

## Fundamentalists

Fundamentals, Fundamentalism, and Fundamentalists, while proceeding from a common root (the Latin *fundus*, meaning bottom), and all relating to a view of Christianity, are terms of increasing distaste even among sound evangelical Christians.

Fundamentals is a term given to certain beliefs held to be essential to Evangelical Christianity.

Fundamentalism denotes a movement in theology about the turn of the century which arose to oppose the theological Modernism or Liberalism then developing and being popularized. It attempted to do so principally by re-affirming the "fundamentals." The "fundamentals" varied somewhat in different sectors, but basically they centered around the following:

1. Divine inspiration and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures.
2. The deity of Christ, His virgin birth and the Holy Trinity.
3. The accuracy of Biblical history and literal miracles.
4. The creation of Adam, his historicity as a literal man, his fall and the subsequent depravity of his posterity.
5. The substitutionary blood atonement of Christ.
6. The necessity of regeneration of believers.
7. The personal return of Christ.
8. The bodily resurrection of all men and eternal judgment.

Fundamentalist, however, while originally defining a man who held to the fundamentals, has come to have an odious connotation. It has, in J. I. Packer's words, "long been a term of ecclesiastical abuse, a theological swear word. And in such a swear word, the thing that matters is not the meaning of the word, but the feeling of contempt it expresses." While Modernists and Liberals were the first to hold Fundamentalists in contempt (and indeed, they did so because of their hatred for the fundamentals), Fundamentalists have themselves earned a great deal of the derision which is hurled their way.

I do not hope to further impoverish the already poor image of Fundamentalists in the evangelical community. In fact, I doubt that I will say anything in this paper that those to whom I refer will not be proud to admit. We owe much to Fundamentalists. If they have not always fought well, fairly and scripturally sound and honest, at least they have fought. And if their fighting produced little or nothing of significant value in stemming the tide of Liberalism in the mainline denominations, at least they continued preaching areas of truth those denominations have long forsaken. They did preserve a gospel through the last several decades that reveals a Christ Who saves sinners.

My problem with Fundamentalists is not with their Fundamentalism. It seems to me that they are not fundamental enough. I have no objection to their fight against Modernism. The Fundamentalists are themselves too "modern" to suit me. I heartily join in their denouncement of Liberalism, but they themselves are too liberal.

While saying these things and preparing to say more, I want to quickly state that I am not speaking of all men who believe the fundamentals. Many are thoroughly fundamental in every sense of the word. Nor am I speaking of all men who call themselves "Fundamentalists." However, I think the exceptions to this group will be quite rare. Many sound Bible preachers and scholars believe all the foundational scripture truths, but would never allow themselves to be classified as a "Fundamentalist." My target is that group of men who glory in classifying themselves and Fundamentalists, who call their churches "Fundamental," and who participate in a narrowly defined fellowship of "Fundamentalism." Most of these who deliberately choose to display such a brand will fit the shoes I am about to fashion.

### Fundamentalists are Not Fundamental Enough

There is nothing more fundamental than God. Truth does not begin with the Bible, divine inspiration of the scriptures: it begins with deity, with God Himself. "In the beginning God . . ." I do not attempt to prove God from the Bible; I prove the Bible from God. A Bible means nothing to a man who either does not believe in God, or who has so low a view of God that he cares not for what He says or what pleases or displeases Him. On the other hand, if I establish the fact of God, then the Bible becomes a logical necessity. If there is a God, then He must rule, and to rule He must speak, make His law and will known to His subjects. The Bible, then, in its divine inspiration and infallibility becomes a natural complement to a sound doctrine of God.

A low view of God is reflected in an increasing militancy among Fundamentalists in opposing divine Sovereignty. Once again, they are not fundamental enough. The Bible explicitly states that God is holy, God is just, God is love, God is wise, God is spirit, God is good, and God is merciful. But nowhere in the scriptures does the bible say, "God is sovereign." Why is this? That is a truth too fundamental to state. It is inherent in the term "God." God does not have to be all those things the scripture says He is in order to be God, therefore we must be told He is a God Who is wise, good, holy, etc. But He cannot be God unless He is sovereign. It makes no more sense to teach that God is sovereign than to state that woman is female, water is wet, fire is hot, ice is cold or the blind cannot see.

Sovereignty is the *one* fundamental quality of God, yet the one quality or attribute Fundamentalists will not allow Him. They insist on a "limited sovereignty," either by God's design or man's power to frustrate His will. According to them, God is either unwilling or unable to perform all that He would like to see come to pass. The scriptures declare differently. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). ". . . him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11).

Are you fundamental enough to believe in the God of Genesis 1, Who is preeminent and prevenient, Who is greater than all, and Who is the first cause of all things, Who is absolutely sovereign, Whose decrees are altogether free and uncaused by any source outside Himself, and Whose created universe must bow to Him? A God Who has never been frustrated or successfully opposed, and Whose will cannot be successfully resisted? If not, then you do not have a God big enough to merit any confidence in any scripture He might have inspired, and your doctrine of divine inspiration is worthless.

