

# Discerning New Evangelicalism

## Lesson Two

### Defining Fundamentalism

I read of a series of lectures a few years ago entitled *Defining Fundamentalism*. I thought that this was quite an ambitious goal since Fundamentalism has really never been define. **The term Fundamentalism has always been theologically ambiguous.** Any attempt to define it has historically been done by trying to add adjectives to it such as *Fighting, Militant* or *Biblical*.

Fundamentalism, as a movement, was born out of the battle against Liberalism and Liberalism's denial of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and the cardinal doctrines of the Faith (the results of German Rationalism and Higher Criticism). However, Fundamentalism as a theology existed long before this.

In reading the little, four volume set entitled **The Fundamentals** issued by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in 1917; "Edited by R.A. Torrey, A.C. Dixon and Others" (later reprinted by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan), we find the articles dealing mainly with the arguments of Higher Criticism and the resulting denial of various cardinal doctrines. A basic reading of the Table of Contents on the opening pages of these four volumes should reveal to us that the unity of the authors of each of the chapters centered more on their disagreement with their opposition than it did with theological unity on many important theological arenas of discussion.

**Volume One** deals mainly with Higher Criticism

**Volume Two** deals mainly with the inspiration of the Bible and the Deity of Christ

**Volume Three** deals with Anthropology and Soteriological (the most doctrinally definitive articles are "Is Romanism Christianity?" by T.W. Medhurst and "Rome, The Antagonist of the Nation" by Rev. J.M. Foster)

**Volume Four** deals with various "modern" Philosophies and the Cults ("ISMS")

Although most Fundamental Baptists would agree with a great deal of what is written in these four volumes, they would not *fellowship* with the vast majority of the authors. The vast majority of the authors of the various articles in this publication are Reformed/Covenant in their theology and from diverse denominational backgrounds.

The great difficulty in defining Fundamentalism is due to the attempt to define a theological position with one word. However, the difficulty is in the presumption of agreement on all areas of theology. The central and uniting area of agreement within Fundamentalism has never been much more than its agreement on the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible and, perhaps, a literal interpretation of the Bible (even though interpretation is often influenced by suppositions that are imposed upon the text; i.e. eisegesis).

There were peripheral areas of agreement on certain cardinal doctrines, but these were expected areas of agreement and even that agreement was not total. These would include such basic things as Creation as opposed to evolution (even though there was considerable diversity here such as the Gap Theory of the Scofield Reference Bible and a few who held to Theistic Evolution), the Deity of Christ and the Trinity of God (although there was considerable diversity in regards to the ministry of the Holy Spirit between the Holiness/Keswickian, Pentecostals and Dispensationalists), salvation/justification by grace through faith (although considerable diversity about what these terms mean between such SYSTEMS of theology such as Calvinism/Armenianism and some that practiced paedobaptism, from the Greek word *paidion* {pahee-dee'-on}, such as the fundamentalist Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians) and their opposition to Roman Catholicism (primarily Papalism).

Therefore, the ambiguity of the term *Fundamentalism* stems from a lack of theological definitiveness regarding the fundamental doctrines of "the faith." There was really no specific agreement on those fundamentals of the faith within the movement. I believe that the result of this was that the movement was pre-programmed to be inclusivistic. New Evangelicalism was intrinsic to Fundamentalism and, without the theological definitiveness necessary from keeping this engrained New Evangelicalism from coming forth, every new generation of Fundamentalism gives birth to new New Evangelicals. The new New Evangelicals of our generation are called *Young Fundamentalists*.

William Ward Ayer, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in April 1956 (as quoted in Louis Gasper's book, **The Fundamentalist Movement**) gives what I believe is the best definition of Fundamentalism I have ever read:

“Fundamentalism represents a resurgence of ancient practices, which began not with Martin Luther but at Pentecost. Fundamentalism is apostolic, and the doctrine of justification goes back to Paul. That branch from which the fundamentalist movement sprang lived obscurely through the ages and had never been completely silenced even in the Dark Ages . . . What fundamentalism did was awaken the slumbering apostolicism from lethargy.”

