions.

- C. The difference between these two approaches ought to be crystal clear. One's approach to evangelism will be directly linked with which pattern one follows. The atmosphere of worship services will also be directly influenced by which approach one adopts.

III. How does one respond to the Gospel?

The ultimate issue at stake in this debate is whether a sinner must necessarily submit to Christ authority at the point of salvation. The issues may be divided many ways, but at root they deal with the principles of Lordship, discipleship, repentance and faith.

- A. Those on the "historic" side of fundamentalism typically hold that salvation requires that the sinner recognize Jesus' claim to be both Lord and Savior (Acts 2:36, 10:36). The repentant sinner is turning to Christ as his master; he is agreeing to become a follower/student/disciple of Jesus. He's denying himself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus (Mt 16:24). As he's trusting in Christ to save him from sin, he's also submitting his life to Christ as his Lord. When one turns to Christ in faith, he's not merely seeking forgiveness of sin; he's turning over his life to a new master—Jesus Christ. At the point of salvation, the repentant sinner must acknowledge the authority of Christ over his life. This is not to suggest that one must clean himself up first or promise total obedience in order to be saved. It is simply an affirmation on the part of the sinner that Jesus is both Lord/Master and Savior.
- B. Those on the "hyper" side of fundamentalism typically hold that the only requirement for salvation is simple faith. By this is meant that one may simply acknowledge the facts concerning salvation. In other words, faith may be defined as simple assent to certain truths—that people are sinful, that Jesus is the Savior who died on the cross and rose again. Anything beyond simple faith is considered to be a work and hence denies the gift of salvation. Repentance is nothing more than a change of mind about Jesus. All appeals to turn away from sin or to yield to Christ's authority are out of place in an evangelistic encounter. These are part of a believers "second" stage in his walk with the Lord—the stage of being dedicated to the Lord (sanctification).
- C. Once again, the two positions cannot be reconciled. One must decide whether concepts such as Lordship and submission are proper within evangelism.

IV. What are the effects of Salvation?

The question at stake in this theological discussion is the necessity of sanctification and good works as evidence of genuine conversion.

- A. Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically hold that salvation is God’s work in the true believer and so it will necessarily evidence itself in good works (i.e., sanctification). If God has begun a “new work,” he will insure that it will come to completion (Phil 1:6). A new creation (2 Cor 5:17) will progressively “put off the old man,” “put on the new man” (Eph 4:22-24), and strive to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). Failure to show works consistent with repentance (cf. Acts 26:20) brings one’s profession of faith into question (at least) or prove one’s claim to salvation was invalid (cf. 1 John 2:3-6).
 - B. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism typically hold that true believers can live without ever exhibiting much fruit of salvation in their lives. In other words, true believers can consistently live “carnally,” as if they are not saved (1 Cor 3:1-3). After all, they did not necessarily acknowledge the Lordship of Christ at the point of salvation, so it is illogical and unfair to expect them to live as if they have made that commitment. People can have genuine spiritual life without submitting to Jesus’ authority. Thus, there are three legitimate spiritual conditions: saved, carnal, and lost. It’s unfortunate if some believers are carnal; but even if they are, we should not doubt their salvation. As long as one at some point made a profession of faith in Christ, he should be assured of his salvation no matter what the quality of his Christian walk (or lack thereof).
 - C. All sides agree that salvation should have remarkable effects on the life of the believer. Some believe these effects are necessary proofs of genuine salvation. Others say that they are expected and hoped for, but really optional. Which position one takes will obviously have significant impact on life and ministry.
- V. How does the believer make spiritual progress?
- Once a person is genuinely saved, what do we expect of him? Does spiritual growth occur suddenly or over time? Is growth the result of spiritual disciplines or the result of “full surrender”? Can the believer reach a plateau of virtual perfection or will the Christian life be one of struggle and pain?
- A. Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically hold that spiritual growth (i.e., sanctification) is progressive, usually occurring slowly and incrementally, a little at a time, from the moment of salvation. As the believer applies spiritual disciplines of the Christian life (i.e., Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, fellowship, worship, service), growth continues. As the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in the services of the church and in one’s personal devotions, the saved person responds by putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man.” A series of small decisions results in major changes over time. A good tree starts producing good fruit. Spiritual set-backs may occur; back sliding is a real possibility. However, a genuine believer will confess his sin, forsake it, and carry on walking with Christ. The Christian life is a struggle, a battle, a race to be run with patience and fortitude. Perfection is impossible this side of heaven. Even spiritually mature believers continue struggling to overcome sin and live a holy lifestyle (cf. Rom 7).

