

The Family Reunion

Why It's Time To Admit Our Issues



“Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

—GEORGE SANTAYANA

Do you remember the first time you took your girlfriend to a family reunion? If your family was anything like mine, then you had a few conversations during the van ride over. You said things like this: “Now Uncle Frank is really into Lord of the Rings and magic;” “Whatever you do, don’t ask Cousin Lucile what her husband does for a living. (He won’t work.);” “Uncle John really likes to hear himself talk;” and “Don’t say anything about guns around Aunt Jane. (She’ll go off).” Despite all of that, you probably tried to emphasize that yes, your family has issues, but despite that, they’re pretty great. When you went to visit her family, hopefully, you came away with the same impression.

Every family has its issues. You grow up around these issues, you don’t talk about them often, but you realize they are there. Sometimes, it takes an outsider’s eye to bring them to light.

I grew up in the Independent Fundamental Baptist family. From the time I was 6, my family was in an Independent Baptist Church. We attended churches in Leesburg, VA, in Chelmsford, MA, and in Londonderry, NH. As a teenager, I felt God’s call on my life and went to Bible college at Crown College, an Independent Baptist college in Knoxville, TN. I was then privileged to work for two Independent Baptist churches, one in New

We've Got Issues

Hampshire and another in Tennessee, before being called to Pastor an Independent Baptist Church in Mattoon, Illinois. As long as I can remember, I've been a part of the Independent Fundamental Baptist family.

Through my ministry experience, as well as through attending special meetings, going on missions trips, having special speakers in my church, and going to conferences, I think I've had a glimpse of almost every corner of the IFB family. I've been under pastors who went to college at Bob Jones and pastors who went to college at Hyles Anderson and everything in between. I've had the privilege of fellowshiping over a meal with "successful" pastors from all around the country. Overall, my impressions are favorable. I can't think of a family I would rather be a part of.

But we definitely have issues. Unlike a family, no one ever seems to talk about them or want to admit them. Most fundamentalists seem to be in a state of denial.

When you present something as flawless, as above criticism, when in fact it isn't, then you are setting people up for disillusionment.

Too many young preachers like myself are getting out of the van of training, getting into the family reunion of ministry in IFB churches, and running for their lives. There is a huge difference between what they see and what was described to them, and no one around them wants to admit it.

That's why I want to write this book. It may seem harsh. I'm sure it's going to decrease my popularity with a lot of people, but to keep people in the family, we have to admit some of its issues.

This book has two major parts. The first part lists what I see are the six major issues of the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement that we've never dealt with. For each issue, I will examine the Biblical ideal, state how our churches fall short of it, trace this problem through our his-

tory, and list some possible ways to make it right.

I will strive to deal with ideas, not with people, but at times it will be necessary to name people in specific examples. I mean them no disrespect, just like my family members they are loved, respected, and valuable members of the family, but they're still human, and all humans are flawed. Also, whenever possible I will provide the research behind my assertions in the footnotes. If no notes exist, its safe to assume my assumptions are based on personal experience or anecdotal evidence. I can't apologize for that; it is the nature of this book.

If you take issue with my presenting the darker side of fundamentalism's history, consider this: Just because we ignore or try to cover up our defects, doesn't mean our critics will. People my age are facing a loud and unified chorus from evangelicals denouncing the fundamentalist movement, do you think they will spare any of the gory details of fundamentalisms history? In my opinion, it is far better that our issues be brought to our attention from the inside.

In the second part of the book, I will list the reasons why I think our movement is worth staying in. After looking at our families issues, we'll gain some perspective by looking at those of other families. (They have issues too and many of the same ones). Hopefully, you'll conclude like I have that, though our movement is far from perfect, it's the best place to be.

We've Moved On From BIBLE Preaching

Our Sad Lack of Bible-Directed Preaching



“We need nothing more than God has seen fit to reveal.”

—CHARLES SPURGEON

The Ideal

Ideally, IFB preachers would realize that the Bible comes from God.

I'm sure every preacher has memorized 2 Timothy 3:16-17. “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” The simple truth these verses set before us is that God's Word comes from God. God's Word is divine in origin.

It wasn't until prominent scholars started to doubt the God-given nature of all scripture that Fundamentalism as a movement was born. So, in a sense, the bedrock issue of Fundamentalism is belief in the God given nature of all scripture.

Ideally, IFB preachers would realize that the Bible is God's prescription for the church's wellbeing.

2 Timothy 3:16 states that *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God,"* but it doesn't end there. It goes on to say, *"and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* There can be no doubt that this verse states that all scripture is God-given. The primary meaning of this passage, however, isn't the origin of God's Word but the purpose of God's Word *"that the man of God be perfect."*

Put another way, this verse plainly teaches that if you want to have healthy Christians, then they have to be exposed to all scripture.

I like to say that scripture is the church's God given nutrition plan. God wants believers to live on a steady diet of all scripture: Teaching from scripture, preaching from scripture, correction from scripture, and encouragement from scripture. If Christians do this, then they will be complete and thoroughly prepared to do the work of God (*"perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*)

To take it a step farther, scripture is the church's curriculum. As a teacher, I was never at liberty to teach whatever I wanted. My lessons were tailored to a predetermined curriculum or list of goals and objectives. Through scripture, it is as if God has given us 66 books and said "This is what I want you to teach and study."

Ideally, IFB Preachers would study the Bible to provide its God-given meaning and God-intended application for the church.

2 Peter says that no scripture is given for "private *interpretation*."¹ We don't get to read God's Word and make up our own meaning and application of it. God had one intended meaning for His Word, and it's our job

to study the Bible so that we can learn it and teach it. It doesn't matter what "it means to us"; what matters is what God meant when He wrote it.

Again, 2 Timothy says we should "*Study to shew thyselfes approved unto God. . . rightly dividing the word of truth.*"² We know that the study of this is called hermeneutics, and it has traditionally been the foundation of bible college or seminary education. Before you can preach the Word, you have to learn how to tell what it is saying.

Ideally, IFB preachers would preach the Word and depend on it for power and authority.

God's Word is "*a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces.*"³ God's Word is "*quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*"⁴, and as we've already read, God's Word is what makes us "*perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" Nothing is more necessary for the church than that preachers "*preach the word*"⁵.

The Reality

While many (I'd hope even most) preachers in IFB churches would embrace that ideal, the reality in our pulpits falls far short. How often have we heard a preacher say "I'm just going to preach my heart tonight;" or "close your Bibles, you won't be needing them;" or "I don't have time to read you the passage, I've got to get done with my outline." At least those preachers are honest, far more often we hear preachers read a passage then preach a message that has very little if not nothing to do with it.⁶

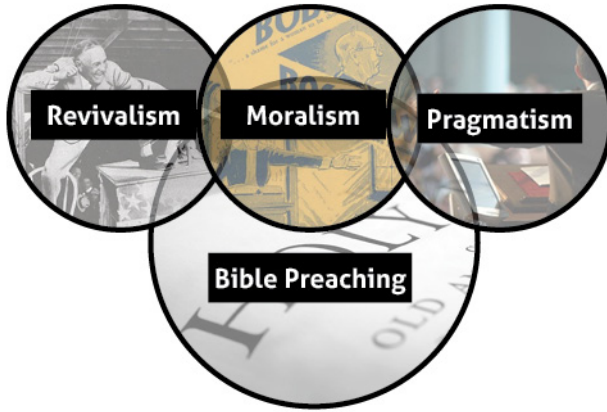
Despite the biblical ideal (mentioned at the beginning of the chapter), strong, simple, Bible-anchored preaching is the exception in fundamentalism, not the rule. Finding an IFB church where the pastor faithfully studies the Bible then limits himself in practice to the message of scripture is very

hard to do.⁷

When you hear someone say “That was good preaching,” what do they mean? Probably they mean they were emotionally moved by the preacher; they may mean they enjoyed the preacher’s delivery; or they may mean that they found the preacher’s personality to be appealing, but seldom do they mean they clearly understood what God’s Word says and feel the need to act on it.

So if there are a lot of people in the fundamentalist family who aren’t preaching the Bible, what are they preaching? I mean, they are still preaching. They are opening the Bible. They are reading from the Bible. They wave it around from time to time. What message has replaced the message of the Bible?

If you accept the above stated biblical ideal and then look back at the last century of fundamentalist history, I think you’ll see three things have slowly replaced sound biblical preaching in many American pulpits: revivalism, moralism, and pragmatism. None of these things are evil in themselves and each one has at least some biblical basis, but each one of these “isms”, when they were taken to the extreme, had a way of replacing Bible preaching and took over fundamentalist culture. Let’s take a look:



Revivalism

Baptists claim to be “people of the Book”, but there are a couple of elements in a typical Fundamental Baptist church service that are completely foreign to the Bible. The calling out of “amen” as the preacher preaches and the invitation at the end of every service are found nowhere in Scripture. So where did they come from?

Both of these practices, and many other cultural elements of Independent Baptist churches, got their start in the “Camp Meetings” and revivals of the 1800s. Revivals are a part of American tradition that goes back further than the nation itself. In Colonial America, the first Great Awakening saw the rise of the revivalist George Whitfield and his imitators. After the First Great Awakening (and a Second), Methodism was the most popular religion in America and had institutionalized revival camp meetings throughout the rural frontier⁸. Charles Finney came about in the early 1800s and added to the mix the invention of the altar call⁹. Picking up where Finney left off, the evangelist D.L. Moody was one of the most popular people in the states following the civil war and held revival meetings all across the country. Moody trained a contingent of lieutenants, that

after his retirement carried on the revivalist tradition, men like R.A. Torrey and J. Wilbur Chapman¹⁰. Chapman passed the mantel to a former major league baseball player named Billy Sunday who, during the first quarter of the 1900's, was the most famous fundamentalist in the world¹¹.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's when fundamentalism took its form, it was learned men like R.A. Torrey (a Yale graduate who studied in Germany for a year), college presidents like Charles Blanchard (Wheaton) and Princeton Theologians like B.B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen who drew the intellectual battle plans and crystalized fundamentalist doctrine. It's a mistake, however, to think of these men as the founders of modern fundamentalism. The doctrines and ideas of Fundamentalism may have been formulated by scholarly men like J. Gresham Machen and C.I. Scofield but was popularized by evangelists and revivalists like Billy Sunday (and later Billy Graham), and it took its greatest hold among the already revivalistic Baptists and Methodists in the south.¹²

There undoubtedly were revivals and revivalistic characters in the Bible, and there can be no doubt that God worked through revivals at different periods in American history. There is, however, a difference between revivals and revivalism. Revivals are an organic work of God; revivalism is trying to reproduce the excitement and appeal of revivals through various human methods.

So how do our roots in revivalism contribute to a lack of biblicism in our pulpits? The Bible contains a lot of teaching that is great material for revival services and evangelistic campaigns, but it also contains a lot of material that just isn't. Can you imagine a preacher teaching through Proverbs in a mass evangelistic crusade? The truth is if you are going to preach the whole counsel of God, you are going to preach as many messages that don't lend themselves to an altar call as you are messages that do. If we force every sermon to be emotional or convicting, we are either going to ignore half of the Bible or leave people very confused about what it says.

For a long, long time fundamentalists (especially Independent Baptists) have relied on a revivalistic culture to attract and retain members. The problem with that is that the revivalistic culture doesn't lend itself to a Bible teaching culture.¹³

Moralism

Historians of fundamentalism will talk about two waves where fundamentalism crystalized. The first wave was the fundamentalist-modernist debate of the late 1800's and early 1900's. Most of us are far removed from that debate, and if we are honest, we would admit that there are many who do not call themselves fundamentalists who we would say come down on the right side of the original fundamentalist-modernist debate¹⁴. The second crucible that fundamentalism flowed out of was the social changes of the mid-1900s. It was during these social changes, beginning with the Scopes trial and prohibition in the 1920s and extending through the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s that really saw the birth of the fundamentalist movement that we know today.

During this time, the popular leaders of fundamentalism were men like pastor J. Frank Norris, evangelist Bob Jones, and later pastor, evangelist, and newspaper editor John R. Rice. These fundamentalist leaders lived through one of the greatest times of social upheaval in the history of the world and witnessed to their dismay the dismantling of the moral underpinning of American society; they were not silent about it. A huge emphasis among fundamentalists became the evils of alcohol and evolution. Later, things like rock music, dancing, theatre attendance, Hollywood and television, hippies, sexual experimentation and women's dress styles became regular pet topics preached in fundamentalist pulpits.

When it became popular for woman to wear short hair and pants, men like John R. Rice would write a book like *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Woman Preachers*. When the hippies started popularizing the style of men

wearing long hair and a beard, fundamentalist preachers started railing against men with long hair and “unkempt” facial hair. They even went so far as to produce tracts that explained that Jesus didn’t wear a beard and only had it ripped out because during his night in the garden and trial he hadn’t had time to shave.

Does the Bible speak about the issues of our day? Of course it does. There are principles in it that can and should be applied to our dress, gender issues, alcohol, music, entertainment, sexuality and almost anything else that we come across. The important thing to note is that none of these issues are a theme of scripture. During the middle of the last century, because of the social upheaval, these things became for some the theme of fundamentalist preaching.

At some point, these issues got the term “standards”. When I was growing up and listening to the preaching in churches, I was under the distinct impression that at least 50% of the Bible had to do with standards. I don’t think I heard many messages where the word “standards” wasn’t mentioned. Unfortunately there are many preachers in fundamentalism that are still giving that impression.

The truth is, the word “standards” isn’t found in scripture at all. The closest thing to this kind of moral to do list that we see in scripture is the conduct of the Pharisees that Christ preached against. The rising of the idea of standards and its prominence in pulpits was nothing more than some fundamentalists answer to the rapid moral decay and cultural changes that they saw in the world around them. The problem with that is that it diverts attention from what the Bible actually says.

I believe with all of my heart and have seen it worked out that if a preacher diligently studies his Bible and preaches it as truth then his congregants are going to be moral people that reject the cultural relativism and decay of the day. Standards and moralism is a short cut that ends up

robbing people of the greater meaning of the Bible and creates simplistic judgmental Christians.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with a pastor once. I asked him why he didn't preach more on the love of Christ, on the doctrine of salvation, and other things so prominent in scripture. His answer was "Our church is filled with so many people that don't have standards yet." Apparently, he thought standards were more important to his people than the great themes of the Bible. A quick reading of scripture would show you God doesn't share his opinion.

Another time, I was interviewing for a job as a youth pastor in a fundamental church. After filling out a long questionnaire that included questions about what my wife wore to bed, the pastor actually told me emphatically "the emphasis of my ministry is standards". I didn't get the job (and I didn't want it after that).

God didn't give us a short list of moral do's and don'ts or standards, he gave us 66 books to study and preach. In my opinion, nothing has driven more young people away from fundamentalism than its extra-biblical emphasis on standards, and few things have been so detrimental to the cause of biblical preaching.¹⁵

Pragmatism

Fundamentalists like to rail against the unbridled pragmatism of the current church growth movement. The historical truth is fundamentalists were the original pragmatic church growth movement.

Charles Finney invented the altar call and called people out from his pulpit for pragmatic reasons. D.L. Moody, a hero and of many fundamentalists, preached a simplified message of salvation and refrained from preaching about hell saying "terror never brought a man in yet"¹⁶. J. Frank Norris talked about "making a deliberate switch from expository

messages to more sensational topics” because his church wasn’t growing fast enough¹⁷. (He would print sensational sermon topics in the local newspaper like “The Ten Biggest Devils In Fort Worth, Names Given.”¹⁸) Jack Hyles talked about having a list of a dozen or so topics that he always preached on because “it brought results”. Some fundamentalists went so far as to boil the Christian message down to the “3 S’s”: Salvation, Separation, and Service.

Preaching should be simple. Salvation is for those who become “*as a little child*.”¹⁹ Paul said that his preaching was “*not with enticing words of man’s wisdom*.”²⁰ Christ never preached without a parable and put everything in simple terms. Ideally, preachers should study the Bible and present its message in a simple enough way that the masses can understand it.

But pragmatism has caused many fundamentalists to take their preaching from simple to simplistic. Instead of preaching the whole council of God in a way that is understandable to the masses, many fundamentalist have with their preaching created an abridged version that is so oversimplified that it barely resembles the source.

Pragmatic topical preaching is safe. People who go to churches where the preacher preaches like this never have to wrestle with what the Bible actually says about confusing doctrines like election and eternal security; they never have to question the bounds of Christian liberty and seldom hear about sins they actually commit (like pride, malice, and gossiping). You can, however, only live on milk for so long. Pragmatic preaching can only produce human results. If we want to see divine work, our preaching has to follow the divine recipe.²¹

How do we fix this?

The lack of strong Bible preaching is the biggest issue that fundamentalists face. Every other issue in this book would go away if preachers would

limit themselves to preaching the whole counsel of God. This “issue” may be a problem that is too ingrained to remove, but the following ideas might help:

Demand that preachers rightly divide the Word of Truth.

There are things that I don't like that I can live with, but I will not listen to a preacher who abuses and misuses the Bible. The time has come for us to demand that our preachers be Bible preachers who spend time in study and at the very least present scripture in its context. Preachers can chop the Bible up and make it say whatever they want it to say, but they're not preaching God's Words. If fundamentalism is really a movement about staying true to the Bible, then nothing is more fundamental than biblical preaching. If biblical preaching can't be an acid test for fellowship, it should at least be an acid test for admittance to our pulpits.

Go back to biblical, Bible-directed preaching.

One thing that will surely keep revivalism in balance and keep pragmatism and moralism from dominating our pulpits is to return to the time honored tradition of Bible-directed preaching whether it be expository or contextual. Our homiletical style isn't the important thing; the important thing is that we make sure the message comes from the text and that we allow God, through His Word, to determine the direction of our preaching. If God's Word is really God given, then maybe God knew what He was doing in arranging the Word the way He did and maybe He thought we needed all of it. No matter how careful a topical preacher may be in his preachin, he is always going to leave some parts out.

Count the cost of promoting “exciting” preachers instead of Bible teaching preachers.

The pulpits of Fundamentalist Bible colleges and their parent churches are sacred ground for Independent Baptists. Fortunately, most IFB col-

leges promote biblical preaching in the classroom. Unfortunately, it's common for them to promote something altogether different through the chapel hour and special conferences. A revivalistic speaker with a dynamic personality might get the students excited and might fill the altars, but we would hope that the leaders consider the long term cost of confusing students about what is and isn't acceptable Bible preaching.

Notes

1 - 2 Peter 1:20

2 - 2 Timothy 2:15

3 - Jeremiah 23:29

4 - Hebrews 4:12

5 - 2 Timothy 4:2

6 - For example, two of Jack Hyles most famous sermons "Is There No King In You" and "Fresh Oil" have almost nothing to do with their texts.

7 - I'm avoiding the term "Expository Preaching" because I think that it too has pitfalls. For a great discussion of this, read this article by Peter Masters: <http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Sword-And-Trowel/Sword-and-Trowel-Articles/Benefits-and-Pitfalls-of-Expository-Preaching---in>

8 - Himes, Andrew, *The Sword of the Lord: The Roots of Fundamentalism in One American Family*. (Seattle, WA: Chiara Press: 2011), 33.

President Grant even made the quip "There are three great parties in the United States: The Republicans, the Democrats and the Methodist church."

9 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Grandison_Finney

10 - Marsden, George M., *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 2006), 37.

11 - Bruns, Roger, *Preacher: Billy Sunday and Big-Time American Evangelism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

12 - For more on this, read Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* or Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

13 - The other problems with Revivalistic culture are its innate Anti-Intellectualism (the next chapter is on this) and its tendency to be driven by a unique regional culture (visit a few churches in the South if you don't know what I mean.)

14 - Many popular, contemporary non-fundamentalist evangelical leaders are constantly attacking any kind of modernism. John MacArthur and Al Mohler are good examples.

15 - I think there is a difference between an emphasis on standards and institutional guidelines and rules. In my opinion, there is nothing wrong with a pastor and church making decisions about a dress code for Sunday School teachers and choir members, or a school requiring its girls to wear dresses to class. It's when those rules replace the Bible as the emphasis in the pulpit that it becomes an "issue".

16 - Marsden, 35

17 - Stokes, David, *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial that Captivated America* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2011). Kindle Location 661

18 - Marsden, 190

19 - Luke 18:7

20 - I Corinthians 2:4

21 - For an excellent discussion of this, read Charles Spurgeon's *The Greatest Fight in the World*.

We've Kicked Intellectuals to the CURB

Our Entrenched Hostility Towards Scholarship

"I know less about doctrine than a jack rabbit knows about ping pong."

—BILLY SUNDAY

The Ideal

Ideally, IFB pastors would realize that there is a type of knowledge and intellect that is dead.

Jesus spent much of his earthly ministry preaching against the excesses of the Scribes and Pharisees, two groups of religious people that emphasized learning. Paul described his preaching ministry to the Corinthians as being “*Not with enticing words of man’s wisdom*”²². In his letter to Timothy, he warned that there would be some who were “*ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*.”²³ He even told the Corinthians “*knowledge puffeth up*”²⁴.

Every preacher needs to realize the danger of intellectual excess. Every age has had those who were willing to sit in their ivory tower and argue about how many angels can dance on the head of a needle, and most of them have been a hinderance, not a help to the kingdom of God.

Ideally, IFB pastors would realize that intellectual deficiency is just as wrong as intellectual excess.

Although scripture in a few places warns against intellectual excess, in far more places it adjures us to learning and knowledge. The first chapter of the book of Proverbs, for instance, teaches us that “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*”²⁵ and that “*fools hate knowledge*.”²⁶ Throughout Proverbs, one of the antagonists is “*the simple one*.” In the New Testament, we see Paul correcting someone by saying they had zeal “*but not according to knowledge*.”²⁷ There are well over 100 positive references to knowledge and learning in scripture.

The very nature of scripture itself argues that knowledge is important. When God wanted to reveal his nature to man, he gave them a book filled with ideas, written in sentences and paragraphs, and that had to be digested through the mind. And He wants us to think about it. Psalm 1 calls the man who meditates in God’s law day and night blessed.

We must never forget that our Lord said “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul*,” but He didn’t stop there, He added “*and with all thy mind*.”²⁸ God wants us to think and to use the mind that He has given us for His glory.

Ideally, IFB pastors would realize that the call to the pastorate is the call to a lifetime of study.

Preachers are commanded to “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God*” so that we can be “*a workman, that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*.”²⁹ We preachers are also required to be “*apt to teach*,”³⁰ a qualification that presupposes study and preparation. 1 Timothy 5:17 says “*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*.” When the deacons were first chosen in Acts 6, the apostles said to the church “*It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables*.”

Study is an intellectual exercise. Like any exercise, it is work but it is

the work to which pastors are called and it is necessary for the health of the church. As students, Pastors should first and foremost know their Bibles, “*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*,”³¹ but we shouldn’t stop there. In order to understand the Bible, the pastor needs to be a student of language and history. In order to apply the Bible in a way that is alive and real to the church, the pastor also needs to be a student of current events.

In light of all this, it’s hard to imagine a faithful pastor with hostility to learning.

Ideally, IFB pastors would praise God for the gift of special people who he has gifted with wisdom and insight.

Two of the gifts of the spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 are “*the word of wisdom*” and “*the word of knowledge*.” While God requires all pastors to be students, he gives some people in each age who are especially gifted with wisdom and knowledge. Where would we be today had not God gifted William Tyndale with such a vast knowledge of languages and a desire to see God’s word translated into the English tongue? Can we not praise God for the wisdom of men in the 1800s like Charles Spurgeon or F.B. Meyer whose pens have made so many things from God’s Word clear to us?

We are thankful to God that not every Christian is an intellectual. Church would be boring (and probably pretty empty) if that were the case. We can, however, also be thankful to God that he does bless the church with thinkers and learn from these people who God has gifted us with.

The Reality

The reality today is that a big part of fundamentalism is intellectually bankrupt. Unfortunately, some of the worst read and most ignorant people I’ve ever met are called “pastor” by some Independent Baptist congregation. It defies reason that so many people tasked with studying a book as deep and wonderful as the Bible and delivering that knowledge to a congrega-

tion week after week cannot think for themselves or use language correctly.

Many fundamentalists are leery of any kind of learning. I know pastors who will only read books sold in the Hyles Anderson bookstore. I've heard from an increasing number of pastors some kind of argument against Bible College education, usually for fear that "*knowledge puffeth up*."²⁴ Even more have expressed to me the dangers of seminaries, even extremely conservative fundamental Baptist seminaries.

Some fundamentalist colleges are even anti-scholarship. There is a growing trend in fundamentalism for colleges to drop Greek and Hebrew courses from their catalogs. Traditional Bible College courses like Hermeneutics and Homiletics are being renamed "Bible Study" and "Preaching." Large numbers of books are blacklisted, and students with questions are labelled rebels.

The assumed purpose of all of these examples is to keep from some knowledge that leaders feel is dangerous to the faith. There are two problems with this purpose, one philosophical and one practical:

The philosophical problem is this: The truth should be able to stand on its own. If fundamentalism, King-James-onlyism, or whatever other "ism" that is cherished by the leader is the true biblical position, shouldn't it be able to stand up to the honest questions of a few young people? This kind of a protective stance shows that a person isn't really settled in their faith in the first place and actually drives people to curiosity about what is so dangerous "out there."

The practical problem with this kind of walled garden approach to learning is that its just far too easy for young people to get whatever information they want in the twenty-first century and far too hard for leaders to keep things a secret. Various opinions and unlimited information is just a google search away from any curious minded and bored student. If your version of fundamentalism and biblical Christianity can't withstand

a google search or a trip to the library, how will it withstand the forces of Satan?

Speaking about this almost a century ago, J. Gresham Machen, one of our fundamentalist forefathers said:

“Certainly a Christianity that avoids argument is not the Christianity of the New Testament. The New Testament is full of argument in defense of the faith. The Epistles of Paul are full of argument-no one can doubt that. But even the words of Jesus are full of argument in defense of the truth . . . Everywhere the New Testament meets objections fairly and presents the Gospel as a thoroughly reasonable thing.”³²

Machen was writing during a time when books were expensive and the internet wasn't even a dream of science fiction writers. The modern availability of information makes his words more, not less applicable.

Have Bible Believing Christians always been so weary of intellect and learning? Absolutely not. From the very beginning, we had intellectual leaders like the Apostle Paul and writers like Luke. All of us are aware of intellectual giants in our spiritual history like William Tyndale, John Bunyan, William Carey and Jonathan Edwards. We read about early fundamentalists like B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, R.A. Torrey, James Gray, and Lewis Sperry Chafer who were intellectual giants. Are there, then, any historical clues to why fundamentalism tends to be so anti-intellectual today? I think there are:

An Element of Revivalism

Christian history swings back and forth between two extremes: cold-dead intellectualism and revivalistic emotionalism. Every national revival that has ever come to the United States came during a time when religion was controlled by spiritually dead egg heads. The First Great Awakening came and wrested the control of American religion from the dead hands

of New England Puritans. The Second Great Awakening came and took control away from Old School Calvinists and Universalists. The revival of the D.L. Moody era came when mainline denominational religion was starting to move into modernism. By the time of the revival of the 1950's and 1960's, main-line denominational Christianity had wholly swallowed liberalism and as a consequence that revival saw the rise of the Independent Baptist movement.³³

Because one work of revivals is to correct some form of excessive intellectualism, and because the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement was born out of one of those revivals, our movement has never been accused of falling anywhere near the intellectual extreme. On the contrary, anti-intellectualism is as much a feature of Independent Baptists as amens and tract racks.

Fallout from anti-modernism

Early fundamentalists were fighting a battle against the theological modernism being propagated by seminaries. On top of accepting evolution, seminaries in the first half of the 1900's were (largely due to German influence) forwarding ideas critical of the inspiration of the Bible, dicing up it's supposed authorship, and denying every miracle from the crossing of the Red Sea to the virgin birth. As a natural result of this, many fundamentalists became weary of any higher learning and became radically anti-intellectual.

Billy Sunday, quite possibly the most famous and most imitated fundamentalist in the 1900's, is a great example of this. He would go around the country denouncing institutions of higher learning with as much crassness and vitriol as his audiences could stand. He'd throw out one liners like "I don't need no doctor to doctor my doctrine;" "Seminaries turn out bottle fed preachers stuffed in theological molds;" and "Academic types tried to tickle the palates of the giraffes with their high-sounding rhetoric while

their sheep starved.”³⁴ Sometimes, in his enthusiasm for the defense of the faith, he'd even go so far as to say things like “I know less about doctrine than a jack rabbit knows about ping pong.”

Necessary for Populist Appeal

For all intensive purposes, theological liberalism is dead. Though it's true that there are still denominational churches in almost every town that are pastored by theological liberals, they long ago ceased to have much influence. (Imagine that - a church that attacks its own reason for being becoming irrelevant!) Despite the death of liberalism as a threat in modern churches, the anti-intellectual rhetoric never really went away. Why? I think it's just because people like it.

Anyone who has ever been to high school in the United States could tell you that there are plenty of Americans that get a sense of joy by picking on smart people. There is a rapport to be gained by a pastor with his people (in some areas) by picking on those nerds in higher education. Modernism has been dead for a while, but it keeps getting burned as a straw man because doing so rallies the troops and seems to cost nothing.

How do we fix this?

Call intellectual laziness what it is.

If we are going to keep the anti-intellectual tendencies in our churches at bay, we cannot continue to promote preachers and teachers who do not study and read. There are many callings where someone who hates reading and studying can fit in, the pastoral ministry should not be one of them. Let's be honest, long meandering sermons, rabbit trails, hobby horses, and the oft repeated "I was going to preach on something else today, but I feel the spirit moving me in a different direction" are too often just symptoms of "don't-want-to-studyitis". It takes hard work for a preacher to preach 3 or 4 Bible messages a week; if it is hard work you don't want to do, find another ministry.

Learn to value those to whom God has given superior intellect and wisdom.

If God gifts some Christians with wisdom and knowledge, then let's encourage those people to use their spiritual gifts, not treat them with continual suspicion. In order to properly defend the faith against the attacks of Satan, we need the insight of smart, thinking people. Thinking people ask questions, and they take time to come solidly to their conclusions. So when bright young people ask tough questions, let's try to answer them as openly as possible. As long as there exists in some sections of fundamentalism an idea gestapo, young people are going to be fleeing to the free world whether the ideas are better there or not. If, as I believe it is, the Independent Baptist position is the closest to Scripture, then it will stand up to their questions.

Stand up against the devil where he is actually attacking today.

There are many in fundamentalism who will rail on modernism and liberals but couldn't tell you what the emerging church is, couldn't tell you a thing about the "say it and claim it" theology of Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer, have no idea what postmodernism is, know very little about the church growth movement, and have little ammunition to use against the excessive Calvinism of John Piper and R.C. Sproul. We need people who will stand for biblical truth against error, but we need people who will fight today's battles, not rehash battles that have been over for nearly 75 years. As Martin Luther is often quoted as saying "If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. . . . Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved;"³⁵

Be conscious of collateral damage.

In attacking the modernistic seminaries of the late 1800's and early 1900's fundamentalist leaders ended up alienating a generation of young Bible scholars. When we attack error, we need to do it as fairly as possible. If you cut out a tumor with an axe, you might do more harm than good. The tumor needs to be removed, but how much better is it to do it with a scalpel instead. Let's be careful in our necessary and zealous defense of the faith, not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Notes

22 - I Corinthians 2:4

23 - 2 Timothy 3:7

24 - I Corinthians 8:1

25 - Proverbs 1:7

26 - Proverbs 1:22

27 - Romans 10:2

28 - Matthew 22:37

29 - 2 Timothy 2:15

30 - I Timothy 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:24

31 - I Corinthians 2:13

32 - Machen, J. Gresham, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004), 23-24

33 - McLoughlin, William G., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham*, (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959), 10

34 - Bruns, 126-129

35 - The actual origin of this quote is a little hard to track down. It has been many times attributed to Luther and there can be no doubt he said similar things, but it may have been the creation of a mid 1800s Anglican hymn writer.