

Where are Today's Fundamentalists?

By Evangelist Van Billingsley

Reprinted from "The Story of Jesus Newsletter" Summer 2007 Edition

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set. -- Proverbs 22:28

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...

-- Jeremiah 6:16

Few people today even know what a real Fundamentalist is. The term has been stolen, misapplied and dragged through the mud by the media for many years. Though once understood by the public, this term must be expanded to "Christian Fundamentalist" to even get one's mind in the proper context.

I've read among the many outrageous articles about our heritage comments such as, "Fundamentalism is a phenomenon which emerged in Christianity around 1900" and "Fundamentalism is 'The new kid on the block.'" While the actual word "Fundamentalist" is only about a century old, it is not we who have changed or emerged with some new idea. It was the advent of modernism and liberalism into the churches and Christian institutions that required the new title of identity on those who held to the truth.

With the advent of Darwinism and the popularity of the evolution myth, the birth of modern translations from the Alexandrian text and the Westcott and Hort Greek text, and the emergence of so-called theologians who denied sound theology, modernism and liberalism had infiltrated Christianity with these worldly views and philosophies. The great men of God in that day who fought these new trends in Christianity referred to the old time way and truth of God's Word as the fundamentals of the faith.

This word "Fundamental" originated in the "Middle English" period from the root word "Fund" meaning "bottom" from which we get our word "Foundation." It referred to a foundation, basis or groundwork. This is also the origin of the word

"Fund" in reference to finances, as well as "Found" and "Founder" for establishing anything. According to "The Oxford Universal Dictionary" the word "Fundamental" was first used around the year 1637 meaning "A leading primary principle, rule, law, or article, which serves as the groundwork of a system; an essential part." It was first used in music in the 1700's.

One of the most defining moments in early Fundamentalism and this new title is the publishing of a work edited by R.A. Torrey, A.C. Dixon and others entitled "The Fundamentals." The work began in 1909 and was published in four volumes in 1917. Many people refer to the fundamentals of the faith as the so-called cardinal doctrines. "Cardinal" comes from an old word meaning "hinge" and a cardinal truth or cardinal doctrine is that which something hinges upon. For the Christian faith, these are often described as the five or six fundamentals including the inspiration and infallibility of the scripture, the deity of Christ and His virgin birth, the literal bodily resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the believer, His substitutionary death on the cross for the payment of sin, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. All of this basically amounts to a literal interpretation and belief of the entire Word of God. While some can simplify this into five or six points, the four volume work of "The Fundamentals" contains ninety chapters. The fundamental principles of the Word of God cannot be limited to a few doctrines or even those relating directly to salvation, but whether or not you accept the entire Bible as God's infallible Word. From the very beginning

this included things such as the literal account of the creation, the global flood and the moral law and standards of holiness. While those who attempt to rewrite history call Fundamentalism a new phenomenon, "Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia" (1986 ed.) says, "Until the middle of the 19th Century, its principle beliefs were held by almost all orthodox Protestant denominations, particularly by evangelical denominations."

With the adoption of the word "Fundamentals" in reference to our firm belief in God's Word, those who held to these beliefs were soon labeled "Fundamentalist." "Oxford" defines "Fundamentalism" as "Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of Scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith: opposed to liberalism and modernism." Also according to "Oxford," the first known use of this term was in 1923; but Earle E. Cairns, in his "Christianity Through the Centuries," credits the first use of the term "Fundamentalist" to editor C.C. Laws in the July 1, 1920 edition of his Baptist paper, "Watchman Examiner."

Fundamentalism had a great impact on our nation's history. You will not read any credible secular synopsis on Fundamentalism without reading of the famous "Monkey Trials" over the evolution myth, the most famous being the trial of John T. Scopes for teaching evolution in the public schools of Tennessee. Shortly after these trials, Fundamentalism faded from the secular arena and "The Universal Standard Encyclopedia" (1957 ed.) says it "was practically confined to Baptist congregations, especially to those of the Southern States." This statement points directly to our Independent Fundamental Baptist roots. It was during that first half of the 20th Century that all of our Independent Fundamental Baptist forefathers entered the ministry, faced these conflicts within their own schools and associations and founded the churches and ministries we cherish and celebrate today. Just as that encyclopedia indicated, the only true Fundamentalism

you'll find today is basically within our Fundamental Baptist churches.

It wasn't until recent years that the meaning was diluted by applying it to radical Muslims, cults, and even the liberals and modernists of our day. More recent definitions tend to use negative words such as extremist, radical and militant to define Fundamentalism. With the masses who are identified with Fundamentalism, any leader who falls into, or is caught in sin, scandal or even accused, is portrayed as a blight or smear on Fundamentalism. When I was in my first year of college, a young lady on my job ask me if I'd heard what those Fundamentalists were saying, referring to a cult in the news predicting the rapture to be within days. I quickly informed her those were not Fundamentalists, but they were either claiming the title or the media had tagged them with it. It's because of this confusion that Dr. Bob Jones, III proposed abandoning the term for a new one such as "Preservationist," but I say we've given up enough ground as it is! Let's keep our identity and stand up to the challenges we face today.

True Christian Fundamentalists are noted for many things in the outside world. It's not just a few doctrines which distinguish us from the rest, but the fact that we believe the Word of God from cover to cover and practice it regardless of the trends of our day. "Encyclopedia Britannica" (1986 ed.) points out that "Most Fundamentalists do not smoke or drink alcoholic beverages and usually do not dance or attend movies and plays." An article at "Catholic.com" criticizes us for our "...strictures on drinking, gambling, dancing, and smoking" which it calls "Their rules — non-biblical rules." The fact is, Fundamentalists have always took a strong stand on not only cardinal Bible doctrines, but strong Bible standards. These are standards of worship, conduct and appearance.

Christian Fundamentalists have always stood against changes introduced into their own ranks which shift away from scriptural teachings or practices. Today, we see liberal theologians and Bishops quoted in the

news media mocking the Word of God and those who believe it. We are puzzled at why anyone would devote their lives and livelihoods to a Bible which they do not believe. It is obvious they are hirelings in it for the paychecks or the personal power they may achieve. Maybe they use the power and influence of the gospel to then substitute their own philosophy and views. Whatever the case, we rarely come face to face with one of these modernists or liberals; they seem to always be some obscure voice quoted in the secular media. They are not pastoring our churches and teaching in our Bible colleges. This was not the case for our forefathers of the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement. They were in schools being led and taught by the Bible deniers. They were in local Baptist Associations controlled by these liberals and often associated with churches pastored by these modernists. They faced men who said it was not possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit and refused "Old Time Religion" and "Old Fashioned Preaching." Our great leaders of the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement such as Dr. John R. Rice, Dr. Oliver B. Greene, Dr. Harold B. Sighthler and Dr. Lee Roberson took a stand and pulled away from the liberals and modernists founding churches, ministries and institutions to make a difference for our generation. While the secular historians write that the Fundamentalists lost the battle, we know that the battle was won in our ranks. We have churches and institutions where those old liberal and modernist teachings seem foreign to us. They seem simply as ramblings of unbelievers and outsiders to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can thank our leaders of the past for this victory and heritage left to us. At the same time we have new battles to fight, new challenges to face, new attacks being made on true Christianity and Godliness. We cannot truly claim to be the Fundamentalists of our day simply because we hold to those fundamentals of our faith which were being attacked a century ago, while we accept the modernist and liberal influences attacking Christianity and the

Word of God today. Just as our forefathers faced attacks within their own ranks, we too have issues among us which need Godly men to rise against while taking a stand for the truth. There are things being accepted and even promoted in our own churches and schools which should have no place with the people of God. We need today's Fundamentalists to stand up and say, "I will take a stand; I will dare to be different."

While those on the other side are changing methods and tactics to conform to the changes of the day, "changing with the times," as they say, we by necessity must take our stands against new and different issues that arise. There are different attacks from which we must defend the Gospel and the truth of God's Word. I know there are others, but in our Fundamental circles today, I see three main areas in which most will pick and choose upon what they will take a stand. These three being Bible translations, music, and dress standards. These are some of the predominate issues we face within our ranks and many are forsaking the old paths in these areas. There are some such as one large radio network and some universities who claim Fundamentalism and take a strong stand against contemporary music but insist on accepting modern translations or perversions of the Bible. Others will take a strong stand on the KJV while embracing contemporary music, so-called Christian rock and contemporary worship. Some stand strong on the KJV and music while seeing no reason to dress differently from the world.

We need today's Fundamentalists to take a stand against all liberalism, modernism and worldliness coming into the church. I do not have space to elaborate on these issues, so I'll summarize them as best I can.

They claim to want a Bible that is easier to understand, but we know all modern translations come from corrupt manuscripts which have been pen-knifed to attack the fundamental doctrines of the faith. As for being easier to understand, the way our society is headed, we'll soon need a wordless picture book version.

Where our Fundamental forefathers fought ritualistic formalism in worship, we face the battle over contemporary worship. Our services are influenced far more by the worlds entertainment industry than by the Spirit of God. Even in the services of our most Fundamental groups we've begun to applaud everything in the service as though it is a performance. I may applaud children after a special program or even adults in certain situations, but in a regular worship service I do not expect the singer or speaker to be on the platform for a performance nor should we treat them as such from the congregation. You may think my words here to be harsh or personal, but you must admit, not many years ago this performance atmosphere was nonexistent in Fundamental church services. I know the Bible refers to clapping hands and praising God, and I've known many Christians, especially preachers to do so while shouting and praising God. That is far different from this contemporary entertainment and performance atmosphere I am referring to. Some are even bringing in the contemporary Christian music and so-called Christian rock (which is like saying Christian beer or Christian porn). Today's Fundamentalists must keep the command of Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed..." We should never attempt to conform the things of God to fit this ungodly world. We should take care to guard the music brought up within our own heritage as well. We need men who will draw the line when southern gospel sounds more like the honky-tonk than church, when it moves the foot before it

moves the heart and when it gets you to the Saturday night singing but not to Sunday School or prayer meeting.

The third area which is forsaken by almost all today is the area of dress standards. It's a shame that most Christians see no cause to dress differently than the world. There are very few who do not place worldly styles and personal comfort above honouring God. God's word teaches two areas of concern for our clothing. First our clothing should cover our nakedness as defined in the scripture. Then our clothing should show a distinction between male and female. It's a disgrace that most Fundamental Christians today no longer see a need for there to be a difference in the clothing of a male and a female. The world's view promotes no distinction between man and woman to the extreme, even in partners, relationships and marriage. It is frightening how far the world's philosophy has penetrated into the church!

So where are today's Fundamentalists? In a day when the praised philosophy is thinking outside the box, many in the church follow this trend into thinking outside the Book. When our box is the Word of God, it's time we as Christians get back inside the box. This may seem a lost cause for those who have gone so far as to throw the box away. In this postmodern society we need some true "Modern Fundamentalists" who will stand for the fundamental principles of Godliness being tossed aside by our "Pseudo-Fundamentalists" of today. This is a call to the people of God to get back inside the box; get back inside the Book!

© Copyright 2007 by Van Billingsley

Evangelist Van Billingsley

"Proclaiming The Story of Jesus"

1906 South First Avenue

Lanett, Alabama 36863

(334)644-4913

(706)585-2026

vanb@mindspring.com

www.sojministries.com
