

**Fundamentalism: the Misread Gospel, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr.** 25081102  
**Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37 and Matthew 23:1-12**  
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For one hundred twenty years, now, religious wars have been fought between Christian liberals and fundamentalists. As biblical scholars in the 1860s began pointing out the fact that Moses could not have personally written the first five books of the Bible, there arose the discipline of biblical criticism. Conservative Christians reacted, saying that one should not question the construction of the Bible as God's word. Bitter controversies tore many congregations and denominations apart. The Scopes trial, or "Monkey Trial," in Dayton, Tennessee was a reflection of this controversy.

What is fundamentalism? Let me begin by saying what it is not! Fundamentalism is not necessarily traditionalism. The Amish are traditional, but not fundamental. Fundamentalism is not the attempt to live the religious faith with conviction. Quakers associated with the American Friends Service Committee are deeply committed to living and teaching the religious principle of peace, but they are not fundamental. Fundamentalism is not a rejection of modern technology. Operation Rescue, a fundamentalist organization, uses the latest computers, cellular telephones, internet, and transportation in their efforts to impose their beliefs on society.

It is the characteristic ways that fundamentalists select, present, and understand the "fundamentals" that sets them apart from liberal, moderate or orthodox believers. Perhaps my favorite commentary on fundamentalism was given by Frank E. Davison, former pastor of First Christian Church of South Bend, Indiana. Davison said,

"Fundamentalism. That's an interesting word. It seems to me that there isn't much 'fun' in fundamentalism. There doesn't seem to be much 'mental' in fundamentalism either. But, what really bothers me is that 'dam' in the middle!"

Christian fundamentalism's founders included B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) of Princeton, Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921), famous for the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and John Nelson Darby (1800-1882).

To be a Christian fundamentalist, one must believe these things: 1) the verbal inspiration of the Bible, 2) the virgin birth, 3) the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, 4) the miracles of Jesus, and 5) the physical character of the Resurrection.

But then, it depends upon which "fundamentals" fundamentalists decide to be fundamental. Other lists include believing in the deity of Christ; the second coming; the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion; and the sanctification of the sinner, the eternal blessedness of those accounted by God as righteous because of their faith in Christ, and the eternal punishment of the wicked.

Fundamentalism is growing dangerously in the major religions of the world. Beside Christian fundamentalists, there are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh fundamentalists who all believe that culture should be dominated by and led by the principles and laws of the Word of God – as *they* read and interpret it. They all read and interpret God's Word in different ways!

Dangerous hatreds can be nurtured by any dogmatism. Randall Terry and Operation Rescue bomb clinics and kill doctors to enforce their beliefs. The Gush Emunim in Israel kill and bomb both Jews and Muslims who interfere with their belief that the West Bank belongs to the Jews. The Taliban and Al Qaeda proudly embrace war, torture and terrorism to enforce strict fundamentalist Shiite Muslim rule throughout the Middle East. In India, Sikh and Hindu

fundamentalists kill and burn each other to gain control of the golden temple at Amritsar.

Fundamentalists are like the vineyard tenants who seized the landowner's slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.<sup>1</sup> By misreading the Gospel and violently controlling the vineyard, they will face God's judgment.

We face a dilemma. Religious freedom must be able to exist. For religious freedom to exist, a liberal atmosphere must exist which allows various and conflicting religious beliefs to exist side-by-side. As a liberal religious atmosphere exists, fundamentalisms prosper. As fundamentalisms prosper and take power, they define religion their way, excluding religious beliefs that conflict with their own. As a result, they destroy the very liberal atmosphere which allowed their life and prosperity in the first place. Therefore, what I am preaching today is this: it is important for you to know what you believe. If not, you will be swayed by those who are certain about their faith and how it is articulated, and who want everyone else to believe what they believe. I can tell you of scores of families that have been torn apart by fundamentalist's beliefs.

It is important for you to uphold and defend a liberal religious atmosphere. Picture the spokes on a wheel. God and religious truth are in the center. The farther out the spoke of one's faith, the more fundamental and exclusive one is. Those who are less fundamental in religions can get along with each other. I have been a part of round-table groups made up of liberal Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims who can work together to discover truth in an atmosphere of dialogue and trust.

You are part of a denomination that believes in something much more fundamental than so called "fundamentalists" of any stripe believe. When you confess your Christian faith, we do not ask you to subscribe to a list of five fundamentals. We ask simply whether you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and whether you accept him as your savior.

The fundamentals which are more fundamental are these: the two great commandments listed in Luke 10:27, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Or, how about this as the fundamental of all fundamentals: God is love! 1 John 4:8 states, "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

This universe is in God's control, and history will ultimately serve God's purposes. It is not up to us to judge or condemn. It is not up to us to physically and violently fight for God's rule to succeed. It *is* up to us to serve God and to work in our way in our daily worlds to serve our fellow human beings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus warns us, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."<sup>2</sup>

If we can accept our fellow humans without judging, there is the promise that we also will be accepted by our loving God without judgment. We will be witnessing to the fruits of God's kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 21:33-41

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 7:1-2