- B. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism likewise typically hold that application of the spiritual disciplines is important for maintaining Christian growth. Also helpful in Christian growth is periodic revival, extended sessions of intensive, hard-hitting preaching under which one expects to make a final surrender or a series of decisions that will change the course of his life. Crisis-point decisions are often necessary to grow. In fact, little is expected of a believer until he makes a life-altering post-salvation commitment to Christ. He will probably continue to live a carnal life until he makes this commitment. After making a full surrender or a complete commitment to Christ, one may then make rapid spiritual progress and potentially attain a “higher plane” of spiritual life. Thus, spiritual growth is driven by crisis-point decisions in addition to the daily walk with God.
 - C. Everyone agrees that spiritual growth is expected of the believer. Carnality is shameful and intolerable. Little growth will occur outside daily participation in the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. But whether growth comes incrementally or through periodic “revival” (or both?) remains a minor point of disagreement.
- VI. Must Christians Persevere in the Faith?
- At question here is whether continuing in faith and good works is proof of salvation. May one be assured of salvation in spite of an ungodly lifestyle, or does continuing unrepentant ungodliness give evidence of an unregenerate state?
- A. Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically hold that a genuine believer will persevere (i.e., continue on) in faith and in good works. The presence of faith and good works give evidence of genuine salvation; without them, one’s profession of faith is questionable at best. God both enables and motivates believers to accomplish God’s “good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Perseverance is a result, not a cause, of genuine salvation. Without evidence of good fruit, one cannot be assured of eternal life. Those who fail to persevere give evidence that their salvation was not genuine. As one writer noted, “The point is not that God guarantees security to everyone who will say he accepts Christ, but rather that those whose faith is genuine will prove their salvation is secure by persevering to the end in the way of righteousness.”
 - B. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism typically hold that one need not persevere in faith and in good works to be assured of salvation. In other words, as long as one professes to believe at some point in his life, he is saved and should not doubt it. The believer should certainly turn away from sin and live righteously, but such is not necessary to be assured of eternal life. Some believers never progress beyond the “carnal” stage of Christianity. Even though they fail to bring forth good fruit, they may be genuinely saved. As one author notes, “Persons who truly believe, even for only an instant, are eternally secure no matter what they do or believe later, even if that includes renouncing the Lord who died for them.”

- C. Perseverance (continuing on in faith and in good works) is either a proof of salvation or it is not. One either expects genuine believers to persevere or one does not. Not much middle ground here.

Summary: Those on the “historic” side of fundamentalism typically (with some exceptions) affirm God’s sovereignty in unconditional election, no-hype evangelism, Lordship salvation, and perseverance of the saints. Those on the “hyper” side of fundamentalism typically (with some exceptions) affirm the human will as sovereign in salvation, employ extended measures in evangelism, preach salvation without submission to Christ or turning from sin, and hold that perseverance is not a proof of genuine salvation.

So What Now?

The aim thus far in this lesson has not necessarily been to persuade the student toward a particular view. Rather, the aim has been to demonstrate that there are significant theological differences in these two understandings of salvation and the expectations of the Christian life. Different theology leads to different practice. Different practice makes it harder for those holding divergent views to get along or cooperate. These viewpoints explain why differences remain among fundamentalists.

To be charitable, perhaps we could conclude that some of the differences are really quite minor, little more than different understandings of words (i.e., semantics). On the other hand, a thoughtful analysis of the theological issues in play lead one to conclude that these issues are quite significant. Is man totally depraved or neutral? Do we use manipulative techniques to elicit a favorable response to the Gospel, or do we communicate the message and trust God for the response? Do we recognize those who persist in unrepentant sin as genuine believers or do such people prove themselves to be unregenerate? On many of these issues, one has to affirm one side or the other; they are mutually exclusive.

Since these biblical, theological, philosophical, and practical matters differentiate the two branches of fundamentalism, it seems unlikely that those from one side will cooperate closely with those on the other side. However, differences need not prohibit some forms of fellowship. These differences have existed within the broader fundamentalist cause since its beginnings and did not originally prevent people with different views from working together for the greater good. Churches of the “historic” and the “hyper” variety can at least recognize one another as legitimate churches. In reality, people are getting saved, grounded in the Scripture, and are growing in Christlikeness in both kinds of churches. Yet the differences, when thoroughly understood, are quite striking.

Lesson 14: Challenges Facing Fundamentalism:

The Issue of the Local Church

One of the interesting historical phenomena associated with the development of the new evangelical movement is the plethora of so-called “para-church” ministries. While such ministries did not originate with the movement, they certainly felt at-home in the movement. When one sets aside God’s Word (the objective truth) and the gospel (for the social gospel) it is only a matter of time before the God-ordained means for fulfillment of the great commission is also ignored. However, there is a grave danger that the present form of fundamentalism forces that led the new evangelicals down the slippery slope of compromise. The truth, the gospel, and the primacy of the local church are all in danger from within our movement. The aim of this lesson is to establish the biblical/theological basis for the primacy of the church.

Does the Bible Teach the Primacy of the Local Church?

It is not uncommon in today’s fundamentalist climate to grant tacit approval to the local church. However, actual commitment to the idea of primacy of the local church carries very little weight. Allegedly, a ministry is a ministry whether it is a camp, college, club, evangelistic team, Christian day school, etc. The question one must ask is whether this is genuinely thinking God’s thoughts after Him (i.e., obedience to God’s revealed will) or is it a dangerous path that contributed to the demise of the new evangelical movement? In other words, what does the Bible teach about the primacy of the local church?

What did Christ Promise to Build? Christ gives a significant promise in Matthew 16:18, a promise to build the church. This promise is significant for several reasons. First, it appears to establish the Christ’s plan for ministry in the time following his death, burial and resurrection (notice the future tense—I will build). In fact, the context of Matthew 16 demonstrates that this promise transpired just prior to Christ’s last days of ministry (cf. 16:21-23). There was going to be a significant change from Temple/Jewish centered worship and the coming church age. Christ gave his pre-authentication and commitment to one ministry model—His church. Secondly, one must not miss the strong nature of this promise. “Ministries” rise and fall, but the church will never fail. Behind God’s ordained means stands the power of omnipotence. Hell itself cannot shake the New Testament church.

The Church and the Great CommissionIn many quarters of fundamentalism, the Great Commission has been equated with any form evangelism for many years. However, upon closer examination, this understanding of the great commission only arises out of a failed diligence in cutting straight the Word of Truth. The command of the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20 is to make disciples who are baptized (united to a local assembly) and continuing in all of Christ's teaching. In other words, the text of the Great Commission does not square with simply taking a missions trip or doing some community service. Furthermore, the connection of Matthew 16:18 and the Great Commission as being entrusted to the local church can be clearly seen in the writings of Luke. Luke's version of the Great Commission is found in Luke 24:46-49. Luke subsequently records a second volume (known as Acts) to demonstrate the fulfillment of this commission in the first century (Acts 1:1-5). In this context, then, Luke re-states the Great Commission (Acts 1:7-8), and then records the establishment of the local New Testament church (Acts 2—esp. 2:38-43). Luke then records throughout the remainder of the book the how the early church fulfilled this mission through establishing other local churches (note Luke's summary statements—2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31). One should not overlook nor look lightly upon the fact that the Great Commission itself (i.e., the plan, the means, and the fulfillment) is founded upon the authority of the risen Lord (or Despot)—Matthew 28:18. In other words, this does not seem simply to be a trivial matter in the mind of God.

The Guardian of the TruthThe church has been entrusted with the enormous task of preserving the truth from generation to generation. Paul instructs Timothy of this very truth in 1 Timothy 3:15 and one must not overlook the context of Paul's statement. The church is the "pillar and support of the truth" and so it needs qualified leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13). Furthermore, the danger mentioned subsequent to 1 Timothy 3:15 is that of false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-5). Hence, there is a need for the church to preserve the truth by the proclamation of the truth (1 Timothy 4:6-16—note especially vv. 6, 11, 13, 15, and 16). It is precisely this context—the context of preserving the truth within the context of the local church--in which much of the New Testament came into existence.

God's Gifts are for the ChurchGod has sovereignly bestowed gifts upon each true believer (consider the "each one" of Romans 12:3,6; 1 Corinthians 12:7,11; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10). The passages that deal with the gifts for the believer are all within the context of local church ministry (cf. Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; and 1 Peter 4). In other words, God has sovereignly planned for each believer to participate in the context of the local church so that the Great Commission might be fulfilled. When professing believers fail in their commitment to the church it is a defection from God's ordained means to the fulfillment of His plan. In other words, the means or the "how" of God's plan is important—God cared enough to equip every believer for it!

Does the Bible Teach Church Membership?

It is granted up from that church membership is not explicitly commanded in the Scriptures. However, does this mean that it is not necessary? One of the important principles of Bible interpretation is to systematize or correlate God's truth. In other words, Bible students have a responsibility to harmonize (bring together) in a reasonable manner what God has revealed. The doctrine of the Trinity is one such harmonization—i.e., there is no specific text which explicitly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, but the correlation of God's Word definitively and assuredly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. Church membership is similar to the Trinity in that, though not explicitly commanded, it is assuredly taught in the context of the New Testament local church. For instance, the doctrine of church membership can be surmised from the fact that the early church kept the numbers (Acts 2:41; 4:4) and maintained special "rolls" (1 Timothy 5:9). Furthermore, the early selection of leaders "from among you" certainly teaches that there were a group of believers committed to a group (Acts 6:2-5). Again, the whole idea of New Testament baptism speaks to the issue of membership (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). Finally, the entire principle of church discipline is predicated upon the principle of church membership (responsibilities and privileges within the church are denied to those who are actively living in sin—1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Why is there no explicit imperative to join a church? One author succinctly notes that non-membership was completely foreign to New Testament thought. "The necessity of membership in the local church is never questioned in the New Testament. It is taken for granted. Had we asked the believers of the Apostolic period whether it was essential to join a church, they would not know what we were talking about. Every believer became a member of a church. It was involved in the very profession he made in Christ...there is no authority for abandoning the local church altogether for a purely individualistic Christian experience. The very Christian profession involves fellowship with other Christians." In other words, the Scriptures nowhere teach the "hitchhiker" or "beach bum" mentalities of non-commitment and freedom from responsibility often found in today's Christianity.

So What Now?

The Pastor does not own the church, nor does the membership. God owns the church. In fact, God owns everything. Sadly, in spite of the overwhelming testimony of the Word of God to the primacy of the local church, many Christians acts as practical atheists in this matter by maintaining a rebellious and autonomous attitude toward the local church mindset. Ultimately this defection, though, is a defection from God and not God's messenger. For God is the one who has planned, commissioned, established, gifted, and communicated to the local church. Furthermore, submission to the idea of the primacy of local church without it affecting the particulars of life is not true submission. This means that the daily priorities of life must demonstrate a commitment to God's plan for this day—the local church (see Ephesians 5:25-32). Fundamentalists, as guardians of the truth, must be carefully to maintain the truth through the means God has proclaimed—not through Bible Colleges, camps, evangelistic teams, Christian day-schools, etc., but through God's Church. Failure to do so will lead the movement down the path well worn by the liberals and new evangelicals—the path of destruction.