

The Failure of Fundamentalism

by Phil Johnson

The author critiques the fundamentalist movement for its failure to focus on fundamental doctrines and its shift from theology to culture, and calls for a new movement that is guided by biblical principles and truth.

Duration: 1:15:29

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14

Topics: "Fundamentalism"

Description

The sermon transcript describes the speaker's experience at a college chapel where various unconventional and questionable preaching methods were employed. The low point was when a speaker debunked the five points of Calvinism, promoting the idea that sinners have the power to convert themselves, which is considered heresy. The speaker criticizes the fundamentalist movement in America for not properly stewarding the essential doctrines of the faith, such as the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, penal substitution, bodily resurrection, and biblical miracles. The transcript concludes by mentioning a speech given by Dr. Kevin Bouter, a fundamentalist who offers a thoughtful analysis of what is wrong with fundamentalism and desires to see it return to its true path.

Transcript

During this hour, we'll be talking about the failure of the fundamentalist movement in the 20th century. Just from the title of this seminar and all, which, by the way, I did not choose, somebody else made that title. I thought, some of you think I'm going to come in here so hostile to fundamentalism that I thought maybe I should wear a Kevlar vest and a plastic raincoat.

But I opted not to do that, so please don't throw anything, I'm not protected. But it's true, you use a word like fundamentalism these days, and immediately you're in trouble. And I'm going to spend some time trying to give definition to that term, fundamentalism, in a moment, but I want to say at the very outset that the kind of fundamentalism I'm dealing with in this session is the movement that practices and insists on strict second and third degree separation.

What I have in mind are the kind of fundamentalists who wouldn't even attend a conference like this because they would consider John MacArthur and Grace Community Church as new evangelical. And so, that exempts most of you IFCA guys, because you've kept John MacArthur as a member in your organization. But you know that according to the rest of the fundamentalist movement, that makes you new evangelicals rather than fundamentalists anyway.

And so, you're permitted to consider yourself exempt from some of my criticisms here. I do need to acknowledge that some of what I am going to say about the fundamentalist movement doesn't necessarily apply to moderate fundamentalist groups like the IFCA and the GARB. And so, I say that because I know some of you guys are there.

I don't want you to feel too targeted. I do recognize that the fundamentalist movement is a large and varied movement. There is not just one fundamentalist movement, but there are many, maybe thousands of smaller groups within fundamentalism, and most of them don't get along with each other.

And so, fundamentalism isn't the sort of monolithic movement that you can critique fairly. I'm going to try to be fair, but I'll admit up front that I am painting with a broad brush, and I'm doing it deliberately because of time constraints, and I don't have the time to qualify everything and exempt the IFCA and the GARB from everything. So, I give you all permission just to pick and choose as you listen to me which criticisms might or might not apply to the particular fundamentalist groups that you belong to.

But at the very least, I also recognize that some of the issues, most of the issues that I'm raising in this hour have already been recognized to some degree by groups like the IFCA and the GARB, and these groups are trying to deal with some of these things. But at the same time, because you IFCA types tend to be willing to grapple with the kinds of issues that we're raising here, your credentials, you know this, your credentials as fundamentalists are often disputed by the more hardcore fundamentalists who seriously regard groups like the IFCA as tainted with New Evangelicalism. And it's that spirit of hardcore fundamentalism that I'm critiquing primarily in this section.

And so for those guys here who have always considered themselves fundamentalists, you don't need to feel like you're under attack. Actually, I'm on your side. And in fact, let me say this.

From the title of the seminar, again, those of you who don't know me might assume that I am someone who's hostile to the principles of fundamentalism, and that is not the case. In the classic and historic sense of the word, I am a fundamentalist. I've never been really a member of the fundamentalist movement, but I have always had an interest in the movement, and I've always had a deep sympathy for the true principles of historic fundamentalism.

And here's what I mean by that. I believe wholeheartedly in the authority and the inerrancy of Scripture, and I am quite willing to be militant in defense of the gospel. And some of you who may have listened to me in years past know what I mean.

I'm not afraid to stick my foot in it, and I'm not reluctant to defend the gospel. And in fact, I believe as Christians, we have a duty to contend earnestly for the faith. Whenever the vital truths of the gospel are under attack, it's our duty.

We can't sit by silently and ignore things. That's wrong. That's sinful.

We have a duty to contend for the faith. And I recognize that there is a core of truth that is absolutely essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that when someone's teaching deliberately rejects or fatally compromises any of those essential truths, true Christian fellowship is impossible. And seeking fellowship, seeking any kind of spiritual fellowship with people who deny the essentials of Christianity is absolutely out of the question.

And I'm not willing to pretend that someone who rejects the essentials of the gospel is my brother or sister in Christ, and I would not knowingly align myself in ministry or in Christian fellowship with a person like that in the name of Christian unity. That's not a popular stance today, but that is what I believe. The doctrines I would deem fundamental include, but, and I stress this, they're not limited to these.

One, the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Two, the doctrine of Christ's virgin birth. Three, and this is a big one, the principle of substitutionary atonement.

Four, the bodily resurrection of Christ. And five, the literal truth of all the miraculous elements of Scripture. And historically, all authentic fundamentalists have been united in their affirmation of those five doctrines as truths that are essential to the gospel.

Those are sometimes called the five fundamentals. And if you, many of you heard my seminar yesterday on justification by faith, you know already that I would also insist that the doctrine of justification by faith, the principle of sola fide, is also an essential truth of the gospel. In fact, I would put the doctrine of justification at the head of the list.

And if time permits in this hour, I did it yesterday, but I'll do it again, explain why I think that's such an important issue, and it's especially an important issue as far as historic fundamentalism is concerned. But, in other words, what I'm saying is that in the historic and original sense of the word, I am a fundamentalist at heart, and I've always been since the day of my conversion. This is not some new conviction for me.

This is what I've always believed. And yet, I was never part of the fundamentalist movement. Why? Well, because it was obvious, even when I first became a Christian in 1971, it was obvious to me then that fundamentalism, and I'm talking now about the visible, organized, identifiable movement made up of men and churches who proudly label themselves fundamentalists, that movement in 1971 was already seriously dysfunctional.

In 1971, the most vocal and visible figures in the movement were men like Jack Hiles and John R. Rice. And, in fact, I grew up in Tulsa, which is well known as the home of every charismatic aberration, but the house where my family lived at the time was actually less than a mile from the international headquarters of Billy James Hargis, who was a fundamentalist radio preacher in those days. You never hear of him anymore.

He actually disgraced the fundamentalist cause in the mid-1970s because of an appalling moral scandal that came to light. But that was one of the fundamentalists I was personally familiar with. And, in fact, the town where I attended my first year of college had once been the hometown of Carl McIntyre, and he still dominated the airwaves there.

And so I'd listen to Carl McIntyre rant and rave on the radio every day, and I also became acquainted with him through the radio. And, frankly, the closer I got to the fundamentalist movement in the 1970s, the more it seemed to me that the movement had significant tendencies that owed more to the cults and the Pharisees than to historic Christianity. And so while I carefully kept my distance from the movement, I never stopped affirming the principles of historic fundamentalism.

And during those years, I read a lot of fundamentalist literature. I subscribed to *The Sword of the Lord*. I read everything John Rice wrote.

I read as much fundamentalist literature as I could find. And, of course, one of the things I noticed right away was that there wasn't a whole lot of serious fundamentalist literature to read. If you wanted to learn doctrine, the place to go was not to the fundamentalist movement.

And I thought that was strange. Here's a movement whose very name suggests that they're concerned with fundamental doctrine, and yet that wasn't what any of their writings focused on. I came to Christ without any sort of evangelical or fundamentalist background, and so I studied at Moody Bible Institute.

It was the only evangelical school I'd ever heard of. I knew it had a good reputation. I went there.

I got my diploma from Moody in 1975, and after that I needed one more year of college, liberal arts credits, which you couldn't get at Moody, in order to complete my bachelor's degree. And so, having read all this fundamentalist literature and being somewhat sympathetic to the aims of the fundamentalist movement, I decided to go to a fundamentalist school for the 1975-76 school year. And that one year in a fundamentalist school convinced me that American fundamentalism as a movement was already seriously and perhaps irretrievably off the rails.

The movement was obviously in serious trouble doctrinally, spiritually, and morally. That was 30 years ago. But even then, the fundamentalist movement was dominated by personality cults, easy believism, man-centered doctrine, and an unbiblical pragmatism in their methodology with the altar calls, the bus ministries, and all of that stuff aimed at manipulating people, a carnal kind of superficiality in their worship, petty bickering at the highest levels of leadership, deliberate anti-intellectualism, even in their so-called institutions of higher learning, and moral rot, no matter where you looked in the movement.

It seemed to me that the fundamentalist movement was doomed. And in fact, by the 1970s, American fundamentalism had already ceased to be a theological movement, and it had morphed into a kind of cultural phenomenon, a bizarre and ingrown subculture all its own, whose public face, more often than not, seemed overtly hostile to everyone outside its boundaries. And frankly, I thought that sort of fundamentalism deserved to die.

And I knew eventually it would, because the most prominent hallmark of the visible fundamentalist movement was that its leaders loved to fight so much that they would bite and devour one another, and proliferate controversies, even among themselves, over issues that no one who fought rationally would ever try to argue. These are essential things as far as the truth of the gospel is concerned. They argued over non-fundamental issues, not fundamental ones.

And in fact, about the time I started subscribing to the Sword of the Lord, John R. Rice got crosswise with Bob Jones Jr. over something, and exactly where their differences lay was never really very clear to me. But for a couple of years or so, John Rice refused to carry any advertising for Bob Jones University in his newspaper. And that war was going on when I first encountered the fundamentalist movement.

And so the first things I read about Bob Jones were critical. I thought he was one of the bad guys because John Rice said so. And these two men, both of whom wanted to be seen as the dominant voice in the fundamentalist movement, were publicly at odds with one another.

My strong feeling, even then, was that if fundamentalists allowed their movement to continue in that direction, they would soon be so fragmented that it would be impossible to speak of fundamentalism as a single, coherent movement. That is exactly what happened. And it happened sooner than I anticipated.

When John Rice died in 1980, there was a war among his followers about who would become his successor and who would take his place as the de facto spokesperson and figurehead at the helm of the fundamentalist movement. Twenty-five years later now, there is still no clear successor to John R. Rice as the leading figure of the fundamentalist movement, and today's fundamentalists are more fragmented than ever. There are no clear leaders in the movement who are recognized and affirmed as leaders by the movement as a whole.

Fundamentalists are not moving together in any clear-cut direction. The fundamentalist movement is virtually dead. Now, I realize that the fundamentalist movement has been declared dead many times before, beginning with the aftermath of the Scopes trial as early as 1925.

And in the 1950s, after fundamentalists failed to recapture a single one of the mainline denominations from the liberals, and the fundamentalists responded by abandoning the denominations, lots of people in those days were declaring the fundamentalist movement dead again. And so a true fundamentalist who is aware of the history of his movement is not likely to be shaken by my declaration that their movement is practically dead, because, historically, dry fundamentalist bones do have a way of coming to life. And that's why every diehard fundamentalist will probably tell you that my obituary for their movement is premature.

But it is clear that the more serious-minded and reflective fundamentalists these days are concerned about the future of their movement. Read the fundamentalist chatter on the Internet, and you will see that in just the past month or so, a large volume of fundamentalist bandwidth online has been devoted to a discussion about what fundamentalists can do to keep their brightest young minds from abandoning the movement. In fact, look for the transcript of an address that was given by Dr. Kevin Bowder to the American Association of Christian Colleges and Seminaries.

That's a fundamentalist group. And Dr. Bowder is president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, which is a fundamentalist seminary. And his message, which, frankly, I think is brilliant, is an encouraging and perceptive analysis of what's wrong with fundamentalism from a thoughtful and articulate fundamentalist who loves the movement and wants to see it back on track.

My perspective is only slightly different. I think he's right in his analysis of the problems. But I speak as someone who loves historic fundamental principles, but who hates what the American fundamentalist movement became in the second half of the 20th century.

And I have no sentimental, sectarian, or party attachment to the movement. And in fact, it seems to me that any movement that could lionize someone like Jack Hiles and produce hundreds, maybe thousands of Hiles clones, while deliberately exaggerating petty disagreements in order to portray almost every conservative evangelical outside the fundamentalist movement as a dangerous heretic, a movement like that really needs to die. And it would be my hope that whatever takes its place would be less superficial, more sober-minded, more doctrinally sound, more faithful to scripture than the party that always dutifully agreed with John R. Rice when he insisted he was a great scholar.

The new movement needs to be ruled by truth, not by petty tyrants. It should be guided by biblical principles, not by big personalities. It has to be motivated by a passion to see Christ's kingdom expand, not driven by someone's desire to build a personal empire.