Included in Fundamentalism's assault on divine sovereignty is a refusal to accept the Bible doctrine of Unconditional Election. That is, God's choice of certain persons to salvation not conditioned on foreseen faith or virtue in the elect themselves. Fundamentalists, unable to deny the doctrine of Election, yet unwilling to permit God's sovereign freedom in it, make it a subjective election contingent upon God's foreseeing the believer's choice. The point at which they are not fundamental enough here is in the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. Foreknowledge, to them, is something God learned, something He looked ahead and found out about, and something which He had nothing to do with its happening. In describing such a view, a fundamental paper recently stated "You can foreknow a tragedy without planning it." That may be true of man, but it cannot be true of God. God is the *cause* of things. He does not learn of that which He decrees. If something is happening in the universe which He did not decree, then there is a causative agent in operation out of His control. If such be true, He is no longer sovereign God and none of us are safe in Him. God does not *get* knowledge, He *is* knowledge. This is how John spoke of Him as the Word. All reality is embodied in Him. Fundamentalists would reduce Him from creator to prophet (exactly what the cults have done with Jesus).

We are elect according to God's foreknowledge, but we must not regard foreknowledge, in respect to God, as advance information which He learned. Consider Acts 2:23: "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, yet have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Did God merely foresee the rejection of Christ by the Jews, or did He determine it? He determined it. Christ is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" (Isaiah 53:10). Because it was fixed in His determinate counsel He "foreknew" it. Only what God determines can be certain and foreknown. *That* is fundamental.

### **Fundamentalists Are Too Liberal**

I use the term "liberal" in the primary sense of the word. I do not accuse Fundamentalists of denying *their* fundamentals and subscribing to the heresies of classic religious liberals. They are, however, too liberal, too generous, with their view of man. They lavish upon him abilities and powers the scriptures refuse to grant him. They refuse to limit the capabilities of man as God has. In this they are more liberal than the Bible.

The Bible declares man to be totally depraved . . . all bad . . . his faculties and senses wholly given to evil (Isaiah 59, Romans 3). As such, he seeks not God. He is not only incapable of doing or performing any good, He is unable to choose any good. He is a slave to sin (Romans 5:21, 6:20). He is unable to stop sinning, and equally unable to love or do righteousness. The scriptures pronounce him spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1, 5) and completely unable to come to Christ until quickened and drawn by the Holy Spirit (John 5:21, 6:44).

This narrow view of man is too conservative for most Fundamentalists. They would bestow upon him what God does not. They would have Adam's fall make him almost depraved, but leave him enough good intentions to choose the good and reject the bad. They believe the devil's lie of Genesis 3:5. According to them, fallen man knows and can sincerely desire to be good, and if he will just choose to do good (and he can), God will make him good. They will not have man to be spiritually dead. He is alive enough to cooperate in his own spiritual birth. He makes the first step by repentance and faith, then God does the rest.

Ironically, what Fundamentalists liberally bestow upon man, they rob from God. They will grant man what they refuse God. God's election of the sinner, they say, is caused by the sinner's election of God. That is, God looked down through the years and found out who would choose Him, and chose all who chose Him. That robs God of any choice at all, and makes a mockery of the doctrine of divine election. If I am told whom I must choose, then my choice is not real. Choice (and will) *can not* be absolutely free in *both* God and man. The choice of one must be subject to the choice of the other. So who will the Fundamentalists be liberal with? Upon whom will they bestow free will and free choice? They will generously give it to fallen man, and that at the expense of a Sovereign God.

Fundamentalists are also liberal in their views of determinism, far more liberal than the scriptures. All things are caused, determined by something. Nothing is causeless. As sure as there is an effect, just as certain there is a cause. The scriptures are very narrow and fundamental in this. God is the first cause of all things; and all incidents, though not ends in themselves, are part of the fulfillment of His ultimate decree. He works all things after the counsel of His Own will. He determines and works all events so that they will result in good for the called, His chosen people (Romans 8:28).

That will not do for most Fundamentalists. Too narrow, too restricted. God, according to them, causes some things, but not all. They award the power to determine things upon man, upon social circumstances, chance, "the times," environment, heredity, biology, the weather, and a host of other entities or agencies over which they refuse God absolute control. Their views of the cause of things is so liberal and uncertain, it is a wonder they can have faith in God for anything. With such an abundance of powers ready to hinder and overthrow the will of God, it is futile to pray as the Lord instructed, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Fundamentalists are also far too liberal in the power they ascribe to preachers and evangelistic methods and techniques. While it is true that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and that God uses men to accomplish His will and purpose, the final work of regeneration, the infusing of spiritual life, is God's alone. And the Bible knows nothing of the scheming, the conniving, the gadgets, trinkets and claptrap which present day evangelists employ.