Therefore, when we take the idea of Fundamentalism out the Modernists controversy of the early Twentieth century, we should simply define *Fundamentalism* as **Apostolic, New Testament, Biblical Christianity**. This was not be the meaning of the word as it was coined, but we must ask ourselves, did Fundamentalism exist before the term was initially used? If so, how would that Fundamentalism have been defined?

**This wide theological diversity among early Fundamentalists naturally led to a tolerance of theological differences.** In this dynamic, the focus is centered upon the areas where agreement is found while minimizing the areas of disagreement. As a result, this tended toward inclusivism. This pre-programmed many of the early fundamentalist for Neo-evangelicalism (as it continues to do today).

### **Barthian Inspiration**

Charles C. Ryrie in his book **Basic Theology** (Victor Books, 1982) makes a discerning statement regarding the influence of Karl Barth's position on inspiration upon evangelical Christianity.

“Karl Barth (1886-1968), though one of the most influential theologians in recent history, held a defective and dangerous view of inspiration, a view many continue to propagate. Barthians generally align themselves with the liberal school of biblical criticism. Yet they often preach like evangelicals. This makes Barthianism more dangerous than blatant liberalism.

For the Barthian, revelation centers in Jesus Christ. If He is the center of the circle of revelation, then the Bible stands on the periphery of that circle. Jesus Christ is the Word (and, of course, He is); but the Bible serves as a witness to the Word, Christ. The Bible's witness to the Word is uneven; that is, some parts are more important in their witness than other parts. Those are the parts that witness about Christ.”

Essentially in this position, the center of revelation is Jesus Christ; the Bible stands on the periphery of that circle. Jesus Christ is the Word. Therefore, the most important parts (the Majors) are those that witness about Jesus Christ.

Karl Barth was not a Fundamentalist by any definition. Although most evangelicals and New-Evangelicals would not agree with Barthians as they embrace the conclusions of liberalism regarding the Gospels, which teach that there are errors in their records, they do embrace the idea of *Major and Minor doctrines*, which is a foundational premise for the development of Neo-Evangelicalism. Most Young Fundamentalist have embraced this philosophy of *Major and Minor doctrines* without ever really understanding or examining Barth's philosophical premise for it.

**“Let's major on the Majors and minor on the Minors.”** We have all heard someone make a statement like that at sometime or another. Another phraseology that communicates the same idea are the words *essentials* and *non-essentials*. What those phrases reveal is the influence of this Barthian concept of inspiration upon Christianity. This is, in many cases, the first stepping stone to New Evangelicalism (although many people use these phrases ignorant of their meaning).

This influence has led many evangelicals and New-Evangelicals to list the importance of their *cardinal* doctrines vertically according to pragmatic and subjective criteria relating to their priority of reaching people for Christ. It is a subtle error that sustains itself with a deception of noble purpose. Nonetheless, it is a serious error.

The Barthian concept of inspiration obviously redirects the priority of Scripture away from its doxological purpose to a soteriological purpose. In doing so, it redirects the priority of Scripture towards evangelism. Doctrines like personal and ecclesiastical separation are moved down in the list of subordinate doctrines in order for people to hear the gospel (even to the place of rationalizing these doctrines out of existence or relegating them to irrelevance and obscurity). This is the driving rationale of the *Carnival Church*.

## “Jot and Tittle” Fundamentalism

“<sup>17</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. <sup>18</sup> For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

When it comes to Christ’s “commandments” (i.e., directive truths for living), there are no *Major* or *Minor doctrines*. There are no *essentials* and *non-essentials*. Truth is not categorized vertically according to importance or priority. Truth is cataloged horizontally and all of it is on the same level of importance. Every Christian becomes a depository for every single commandment of God and is responsible to “contend” for each of those “commandments” tenaciously. I believe that is the exact meaning of Jude 1:3 and is the exact meaning of the “jot and tittle” command of Christ.

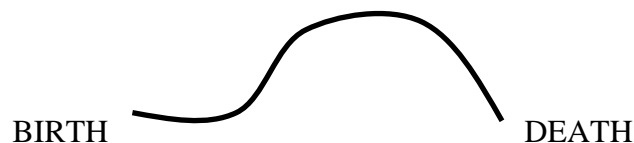
“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

The word “delivered” in the above verse is from the Greek word *paradidomi* (par-ad-id’-o-mee). It means to deliver something to someone to keep, use, take care of and/or manage. The idea is one of guardianship. (We will deal with the commands of Jude 1:3 more extensively later in this article.) According to Matthew 5:17-19, we are commanded to be “jot and tittle” Fundamentalists. Defeat takes place anytime we surrender any single truth and cease to fight for any single issue of truth. That does not give us permission to be rude or unkind, because we are also commanded to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

Paul uses the word *epieikes* (ep-ee-i-kace’) in Philippians 4:5 when he says, “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand.” That word (translated “moderation”) means mildness or gentleness. Contending for “the faith” needs to be done tenaciously without being abrasive or crude.

## The Sigmoid Curve

(The Life Cycle Curve)

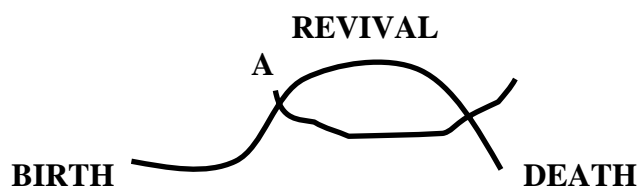


The above graph is known as the **Sigmoid Curve** and is used as a means to understand the life cycle of an organization, a relationship, a life or even a local church, association/convention of churches and/or educational institution (the name is derived from the 18<sup>th</sup> letter of the Greek alphabet; *sigma*). The concept is simple in that the premise is built upon the fact that everything has a beginning and an end.

This is a graphical expression of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (more commonly know to Christians as “the curse”). The Second Law of Thermodynamics describes basic principles familiar in everyday life. It is partially a universal law of decay (entropy); the ultimate cause of why everything ultimately falls apart and disintegrates over time. Material things are not eternal. Everything appears to change eventually and chaos increases. Even death is a manifestation of this law.

**A fact of life is death.** Every person born into this world lives for an undetermined amount of time (from man’s perspective, not God’s; Hebrews 9:27), gets sick and dies. That fact is ultimately true of every organization or *movement* on earth. God has a plan to interrupt this continuum. He does this through His personal and supernatural interference in the affairs of man and the human predicament. He does this through revelation of His will (“vision”), regeneration, revival and restoration. We know these times of recovery from the *Curve* as historical and spiritual paradigms (Dispensations). God refers to the “faithful” of these transitional periods as the “remnant” (Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11; Romans 11:5 and Revelation 12:17).

There are also times of recovery in local churches, denominations/conventions associations and religious educational institutions through the renewing of “vision,” revival and restoration. Dr. Arnold L. Cook, in his book **Historical Drift**, charts this recovery in a graph he calls “Jumping The Sigmoid Curve” as follows:



The best place to intercede for recovery is at the earliest point of recognition of *Plateau* (point A). It is at this point that “vision” must be renewed and revival must take place for recovery to happen. There will normally be some declension in that the momentum of “death” will reveal itself through resistance by some to a renewal of “vision” and revival. This declension and resistance should be anticipated and planned for.

## Progressive Fundamentalism (pronounced Young Fundamentalist)

**Liberals try to mask their attempts to move a society or generation away from historical absolutes by using terms that remove the negativity of what they are doing.** For instance, they call themselves *Pro-Choice* rather than *Pro-Abortion*. The term they have adopted to describe the advancement of their liberal agenda is *Progressive*. It has been (and still is) a key word in Fabian Socialism (Marxist Re-Constructionism).

**The root of political liberalism is theological liberalism. The religion of political liberalism has become Secular Humanism** (Secular Humanism has been qualified as a religion by the Supreme Court of the U.S.A.).

Any movement towards liberalism politically is deemed *progressive*. People are said to be *progressive* when they become more tolerant and receptive of more open-minded views of sexuality, cultural norms and the Neo-absolutes of Liberalism (Political Correctness). Those who refuse to be tolerant and receptive of these new norms are considered Right Wing and are ridiculed for their archaic beliefs.

**Absolutism (which is essentially the only real defining factor of Biblical Fundamentalism) establishes a system of absolute rights and absolute wrongs and does so dogmatically.** Within professing Fundamentalism, there are a growing number of people shying away from the theological dogmatism of past generations. That is because theological dogmatism often results in the kind of conflict that demands separation from the people with whom we call *friends*.

**The sad truth is that many people have a greater loyalty to their friends and family than they do to the Lord and His Word.** This is an abnormality in Christianity. This is the exact context of Christ's warning in Matthew 10:34-38.

“<sup>34</sup> Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. <sup>36</sup> And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. <sup>37</sup> He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:34-38).

**Progressive Fundamentalism is a mocking caricature of the real thing.** It hides behind a pragmatic façade of professed love. However, “love” at the sacrifice of truth is a false love. Love that does not seek to rescue the errant from the “way” of destruction is not love at all. Love always expresses itself through the medium of truth. It does so as gently and as tenderly as possible, but it does so.

The man caught up in a life of sin is like a person caught in a tangled coil of barbed wire. Every move cuts him deeply and entangles him more severely. He needs to escape to survive. The Progressive Fundamentalist (*Young Fundamentalist*) would try to counsel him about *Pain Management* or how to get in touch with his *Inner Self* in order to focus upon the positive rather than the negative. What he needs is to have someone love him enough to take the *Sword of the Lord* and confront each area of sin in his life, gently extracting every *barb* from his *flesh* one piece of wire at a time. There will be some pain involved, but it needs to be done.

The Christian ceases to be “salt and light” the very moment he compromises truth in any way. Progressive Fundamentalism lets truth slip through its apathetic fingers because its grip on that truth is weak. It really does not *own* Truth for its self. It talks as if it does, but it really doesn't. If a truth does not advance its agenda for *church growth* (really self promotion and Empire Building), Progressive Fundamentalism will readily sacrifice that particular truth at its *High Place* to the idol of its pragmatism.

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Lesson Two  
Defining Fundamentalism

1. Discuss why the term *Fundamentalism* is ambiguous and why it really cannot be defined in any real detail. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Discuss why it is important to understand the contents of the four volumes called **The Fundamentals** issued by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in 1917 as they relate to the difficulty in a detailed definition of *Fundamentalism*. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Discuss New Evangelicalism should be an expected outcome of *Fundamentalism*. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What does the present generation of new New Evangelicals coming out of *Fundamentalism* call themselves? \_\_\_\_\_

5. According to William Ward Ayer, in his speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in April of 1965, did *Fundamentalism* exist before the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy of the late 1800's, and early 1990's? If so, what would THAT *Fundamentalism* been known as? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Discuss Karl Barth's distorted view of inspiration and the outcomes of that view on New Evangelicalism and *Fundamentalism*. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Read Matthew 5:17-19. How do these verses define Apostolic Christianity (true Fundamentalism)?

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8. Discuss the Sigmoid Curve as it relates to the death of a movement (such as Fundamentalism) or organization (such as a local church) and how to interrupt the *Death Phenomena*. \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Discuss the meaning of the word *progressive* as it relates to the way New Evangelicalism develops out of *Fundamentalism*. \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What is the only real defining factor of Biblical Fundamentalism and why is that important as it regards theological diversity among various sects of Christianity? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Read Matthew 10:34-38. Discuss why INTOLERANCE of theological diversity within Christianity should be the norm as opposed to tolerance of theological diversity. \_\_\_\_\_

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