It has to remain committed to separation from those who deny essential gospel truths, but it also has to be equally committed to spiritual unity and brotherly kindness among those who affirm the essential truths of the gospel. Above all, it has to keep its focus on doctrines that are truly fundamental and not get sidetracked all the time over secondary issues, petty preferences, man-made rules, foolish questions, and useless contentions over matters that are unprofitable and vain. After all, scripture commands us to be that way.

Now, let me be clear. I am not arguing that it's inherently wrong to be militant. And in fact, I'd like to see a new movement that is no less willing to fight than Charles Spurgeon and the rest of our fundamentalist forefathers were.

We need some fights today. There are some doctrines under attack that we need to fight to defend. But let's make sure that our militancy is genuinely motivated, as Spurgeon's was, by a love for the gospel and a passion for truth, not by a perverse enjoyment of controversy for controversy's sake.

Now, I've already hinted at some of the reasons I think the 20th century fundamentalist movement failed so spectacularly. I want to explore some of those things in a little more detail. And let me start by doing what I promised at the outset.

I want to give you two definitions so that you'll know exactly how I'm employing these terms. The terms I want to define for you are fundamentalism and evangelicalism. We sometimes speak of the evangelical movement in contrast to the fundamentalist movement.

And a lot of people, therefore, use those terms, fundamentalism and evangelicalism, as if they were virtually opposites. Historically, though, they have a lot in common. The word evangelical came into widespread usage at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

It's an old word and a good word. William Tyndale used that expression, evangelical truth, as a synonym for the gospel itself. An evangelical, then, would be someone who affirms the essence of the gospel.

And in the historic sense, the term is a Protestant term. It describes those who see divine grace rather than good works as the whole basis of salvation. As a matter of fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, evangelicalism is defined this way.

Here's how the Oxford English Dictionary gives it. It's that school of Protestants which maintains that the essence of the gospel consists in the doctrine of salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ and denies that either good works or the sacraments have any saving efficacy. That's a pretty good definition from a secular dictionary, isn't it? And it's a good definition as far as it goes.

But it does leave out one vitally important aspect of historic evangelicalism. Early in the Protestant Reformation, a heresy known as Socinianism arose. The Socinians questioned the authority of Scripture.

They doubted all the miraculous elements of Scripture. They rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. In other words, they were proto-liberals.

And as their heresy spread, the term evangelical was often used to contrast mainstream Bible-believing Protestants from the Socinians. And so the term evangelical, in effect, came to describe those who affirm both the formal and material principles of the Reformation. In other words, the two principles, sola scriptura, or the authority and sufficiency of Scripture alone, and sola fide, or the doctrine of justification by

faith.

Those two principles, sola scriptura, sola fide, were essentially what defines an evangelical. Someone who holds to sola fide, sola scriptura. And by the way, in the historical sense of the word, there is no such thing as an evangelical Roman Catholic, because Roman Catholics deny both sola fide and sola scriptura.

Historic evangelicalism was a distinctly Protestant movement. You call someone evangelical, you were saying he's a Protestant. You could define an evangelical simply as a Bible-believing Protestant.

Someone who affirms both sola scriptura and sola fide. Now that's what I mean by evangelicalism. That is historic evangelicalism.

That's the principles of evangelicalism. So what is fundamentalism? That's a fairly new term. The word fundamentalist was coined by Curtis Lee Laws in 1920 in an editorial that he wrote for the Watchman Examiner.

And he proposed that the movement of men who opposed liberalism in the Northern Baptist denomination needed a name. There was a group of men among the Northern Baptists who opposed liberalism, defended the truth of Scripture. He said they need a name.

And he explained why he didn't think it was sufficient just to label them conservatives. And then he said this, and I'm quoting. He said, We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called fundamentalists.

That's where the name began. That's where the movement really gelled. And notice that two elements are expressly stated in that definition.

A fundamentalist was someone who not only affirmed the essential truths of the gospel, in other words, he was an evangelical, but he also was willing to fight for those truths. And so there was a strong tone of militancy built right into the definition of fundamentalism from the very beginning. Fundamentalists were, by definition, men who meant to do battle royal for the fundamentals.

Now, historically, it didn't quite become perfectly clear what was implied by the expression battle royal until about the 1940s and 1950s when fundamentalists began, as I said, to abandon the mainline denominations that had proved incorrigible in their liberalism and their apostasy. And at that time, the true and committed fundamentalists began to leave the denominations. They couldn't fellowship any longer with organizations whose leadership were committed to opposing the authority of Scripture.

But there was another group of men, conservatives, who were unwilling to separate from the liberal denominations, and they invariably, obviously, had to tone down their militancy and find ways to accommodate the drift of their liberal denominations. And in other words, in effect, they gave up the battle, and therefore they ceased being true fundamentalists. That's how ecclesiastical separation became the third pillar of fundamentalism, and it's really the defining mark of fundamentalism.

A true fundamentalist was someone who affirmed the essential truths of the gospel, who was militant in his defense of those truths, and who would formally break fellowship with anyone who persisted in denying the fundamental doctrines. Now, let me say what I said earlier. According to that definition, I am a committed, lifelong fundamentalist.

So are many, if not most of you, I would imagine, even if, like me, you've never technically been part of any group or church that wears a formal imprimatur from Greenville, South Carolina, or Pensacola, Florida, or Murfreesboro, Tennessee, or Hammond, Indiana. But let me also point out that every true fundamentalist is also an evangelical in the historic sense of the word. That's built right into the definition.

It's impossible to be a fundamentalist without being also an evangelical, but it is possible to be an evangelical without being a fundamentalist. In fact, George Marsden, who's written quite a lot chronicling the history of fundamentalism and all, says this. At the start of one of his books, he says, a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.

I suppose that's close, actually. I think there's even a grain of truth in it. But if you want to be more serious and less derisive, it would be more accurate to say that a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is willing to contend earnestly for the faith and not willing to fellowship with someone who denies the faith.

In other words, I'm saying I don't think there's anything wrong with the idea of fundamentalism. When you distill the objectives and the distinctives of historic fundamentalism, in its essence, it's perfectly biblical. But there is something seriously wrong with what most of the American fundamentalist movement has become.

Now, I recognize the modern limitations of the word fundamentalism. That's why I've tried to be careful and define this. In the late 1970s, when Islamic ayatollahs took political control in Iran, this word fundamentalism was hijacked by the secular media and turned into a synonym for the worst kinds of violent religious fanaticism, so that Islamic terrorists today are always called fundamentalists.

And we lost the word. Now, I suppose it was no great loss, because by then, the term fundamentalism had already been pretty badly corrupted by some self-styled fundamentalists in America, mostly Baptist ayatollahs, who had already moved pretty far away from the spiritual principles and even the clear doctrinal position of their historic fundamentalist ancestors. And so the term was beginning to lose its significance and its usefulness anyway.

Likewise, the word evangelicalism has come to mean something quite different from what the word meant historically. And you have to make a distinction between the idea of evangelicalism and the evangelical movement. And thanks to a little help from Christianity Today magazine, the evangelical movement has become so broad and so inclusive that the word evangelical is now at least as useless as the word fundamentalism.

But nonetheless, for the purposes of this seminar today, I'm trying to employ the historic meanings of those terms, evangelical and fundamentalist. And if I use those expressions in any other sense, I'll try very hard to make my meaning clear. But for example, here's what I mean.

If I use the expressions fundamentalism or evangelicalism without any kind of modifier, you can assume that I'm using those terms in their historic sense. I'm talking about historic fundamentalism and historic evangelicalism, the principles of those movements. If I speak of the fundamentalist movement or the evangelical movement, I'm probably speaking of those 20th century movements, the way they were corrupted in American evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

And it's my contention that in the second half of the 20th century, the mainstream of the evangelical movement abandoned historic evangelicalism and the mainstream of the fundamentalist movement

likewise abandoned historic fundamentalism. So bear that in mind. And by the way, I am not going to suggest to you that the evangelical movement has in any way succeeded where the fundamentalists failed.

It would be my assessment that the evangelical movement has, if anything, melted down in an even more catastrophic way than the fundamentalist movement. It maybe isn't as obvious yet because the broad evangelical movement has so many thriving megachurches all dutifully buying books for their 40 days of purpose and all eagerly awaiting the next evangelical fad. But most of those churches are not any longer truly evangelical in any meaningful sense.

Most of them have no discernible doctrinal position. And in fact, as the erstwhile fundamentalist researcher Elmer Townes pointed out a few years ago, what defines them is their methodology, not their theology, which is to say they are not really true evangelicals in any historic sense. And the evangelical movement in America is as dead as a doornail spiritually.

It's just not obvious right now because so many people who call themselves evangelical are so busy jumping on and off bandwagons. That was the point of my seminar yesterday. And in many ways, these two seminars go together perfectly, and they explain why I think there's a desperate need for a new kind of movement, or better, a new Reformation, a true revival.

But my subject in this hour is the failure of fundamentalism, and I want to give you three reasons why I believe the fundamentalist movement of the 20th century went off track in such a serious and catastrophic way. And for convenience sake, and since most of you are preachers, I've alliterated these. You can take them all three down now if you're fast enough, but leave some room on your page to fill in the details between the points.

First, fundamentalism failed because of a lack of definition. A lack of definition. Second, it failed because of a lack of doctrinal clarity.

A lack of doctrinal clarity. And third, it failed because of a lack of due process. A lack of due process.

And I'll explain what I mean by each of those, and I'll repeat them distinctly a point at a time as we work our way through what I have to say. First of all, fundamentalism failed because of a lack of definition. And I'm convinced that the ultimate failure of the fundamentalist movement was guaranteed from its very inception because the original fundamentalists didn't do enough to make sure that there was widespread understanding and agreement about which doctrines are truly fundamental.

Now, of course, virtually all evangelicals agreed that certain doctrines were fundamental, like the deity of Christ and the authority and inspiration of Scripture. But what about the doctrine of eternal punishment? Or the doctrine of total depravity? Are those fundamental also? How many vital doctrines are there? How many fundamentals are there? Is it just five? I don't think so. Neither did any of the original fundamentalists think it was just five.

I'll show you that in a moment. But how many are there? And is it possible to make a complete list? By the way, I'm not going to answer that question in detail, but I would say my answer to that question would be no. I don't think it's possible to make a complete list because the devil keeps coming up with new heresies that show truths that are fundamental.

Nobody a hundred years ago would have said that the doctrine of divine foreknowledge is fundamental. I mean, we would have said that, but nobody challenged the idea. These days, with open theism, you'd have to list the doctrine of divine foreknowledge in your list of fundamentals because it's obvious that open theism actually introduces a God that is not the God of the Bible, and it's not true Christianity.

So you have to keep adding to the fundamentals. That's one of the problems. But how do you tell what's fundamental? Who makes this determination that, yes, this is a fundamental doctrine? Those questions were never carefully and thoroughly and thoughtfully addressed as far as I have ever been able to ascertain in any of the vital literature of early fundamentalism.

There was general agreement that some doctrines are primary and some are secondary, and at least five of the fundamentals were generally agreed upon because they were the focus of debate between fundamentalists and modernists in the Presbyterian denominations from the very beginning of the war with modernism, even back in the 1800s. But the hard work of explaining clearly from Scripture how to determine whether an article of faith is essential or not was, for the most part, left undone. And there was very little clarity in the distinctions that were made between primary and secondary doctrines.

And frankly, unless we first agree on the question of how to decide which doctrines are fundamental, at the end of the day, it means very little to say that we cling to the great fundamentals, because I think even some of the open theists would try to make that claim. Now, here's how all of that came about. The debate between modernists and evangelicals first began to focus on the question of essential doctrine right at the end of the 19th century.

In 1982, the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church met for the first time ever west of the Rockies in Portland, Oregon. And there they passed a resolution which was known as the Portland Deliverance, which affirmed that the inspired word as it came from God is without error. It was an explicit affirmation of biblical inerrancy.

And they also said that ministers who had changed their belief on that point should withdraw from the ministry. In essence, they were saying that inerrancy is a fundamental doctrine. So inerrancy was the first fundamental ever really identified as such by the fundamentalist movement.

No one realized it yet, but fundamentalism as a movement was beginning to take shape already. But unfortunately, the language of the Portland Deliverance proved too weak, and it wasn't detailed enough. And most of the modernists were already systematically attacking other doctrines besides biblical inerrancy in their quest to undermine people's faith in Scripture.

The modernist juggernaut continued to overtake this denomination. And by the early 1900s, the New York Presbytery was ordaining candidates for ministry who just flatly refused to affirm the doctrine of Christ's virgin birth. And so in 1910, the General Assembly passed another resolution known as the Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910, also known as the Five-Point Deliverance.

And it was the one that first listed five doctrines as essential. They are the same five fundamentals I listed for you earlier, the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, the doctrine of penal substitution, the bodily resurrection, and the literal reality of biblical miracles. Each of those five points in the resolution began with these words, It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards.

And then they would spell out the thing. And after listing the five fundamentals, the resolution said this, These five articles of the faith are essential and necessary, and then it added this very important line, others are equally so. And so the resolution explicitly recognized that those five fundamental doctrines did not exhaust the list of essential truths.

But nevertheless, those five doctrines were where the liberals had aimed their original attack, and they continued to be the focus of intense battle for at least 20 years or more. And so those same five doctrines were reaffirmed in a series of statements by various Presbyterian synods and general assemblies over the next two decades, and they became popularly known as the Five Fundamentals. And to this day, there are many people who mistakenly believe that fundamentalism was based on five fundamental doctrines and no more.

In fact, Chuck Colson is apparently one who holds that opinion. If you read his book, *The Body*, he says the five fundamentals are the backbone of Orthodox Christianity. And then he says this, If a fundamentalist is a person who affirms these five truths, then there are fundamentalists in every denomination, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren, Methodist, Episcopal.

Notice he starts with the Catholics. And he says this, Everyone who believes in the Orthodox truths about Jesus, in short, every Christian, is a fundamentalist. Now that's frankly a pretty naive view of the history of fundamentalism.

The Presbyterian five-point deliverance of 1910 was merely the opening salvo in a long discussion about fundamental doctrines. In that same year, 1910, saw the publication of the first articles in a 12-volume series known as *The Fundamentals*. And it was a catalog of about 90 articles by some 64 different authors defending a wide range of evangelical truths that were under modernist attack.

The articles were published in 12 paperback books over five years' time and distributed free of charge to pastors, thousands of pastors, under the sponsorship of a couple of California oil tycoons, Lyman Stewart, who helped found Biola back when it was known as the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and his brother, Milton Stewart, who was the other donor who helped to fund the publication of these books, *The Fundamentals*. And those who contributed articles to the series are kind of a who's who of conservative evangelicals from the turn of the century. There was B.B. Warfield, Sir Robert Anderson, James Orr, G. Campbell Morgan, C.I. Schofield, R.A. Torrey, and many others.

And they didn't limit their subject matter to the five doctrines named in the Presbyterian Deliverance of 1910, but they also treated as fundamental doctrines such things as the literal bodily return of Christ, the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, the personality of Satan, the doctrines of sin and judgment, and the doctrine of justification by faith. And so five years after the completion of *The Fundamentals* in 1920, when Curtis Lee Laws first coined the term fundamentalism, a considerable amount of literature on *The Fundamentals* was already available, and most of the founders of the movement therefore seemed to think that the fundamental doctrines of evangelical truth had been pretty clearly defined and agreed upon already. Now, I mentioned that the doctrine of justification by faith was one of the featured doctrines in *The Fundamentals*, but I also need to say that justification by faith was hardly given the weight such a crucial doctrine deserves.

I said this yesterday in my seminar. This was the doctrine that Luther and Calvin both regarded as the most essential truth of the gospel. Luther said it was the article by which the church stands or falls.

Calvin said it was the principal hinge of all religion. But in the twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals*, the doctrine of justification was dealt with briefly in one short article six pages long by Handley Moule, an Anglican bishop. And meanwhile, there were several chapters on science in the Bible, including one by James Orr in which he insisted that no violence is done to the text of Genesis if you regard the days of creation as long eons, which obviously today no one would consider very fundamentalist.

And if you read all twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals*, you will discover that the doctrine of original sin, which has always been regarded by Catholics and Protestants alike as absolutely essential to authentic Christianity, that doctrine wasn't even dealt with at all. Now, perhaps those deficiencies are partly understandable given the historical context. After all, justification by faith and the imputation of Adam's sin weren't at that moment under such direct attack by the modernists, the way the inerrancy of Scripture was.

But those omissions and the misplaced priorities soon had a noticeable effect in the fundamentalist movement. Very soon they had an effect because no less than Billy Sunday, the quintessential fundamentalist evangelist of the early 20th century, was wobbly on the doctrine of original sin. He was fuzzy on the doctrine of justification by faith.

And the wider fundamentalist movement throughout the 20th century proved to be vulnerable to various kinds of pietism, perfectionism, neonomianism, and the antinomianism of the no-lordship movement. The fundamentalist movement swallowed all of those errors. The historic principle of sola fide, justification by faith, as the reformers and Protestant leaders through the end of the 19th century understood it, was hardly given any attention at all in the preaching and the writing that was spun out by the fundamentalist movement in the 20th century.

That is profoundly tragic for a movement that was purportedly devoted to the defense and the propagation of truth that is essential to the gospel message. Because no doctrine is more essential to the gospel than the principles of justification by faith, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer, the imputation of the believer's sin to Christ, the forensic nature of justification, and a right understanding of the principle of sola fide. But within the visible fundamentalist movement today, you can hardly find a pastor, much less a trained layperson who is prepared to give an accurate account of those doctrines, much less defend them.

And that, in my view, is where the seeds of disaster were first sown in the early fundamentalist movement. There was a lack of clear definition from the beginning. The distinctions between fundamental and secondary truths were never completely clear.

And that should have been one of the first things on the agenda for a movement that is based on the conviction that some truths are indispensable, essential, even worth dying for. How do we identify which doctrines are primary and which ones are secondary? And yet that was a question that never seems to have occurred to many of our fundamentalist forefathers. It certainly never came to the forefront of the fundamentalist discussion.

And that lack of definition, in turn, gave rise to a second reason why the fundamentalist movement failed, and that is a lack of doctrinal clarity. Now, you might think that a movement that was devoted to making a defense of fundamental doctrines would become the most biblically literate and theologically astute movement since the time of the Puritans. That's what it should have been.

Fundamentalists should have produced the finest theologians, the most skilled Bible teachers, the best writers. Fundamentalism should have been a literate movement, theological, devoted to biblical instruction, doctrinal instruction, and, to borrow language from Titus 1.9, able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. Fundamentalism as a movement has historically exemplified none of those things.

Billy Sunday, known more for his histrionics on the platform than the soundness of his doctrine, quickly became the public face of fundamentalism. Although some of the more thoughtful early fundamentalists expressed some grave concerns about Billy Sunday's style and his ability to speak for the fundamentalist movement, they were, in effect, shouted down by the rest of the movement. And fundamentalism has always seemed to favor men who were both doctrinally shallow and flamboyant in their personal style.

J. Frank Norris and Jack Hiles are probably the two most famous examples. Norris, who lived back in the 30s and 40s, pastored actually two churches simultaneously, one in Fort Worth, one in Detroit, and he would jet back and forth between the two, even back in the 1940s. He shot an unarmed man in the pastor's study of his church in Fort Worth.

How's that for fundamentalist style? I mean, he was the quintessential fundamentalist. Jack Hiles, who boasted that he had the largest Sunday school in the world, was accused of keeping his secretary as a concubine, and his son had some repeated incidents of moral indiscretions with countless women. But Hiles's response to those scandals was to refuse to answer any of the charges, and he demanded that the people of his church declare blind loyalty to him.

He had little buttons made up that his congregation wore, saying, 100% for Hiles. Now, if you want to see more ordinary examples of what I'm talking about, just sit in the chapel services at almost any fundamentalist school and watch the parade of preachers that go through. My very first week at Tennessee Temple, they brought in a speaker who literally doused himself with lighter fluid and set himself ablaze while he preached on hell.

Seriously, I'm not making that up. He billed himself as the flaming evangelist. During the year I was there, our student chapels featured a nonstop parade of karate experts, gospel magicians, gospel clowns, young Jack Hiles wannabes, and other assorted characters.

In fact, the low point of that year was when Robert Sumner came in and in a 45-minute message debunked every one of the five points of Calvinism. He was arguing that sinners have it within their own power to make a free will decision to convert themselves, which is, of course, pure Pelagianism, rank heresy. And he would emphasize his weakest points by shouting louder, and you know what? That never failed to elicit a chorus of hearty amens from people who didn't have a clue what they were amening.

But that kind of thing sadly epitomizes how most of the fundamentalist movement in America has dealt with the fundamentals of the faith. It's bad stewardship of the fundamentals. They're not worthy of the name.

And you can survey the landscape of the 20th century fundamentalist movement and look for important and influential doctrinal material produced by that movement, works where the fundamental doctrines of Scripture are clearly taught and defended, and you're going to come up mostly dry. In fact, it's hard to think of a single, truly significant, lasting, definitive doctrinal work or biblical commentary written by anyone in the fundamentalist movement since the time of J. Gresham Machen. Now, I suppose there are some

exceptions to that rule somewhere, but I can't think of any.

Why is that? Why is it that so many who call themselves fundamentalists seem to care so little about the actual fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith? Why is it that the sermons and literature of the fundamentalist movement have always favored secondary issues like women's clothing, men's hair length, Bible versions, music styles, and ridiculous matters of preference? I listened closely to one sermon by a fundamentalist preacher just recently. Somebody gave me this, and I listened to it. He was insisting that culottes are, you know, women's culottes are sinful because they're really just baggy pants, and therefore fundamentalist women who wear them are sinning because they compromised.

And he screamed and ranted about the sin of wearing culottes for nearly 15 minutes. That was at a fundamentalist college, and the students were mindlessly amening and applauding everything the guy had to say. Why hasn't fundamentalism ever put that kind of energy into teaching and defending the doctrines that are truly fundamental? Have you ever wondered about that? There is a decidedly anti-intellectual strain in American fundamentalism that has dominated the movement for the past 50 years or more.

Many fundamentalists are openly wary of scholarship, suspicious of anything too academic. They dislike historical theology. They have no taste whatsoever for doctrinal teaching.

They prefer preachers who specialize in emotional rants against the evils of rock music or movies or some other aspect of popular culture. And by the way, let me make this clear. I am not arguing in favor of academic respectability.

I understand that Christianity today and most of evangelicalism has compromised because of their thirst for academic respectability. That's not what I'm arguing for. I'm just arguing for some integrity in the way we handle Scripture and doctrine.

I don't care if we impress the secular academics or not, but I think we have a stewardship to get the fundamental doctrines right if we're going to claim that's what we love and want to defend. And by the way, I know that there are some blessed exceptions to what I'm telling you. Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary is a fundamentalist school, and their journal is consistently superb.

I recommend it to you with enthusiasm. I already mentioned Dr. Kevin Bowder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis. He's obviously a gifted writer and a capable theologian.

And in April of last year, I visited the seminary at Bob Jones University and had the privilege of meeting several of their seminary faculty members as well as some fundamentalist pastors in the area who have strong ties with Bob Jones University. Bob Jones has always been well known for their high academic standards. And in my discussions with these men, it was obvious that there's nothing superficial about their approach to doctrine and Scripture.

But I have to say that in my experience, men like that are all too rare in the fundamentalist movement. They're the exception, not the rule. The mainstream of the movement often regards them with deep suspicion because they're too academic.

They're too Calvinistic. They're not sufficiently devoted to the King James Version of the Bible. They're not vocal enough in their criticism of John MacArthur or whatever.

I'm grateful for the influence of men like Kevin Bowder and Dave Doran in the fundamentalist movement, but they are not really typical fundamentalists. The drift of most of the fundamentalist movement is decidedly in the opposite direction. And these guys are rapidly finding themselves on the left wing of the fundamentalist movement.

They're about to get kicked out of fundamentalism because they haven't been vocal enough in defending the King James only position or whatever. Anti-intellectualism has been built into the ethos and the culture of the fundamentalist movement since the time of Billy Sunday. And even today, the main thrust of American fundamentalism is anti-intellectual, appallingly superficial in its approach to doctrine, hopelessly pragmatic in its methodology, and thoughtlessly unconcerned with the truly fundamental doctrines of Scripture.

Just look at the issues that are high on the fundamentalist agenda today. I've already mentioned the question of whether the King James Version is an inspired translation or not. Ridiculous issue.

That is the one issue that consumes the most fundamentalist bandwidth on the Internet. Contemporary Christian music would have to be a close second. And at the moment, there are some debates trying to justify strict separation from John MacArthur and his associates that probably come in third in the amount of bandwidth on the Internet.

And then you've got a host of highly polemical but doctrinally barren treatises on fundamentalism's favorite evils, dancing, drinking, card playing, the Beatles, the Harry Potter books, and whatever other worldly amusements you can think of. Now, I am not opposed to preaching against worldliness. And in fact, this is something worldly evangelicals and their worldly churches could stand a little more of.

But don't give your people a steady diet of preaching about the evils of contemporary culture while neglecting the timeless truths of Scripture. That trivializes the importance of the fundamental doctrines we profess to love. It makes for shallow preaching.

And American fundamentalist preachers have been guilty of that for generations. John Rice wrote a famous book with the title, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers*. I think that book dates back to the 1940s or 1950s.

It was actually still in print. You can still buy it. And the ad copy starts out with the provocative question, should a woman cut her hair? One of the sermon titles is *Bobbed Hair, the Sign of a Woman's Rebellion Against Husband, Father, and God*.

Now, I don't know if Dr. Rice really believed that it was as sinful for a woman to shorten the length of her hair as it would be for her to usurp authority over men in the church. But the whimsical yet authoritarian way he dealt with those two issues side by side did not encourage his readers to be true Bereans. Fundamentalists don't encourage their people to be true Bereans.

They don't want them to think. They want them to conform. And that is all too typical of how fundamentalists have dealt with doctrine.

They tend to be strict and dogmatic and blunt about indifferent matters, about cultural minutia, about issues where the Bible is completely silent, without ever really getting serious about doctrine. For example, most fundamentalist leaders regard Charles Finney as a great hero. They overlook his Pelagianism.

They imitate his pragmatism. And some of them have even absorbed elements of his perfectionism. But Finney denied that the righteousness of Christ could be imputed to sinners, and he denied that the guilt of sinners could be imputed to Christ.

In other words, he denied the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. He rejected the classic Protestant understanding of justification by faith, and he held the view that it's the sinner's own duty to convert himself and reform his own life. And yet fundamentalists have made him an icon.

John Rice called Finney one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived. And yet the same fundamentalists who will try to make a hero out of a heretic like Charles Finney will look for reasons to try to criticize any living Bible teacher or popular speaker outside the boundaries of the fundamentalist movement. And they have to do that in order to justify a cultish devotion to their unbiblical application of the principle of separation.

And that brings me to a third reason for the failure of the fundamentalist movement. There was a lack of definition, a lack of doctrinal clarity, and now third, a lack of due process. A lack of due process.

Let me explain what I mean. Here, in my view, is one of the reasons so many of the best men and the brightest young minds have left the fundamentalist movement. The way second-degree separation has been implemented by fundamentalists is unseemly, ungracious, and unbiblical.

The machinery of fundamentalist separation has, in effect, established a form of excommunication without due process. All someone has to do to ruin your ministry in fundamentalist circles is publish a negative story about you in one of those ubiquitous fundamentalist gossip rags. And if it gets enough circulation, you will be branded for life as a neo-evangelical.

And anyone who has any kind of public fellowship with you will also be tainted. Now, let me explain what I mean by second-degree separation. I said at the outset that I'm a separatist.

I believe Scripture forbids us to have fellowship with people who deny essential gospel truths. 2 John 10 and 11 says, If someone like that comes to you, don't receive him into your house or even greet him, because the one who greets him shares in his evil deeds. That's pretty strong language, isn't it? I would argue that the clear teaching of Scripture commands us to abandon churches and denominations and other organizations whose leadership or membership are irreformably committed to doctrines that fatally corrupt the gospel or foster unbelief.

2 Corinthians 6, verses 14 through 17 make this clear. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? Or what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God, and as God has said, I will dwell in them, I will walk among them, I will be their God, they shall be my people.

Therefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean. Scripture commands us to be separate.

And I could go on quoting Scripture for some time. Ephesians 5, 11, Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. Romans 16, 17 Note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them.

Scripture repeatedly makes it clear that we are not to seek fellowship with people who corrupt the essential truths of Scripture, even if they claim to be Christians, and especially when they demand that we compromise our convictions or tone down our message in the name of unity. Scripture does not affirm that kind of unity. Scripture gives no mandate whatsoever for that kind of false ecumenical unity.

We are told to avoid people like that, not to seek any kind of fellowship or unity with them. But what is my duty to a fellow believer, someone who is fundamentally sound in his own doctrine, but who doesn't practice separation? What about an evangelical Anglican, who preaches the gospel himself, but is a member of a denomination that has ordained practicing homosexuals as bishops? Am I free to associate with them? Am I obliged to break fellowship with them? If I do break fellowship with them, that's second-degree separation. Now, it may surprise some of you to hear me say this, but there are times when I think second-degree separation is perfectly appropriate.

There are some who've tried to argue that there's no warrant whatsoever in Scripture ever to separate from another Christian, so that in effect, if you believe a guy is a true believer, you could not separate from him ever, even if he holds a conference and turns the pulpit over to the Pope. But I think that's quite wrong. 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 14 and 15 says this, If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Yet, do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. And so clearly, there are times when it's appropriate to refuse to keep company with someone who is a believer, especially if that person is deliberately and incorrigibly disobedient to the clear instruction of Scripture. But notice that we're explicitly instructed to admonish such a person as a brother.

You don't treat him as an unbeliever. This is not a de facto kind of excommunication. Separation from a brother like that should never be quick and easy.

And what I object to in the way American fundamentalists have practiced separation is this. They are often rash and impulsive in the way they separate from other brethren without any kind of brotherly admonishment, without any due process, and furthermore, they try to enforce separation not just to the second degree, but to the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the fifteenth degree. Billy Graham refuses to practice separation from Roman Catholics and liberals.

Okay, we won't participate in his crusades. But Al Mohler once participated in a Billy Graham crusade. Are we therefore obliged to separate from Al Mohler? Now you're into the third degree of separation.

And since we haven't broken fellowship with Mohler, are fundamentalists required to separate from John MacArthur and from everyone who associates with him? You see how quickly you get to fourth and fifth degree separation? But that is exactly the way it works in the modern fundamentalist movement. So there becomes a click, and the boundaries are clearly defined by a few powerful men who determine who's in and who's not. Seriously, a fundamentalist pastor friend told me that the reason he could never attend a Shepherds Conference or have anything to do with John MacArthur is because MacArthur hasn't broken fellowship with Al Mohler, and Mohler has a connection to Graham, and therefore MacArthur is not truly a separated man.

How far does this go? Will every fundamentalist who attends the Shepherds Conference be excommunicated from fundamentalism? That is what happens in some circles. And believe it or not, there are actually some fundamentalists who come to this conference incognito and refuse to tell anyone they've

been here, lest it taint them forever in fundamentalist circles. And I know who some of you guys are.

I'm not going to expose you. But you can be branded and condemned and excommunicated by fundamentalists without any due process and without any hope of remedy. And that is exactly what happened to John MacArthur.

Almost 20 years ago, Bob Jones Jr. ran an article in a Bob Jones University-sponsored magazine accusing John MacArthur of teaching heresy. The article accused MacArthur of denying the efficacy and the necessity of Christ's blood. And it seemed to me when I read it that Bob Jones had simply misunderstood John MacArthur and misconstrued some quotations.

And so I personally wrote to Bob Jones for an explanation of the university's position. You know what? He refused to answer my questions. And in a curt way, he told me it was useless to even try to correspond with him.

Five years later, after the controversy had already swept through the whole fundamentalist movement, Bob Jones III finally wrote to John MacArthur and in essence said MacArthur's explanations of his position had satisfied Bob Jones University that MacArthur was not a heretic. But you know what? They never published any retraction. Thousands of their constituents to this day think John MacArthur is a heretic who denies the blood of Jesus Christ.

I get mail virtually every week from people who have heard some fundamentalist parroting Bob Jones Jr.'s accusation that John MacArthur is a heretic. Bob Jones wrote one accusatory paragraph without seeking any kind of response or clarification from MacArthur and it tied a tin can on MacArthur that has rattled through the fundamentalist movement for twenty years. That's what I mean about a lack of due process.

In effect, you can excommunicate someone or blackball them for the rest of their earthly life simply by accusing them in one of these gossip rags. You don't have to demonstrate any thorough understanding of the issue you raise. You can take quotes out of context if you like, or not.

The charges don't necessarily have to be documented. They don't even have to be true. If you are a fundamentalist with sufficient clout or if you're somebody who owns your very own gossip rag.

And meanwhile, the public face of the fundamentalist movement is dominated by too many petty men with big egos who think earnestly contending for the faith means backstabbing one another or sniping at other Christian leaders who come too close to the fundamentalist movement without actually being in the right camp. That's cultish. It's wicked.

It's carnal in its fleshly. That is not righteous behavior. But it happens every week in the fundamentalist movement and every fundamentalist knows it.

The culture of American fundamentalism seems to thrive on it. I have a book in my library by a fundamentalist who actually got fed up with that kind of fundamentalist treachery. And so he documented cases where fundamentalists had deliberately destroyed one another by spreading rumor and innuendo.

And he titled the book, Dear Abner, I Love You, Joab. Alright, well I've gone over time but I started late and I want to finish this so let me wrap up with this. As I said, I don't hold out any hope whatsoever that the fundamentalist movement as it now exists is salvageable.

Those men in the fundamentalist movement who truly love Christ and love His Word ought to practice what they preach and separate from their disobedient brethren. Cut the ties with heretics who claim a 17th century English translation of the Bible is inspired and inerrant. Break fellowship with your fellow fundamentalists who refuse to practice biblical church discipline but who like to destroy good men's lives and ministries by spreading rumors and innuendo.

Come out from among those guys who ignore the Word of God and don't care about good theology and whose preaching consists of pulpit-pounding histrionics with no biblical substance. Renounce those who like to regulate people's lives with man-made rules, binding heavy burdens on people's backs, just like the Pharisees did. Come out from among them and be ye separate.

Practice real biblical separation and stop just pretending to be separatists. You know, one of the really good things about historic fundamentalism was that it created an environment where independency flourished. I've never been fond of denominationalism.

And I think the fundamentalist exodus from the denominations was a wonderful, triumphant thing. Not at all a defeat, the way many chroniclers of the fundamentalist movement have suggested. The early fundamentalists who left the denominations in hundreds, perhaps thousands of cases, founded independent churches that kept the gospel witness alive and thriving while the mainline denominations all basically crumbled under the weight of their liberal unbelief.

And it's my conviction that independency is the biblical pattern. There's no evidence of any denominational type hierarchy in the Bible. But you know what? The fundamentalist click destroys true independency.

You're not independent if some guy in Pensacola is telling you who you can fellowship with and who you can't. Earlier this month I was in London at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. While I was sitting in a pastor's office waiting to pray with the elders before the Sunday service, it occurred to me that this church was already some 200 years old when Charles Spurgeon came there to pastor.

He was barely out of his teens at the time. And the church at Spurgeon's day had already had three famous pastors, Benjamin Keech, John Gill, and John Rippon. Today that church is more than 350 years old and they still preach the same gospel and are still faithful to the very same principles as the day that church was founded in 1650.

And I asked Peter Masters, the pastor there, if he knew of any other church that was still faithful and that old. And you know what? He surprised me with his answer. He said, oh yes.

He said there are at least 50 and some of them are older than 350 years. And he told me that a study had been done on the subject of the 50 churches that are at least 350 years old and still evangelical. And he said, you know what? Virtually all of them are independent, reformed, and baptistic.

I like that statistic. It's affirming to me. I have always preferred independency.

I consider myself an independent in every sense. I'm not looking for a movement to join. Just because I'm not a fundamentalist don't say I'm a member of the evangelical movement.

I am not looking for a movement to join. I belong to this church. That's enough for me.

I'm willing to work alongside anyone and everyone who shares my essential biblical convictions, whether the label they would slap on themselves is fundamentalist, evangelical, strict and particular baptist, or just plain old Christian. Think about the fruits of the various 20th century movements. Liberals and theological radicals never did anything but kill churches and turn denominations into spiritual wastelands.

Fundamentalists who tied themselves to the movement got sidetracked into fighting and dividing into ever smaller and ever less significant factions. They all managed to start with the right ideas, and they had all the right enemies. They had all the best men, and yet they reduced their movement to virtual insignificance in less than a hundred years.

Moderates never did anything, period, except gum up the works of denominational discipline while compromising and clouding everything that ought to be kept crystal clear. And if you think about it, the 20th century saw the same pattern repeated that you see throughout all of church history, and it's this. The true vitality of the church is traceable through the nonconformists, the independents, the true biblical separatists.

The true secret of their power is not, and never has been, in earthly organizations, political clout, visible movements of any kind. Their power is derived from the biblical truth they preach, and the influence of that kind of power has always been what determines the relative health and spiritual vigor of the church. And in fact, if you want to see a who's who of influential people in British church history, visit the nonconformist burial ground at Bunhill Fields in London.

Those are the people whose influence has done the most good for the church throughout her history. They are the ones who were ejected from the established church because they refused to conform to the Anglican prayer book. They built independent churches.

They were devoted to the truth. They opposed every kind of spiritual compromise. They were militant in the defense of truth, and they would stand alone if necessary and die for their faith, and many of them did.

That is the spirit fundamentalism ought to have cultivated. But it forfeited that spirit by becoming a movement ruled by politics and petty tyrants. When the spirit of independence flourishes, the church thrives.

When the simple truth of the gospel is proclaimed and human hierarchies are kept to a minimum, the church flourishes. When organizations and hierarchies and visible movements and human clout comes to the forefront, the church's power wanes. That's why I don't care if the fundamentalist movement dies as a movement.

I think it would untie the hands of a lot of godly men who are currently in bondage to other people's opinions, and that would be a good thing. Well, I have a thousand more things I wish I could say, but I am over time. I hope you find this helpful and somewhat encouraging, and I hope it gives you something to think about.

Thank you.

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