These self-styled purveyors of their own brand of orthodoxy have cleverly devised schemes, methods, and means whereby they can win converts whether God intervenes or not. Adopting the psychological devices of the advertising and sales industry, they manipulate the emotions, carnal lusts, fears and ambitions of men until they have arranged a conversion of sorts. This sort of thing goes on with or without the Holy Spirit. It really doesn't matter to them, since man is big enough to do it all himself.

### **Fundamentalists Are Too Modernistic**

Modernism, in theology, is a movement by churchmen in an attempt to reconcile the Bible with "discoveries" of modern "science" in the fields of geology, archeology, biology, anthropology and social theories. It attempts to explain the supernatural by natural phenomena, superstitions, old wives' tales, mis-translations, or plain deceptive hoaxes. We are not accusing Fundamentalists of these sins. They have their own brand of Modernism.

They are too modern in their methods and means. This is an extension of what we observed under liberalism. The Bible and church history know of only two means of evangelization: Preaching the word and prayer. There are many ways to preach the word. In the pulpit, on the streets, in homes, person to person, by voice, letters, books, through teaching, exhortation, pleading, reasoning, rebuke, declaration and prophesying. But it is all preaching of the word.

This is too old fashioned for most fundamentalists. Today's modern evangelism has taken its cue, not from the Bible, or church history, but from (more than any one figure) D. L. Moody. Moody was a shoe salesman, and learned he could "win souls" successfully using the same methods used to sell shoes. It is a modern innovation.

Must we go into detail? The professional publicity campaigns using all the gimmicks of Madison Avenue which appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The glittering array of "personalities," entertainer, athletes, politicians and famous "ex-hoodlums." Has there been anything like it except in modern times? (I know that fundamentalists are not the only ones guilty of these.) The invitation to "come forward and accept Christ" is itself less than two centuries old . . . totally unknown before . . . and did not really come into prominence until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The "old fashioned mourners' bench" is really a modern psychological gimmick effective in creating a public display which manipulates the emotions of others, causing them to respond also. And although God may use some of these "invitation" systems, the fact remains, they are "modern," and not essential to sound evangelism.

Plain, straightforward preaching will no longer do. It has to be dandied up with puppet shows, "magic," ventriloquist acts (the preacher and another dummy), chalk talks and religious movies (a fourth-rate Hollywood style production where a bunch of irreligious hypocrites pretend to pray, preach or be something they are not). All this modern stuff has accommodated itself to these modern times, since the old ways are not effective enough.

I will not take time to enlarge on multitudes of other modernistic adaptations, such as songs being keyed to the whiney, bluesy, night club tempo of popular social rot. Everywhere you look, the old paths are being forsaken for modern ones.

Most Fundamentalists are eschatological Modernists. That is, they incorporate an article in their creeds that demands a belief in an end-time system that is the most modern of all. I am speaking of Schoffield Dispensationalism, the teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church and two separate peoples of God, Jew and Gentile. This system has no place in historic Christianity at all, and did not appear until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet ignorant men have the audacity to include it in their "Fundamentals." Many people, like myself, have been brought up to believe that this was the only view of the Second coming worthy of Bible-believing Christians, and that all other views were those of Modernists and Liberals. How shocking to learn that Pretribulation Rapture Premillennialism, the creed of Fundamentalism, is the modern theory!

Finally, it should be noted that Fundamentalism is itself a modern movement. Slightly more modern, if you please, than Modernism itself, since it arose to refute Modernism. The false presupposition of the movement is that there was nothing already in existence equipped and prepared to refute such lies as the Modernists espoused. Is such a thing possible? Could it be true that the lies of Modernism are really new and that God's people have never opposed such attacks as in recent years?

Not at all. The devil has no new lies, just new dressings for old ones. The Christian gospel, the whole counsel of God always has been, and yet is, perfectly suited to strike down every subtle demonic lie. A wholesome, well-rounded diet of the word of God will do it. We need no special segment of Christianity "separated" out with a special commission to fight a particular current evil. All the church must be equipped at all times to face any false doctrine that comes along. No modern movement ordained and fitted for such a special crusade is necessary.

It must now be evident that Fundamentalism does not have a well-rounded "full" gospel, but some broken fragments of selected truth which they use as a rallying banner. These are embellished with a few extra-scriptural and modern innovations to fill in the holes and attempt to compensate for ignored truth. It is an isolated section of the orchestra with an incomplete score, loudly attempting to drown out a discordant sound which was never a part of the orchestra at all.

Such is always true of religious crusades for or against certain "causes" within outward Christian profession. The "Fundamentals" were formulated with respect to the "errors" and went no further than to refute them, just as the Five Points of Calvinism were formulated in respect to the Five Points of Arminianism. And as many Calvinists who preach and center all their activities around the Five Points, so do Fundamentalists camp about their limited Fundamentals. One is as sick an spiritually anemic as the other.

In closing, let me once again express my gratitude for preachers of fundamental truth, even those who call themselves Fundamentalists. Without them we would have precious few gospel preaching churches today! (Even fewer than we now actually have). I only wish they were more fundamental, less liberal, and more primitive than modern.