

Text: Hebrews 13:7-14

Title: "The history of fundamentalism"

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Place: ACCC 78th annual conference

Introduction: I became the Pastor of New Boston Baptist Church in New Hampshire in 2007. My kids attended a school in Concord whose pastor soon announced that he was leaving for another ministry. His successor and I became friends, and I remember early on his telling me that he took his staff to John MacArthur's Shepherds Conference. He was surprised by one thing especially at the conference. He said that when he walked into the bookstore of Grace Community Church, the first volume that met his eye on display there was David Beale's history of fundamentalism, titled, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*.

Dr. MacArthur was not known for his presence at the fellowships of fundamentalists, so that explains my friend's surprise. It is an interesting fact of American church history that, except for a few history scholars, little is known by a large segment of Bible-believing, gospel preaching churches about the history of fundamentalism. For those of us who have had teachers like David Beale, we have no excuse.

When I first came to New Boston, our church had a rusted old metal sign on its façade labeling us for passersby. I am afraid that the condition of the sign told them things about our church we did not want to say. What was remarkable about that is that a young man in our church had crafted a beautiful hardwood replacement, complete with intricately crafted gold lettering. The replacement had not been utilized because the former pastor had forbidden its use. The

reason he had done so was that the new sign announces that we are “A fundamental family in Christ.” The pastor in question had no issues with the words *a, family, in, or Christ*. It was the word *fundamental* that troubled him.

I have heard of some who avoid our church because of that word on that sign. Just recently I received an email from a mother whose daughter and son-in-law had moved to a neighboring town. This daughter is a graduate of Dr. MacArthur’s school, but has strayed from the Lord. When told of our church, she drove by, saw the word *fundamental* on our sign, and swore that she would never darken our door.

Others, thankfully, have taken the time to ask their pastor what the word *fundamental* refers to. When they do that, I tell them some simple history. I say that when the apostolic church decayed into Roman Catholicism, God raised up the Protestants as His witness. And more recently, when evolution and biblical cynicism caused Protestant denominations to decay into modernism, God raised up fundamentalists as His witness.

This morning my purpose is not to try to exhaust the details of the history of fundamentalism. I am not expert in the field and would simply direct you to Dr. Beale’s book for that. Instead, as a pastor, I would like to mention some theological truth that we must learn from this history. I want us to see three things about the history of fundamentalism this morning: (1) it is an important history; (2) it is a militant history; (3) a history of coming to terms with the Bible doctrine of separation.

I. The history of fundamentalism is an important history because our Savior is immutable (Heb. 13:7-9).

Illustration: The moral philosopher Oliver O'Donovan spoke of the importance of knowing history in terms of the fifth of the Ten Commandments. His basic point was that honoring father and mother is not just for kids. He wrote, "No social survival in any land can be imagined without a stable cultural environment across generations. By tradition society identifies itself from one historical moment to the next, and so continues to act as itself." [Quoted by Ken Meyers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, p. xvii.] Passing tradition from grandparents to grandchildren, argues O'Donovan, is an important part of obeying the fifth commandment.

Application: Our author understands that this is especially true when it comes to the faith of our fathers, the faith once delivered to the saints. He admonishes a generation that was tempted to change everything that they had known Christianity to be in order to be more acceptable to the Jewish environment these local churches found themselves in. This must not be done. Instead - remember your fathers and mothers in the faith (v. 7).

And why remember? Their conversation - the applications of the faith to their daily lives and worship practices - had an end, a purpose: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. We need to study the history of our fundamentalist fathers because where their conversation led to veneration of the name of Christ, we must follow them. If we do not, it is a denial of the immutability of Christ, who is the same for grandparents of yesterday, for ourselves today, and for generations who follow us forever. When grandparents can no longer worship with grandchildren because changes have been made for ends other than the glory of the immutability of Jesus Christ, we have a major problem. Our grandchildren will not know our Lord.

False teachers are especially dangerous when it comes to the potential for these unwanted changes (v. 9). As fundamentalists, we have been blessed with a heritage that can rightly be described as "In Pursuit of Purity." Our fathers understood what it was to do battle royal against divers and strange doctrines. We must be like them in this regard. The history of fundamentalism's faith and conversation is important if we want to bring honor to Jesus Christ.

II. The history of fundamentalism is a militant history because our Savior was crucified (Heb. 13:10-12).

Illustration: The history of the Northern Baptist Convention is instructive when it comes to the need of faithful gospel ministry for militancy. When we think of the battles of fundamentalism, we often think of fundamentalists vs. modernists. Unfortunately, that was not the nature of the conflict. Instead, there were always three groups. There were orthodox militants, orthodox neutralists, and heterodox liberals. In every battle of the NBC, the outcome was always determined by the imbalance of two groups against one. The long history of defeat for orthodoxy tells the story that the two sides of the battle were orthodox militants on one side versus orthodox neutralists and heterodox liberals on the other side. This is what made the formation of the Baptist Bible Union necessary in the early 20s, in spite of the existence of the Fundamentalist Fellowship.

Reflecting on the sad neutrality of compromisers, W. B. Riley wrote: "Compromisers believe with us on the Nine [doctrinal] points, but who have an exalted notion of their own wisdom in matters of controversy, and who conclude that soft-pedaling the truth and outward friendship for its enemies is the way to win this battle. . . . These men can make themselves comfortable with either side of the theological conflict. They are the friends of fundamentalism, in

faith, but they have become its foes, in fact" "Fundamentalism and Religious Racketeering," *Pilot* (October 1938), 15; quoted in Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 59-60).

Application: Our author is clear that there are religionists who have no right to our altar, which is the cross. It was the apostate priests of the Jewish altar that demanded the true Messiah be crucified on the altar we have, the cross. The author of Hebrews is calling for a militant response to that false religion that is faithful. Faithfulness requires that we be on the right side, the side of militancy, when it comes to the battle between truth and error. We are men of the cross. It is ours to embrace and ours to defend. It does not belong to those who deny that Jesus is the Christ of God.

Illustration: By 1929 at the age of 47, J. Gresham Machen had served the Lord on the faculty of Princeton Seminary for 23 years. That spring semester would be his last. Three months prior to his withdrawal from Princeton to form Westminster Theological Seminary, Machen gave an exhortation to his students that concluded: "Increasingly, it is becoming necessary for a man to decide whether he is going to stand or not to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ as He is presented to us in the Word of God.

"If you decide to stand for Christ, you will not have an easy life in the ministry. Of course, you may try to evade the conflict. All men will speak well of you if, after preaching no matter how unpopular a Gospel on Sunday, you will only vote against the Gospel in the councils of the Church the next day; you will graciously be permitted to believe in supernatural Christianity all you please if you will only make common cause with its opponents. Such is the program that will win the favor of the church. A man may believe what he pleases, provided he does not believe anything strongly enough to risk his life on it and fight for it ["Dr. Machen's

Lecture to His Students at Princeton Seminary, March 10, 1929, Three Months Before His Withdrawal," *Carl McIntire Manuscript Collection*, b. 263, f. Machen, J. Gresham (1 of 2)].

Ours is the calling to believe strongly enough to risk our lives and fight for truth. This is fundamentalist history.

III. It is a history of coming to terms with the Bible doctrine of separation because our Savior suffered outside the camp (Heb. 13:13-14).

Illustration: On August 17, 1919, A. C. Gaebelien concluded an address to the Bible Institute of Los Angeles titled, "The Apostasy Sweeping over the Churches," with a reference to the way many had disagreed with his separatist position: "Some Christians have told me that they are to remain in Laodicea until the Lord gives them a call to leave. He has given the call. It is here and what is happening and will happen is the separation of God's true church from the church of the world, the church of the apostasy and of Laodicea. But you say, "Where am I going?" Well, go first to the Lord and then you will have fellowship with the true saints of God. When you get into the fellowship of the true saints of God you get power, you get blessing, you have the reality of the Lord and he is going to use you."

After quoting 2 John 7-11 to the students, Gaebelien called them to obedience: "That is God's call, 'Depart!' - get away from them; do not touch their books; do not buy their literature; do not support their institutions; do not pay the preacher's salary if he does not obey the truth. If you do, the Lord is going to hold you responsible for them.

“Again Paul says, ‘From such turn away;’ purge yourselves from the vessels which are dishonored that ye might be vessels meet for the Master’s use.”

Application: What Gaebelein called these students to be and do for the Lord was the call to the outside of the camp of Hebrews 13. The reproach of the cross awaits the obedient separatist there, but so does the approval of the Crucified One. That reproach we bare for Him is His reproach which He bore first for us so much the more. The history of fundamentalism is a history of men finally coming to terms with the Bible doctrine of separation – finally willing to bear our Savior’s reproach in the world that hated Him.

Conclusion: In the year of his death (1947), at 86 years of age, having battled Northern Baptist modernism for 40 years, W. B. Riley finally mailed into the home office his letter of resignation. He said in part, “I am no longer a young man, having seen my eighty-sixth birthday, and I should be ashamed to die in the fellowship that seemed to me un-Biblical, and consequently un-Baptistic.

“John, in his second epistle, verses 9 to 11, writes, ‘Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.’ I accept those words as divinely inspired.” He then quotes 2 Cor. 6:14 and 17 and writes, “I believe this to be divinely inspired direction; hence, my request” (Beale, 394-395).

Riley was right about the shame of a failure to separate from apostasy. What he missed until that last year, howev-

er, was that if it is a shame to die in disobedience to the Bible doctrine of separation, it is also a shame to live in disobedience to it. Each of us must pick one of these two shames. Shall we be ashamed of the disobedient compromises that became the record of our earthly ministry, or will we be unashamed fundamental separatists, going to our Savior outside the camp, honored to bear His shame? That is our only choice, for Jesus suffered outside the gate. Let's go to Him. He will always be enough.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching