# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

# A Christian Fundamentalist Travel Guide

**MATTHEW HOSKINSON**[1]



The term *fundamentalist* bears many different meanings. For Seth Godin, it describes "a person who considers whether a fact is acceptable to their faith before they explore it." Andrew Sullivan equates it with one who holds to "Biblical fetishism" (i.e., the inerrancy of Scripture). And Rick Warren defines it as "somebody who stops listening."

Since *fundamentalist* has such negative connotations, it is a wonder that anyone would accept it as anything but an accusation. Nevertheless tens of thousands of Christians gladly adopt and defend this label. And to understand why they would, one must differentiate between fundamentalism as an *idea* and fundamentalism as a *movement*.

## FUNDAMENTALISM: AN IDEA AND A MOVEMENT

The idea of Fundamentalism originated in the early twentieth century with the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. Mainline denominations were succumbing to theological liberalism and (later) Neo-orthodoxy. With the Scopes Trial of 1925, Christians across denominational lines saw the tide turning against them. They therefore sought to unite in opposition to modernist syncretism. Their unity centered on the essential tenets of the gospel—the fundamentals of the faith—and they agreed to check denominational distinctives at the door. Consequently, early Fundamentalists included covenant theologians and dispensationalists, credobaptists and paedobaptists, and representatives of all three millennial positions. While no binding list of fundamentals was drawn up and ratified by all, among the core doctrines to which all subscribed were the inerrancy of Scripture; the biblical account of creation; and Christ's virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection. As an idea, then, Fundamentalism is the uniting of Christians around the basic tenets of the gospel in order to work together for the advancement of the Church to the glory of God.

The movement of fundamentalism began with this idea. But the nature of the movement today depends more on what happened years later. In the late 1940s, some fundamentalists began identifying problems they saw within the movement. Perhaps the most significant was the strategy of withdrawing from modern scholarship. Fundamentalists saw little need to engage unbelieving minds on matters where God had

[1] Matthew Hoskinson is the pastor of the First Baptist Church in the City of New York and director of member care and mobilization for Frontline Missions.

spoken. But the dissenters, calling themselves Neo-evangelicals, proposed a strategy of infiltration, arguing that non-engagement actually threatened the future of Christianity. As Carl Henry wrote, "If Protestant orthodoxy holds itself aloof from the present world predicament it is doomed to a much reduced role" (*The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 63). Fundamentalists argued that accommodating unbelief was the greatest danger to the future of Christianity. The attempt to infiltrate academia ran the risk of compromising truth. In an oft-repeated quip, fundamentalists believed that the Neo-evangelical was saying to the liberal, "I'll call you a Christian if you'll call me a scholar."



The dissension between these groups reached a breaking point in 1957 when Billy Graham included Roman Catholics in his New York City Crusade. For Fundamentalists, this was the last straw. Moved by passages such as 2 Thessalonians 3, they split from the Neo-evangelicals. Consequently, the movement that began with the goal of Christian unity became better known for its emphasis on separation.

## FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY

From this brief history, one can see that the network of relationships forming the Fundamentalist movement rests on two foundations: they affirm the central tenets of the gospel, and they separate from anyone they believe has compromised that gospel. The latter, however, became paramount because of Graham. What he did threatened the very purity of the message he preached. In order to guard the gospel, Fundamentalists withdrew not only from false teachers (i.e., primary separation), but also from orthodox believers who did not withdraw from false teachers (i.e., secondary separation). On the basis of Jude 3, they reasoned that such robust militancy is the only right way to defend the gospel. Fundamentalists have written numerous books defending separatism, and they cite some recent books by broader evangelicals as additional proof that the strategy of infiltration has failed.

One might expect that, given their agreement on the gospel and separation, the movement would be monolithic. But that is hardly the case. Fundamentalists vary widely on many matters, as we shall see, sometimes even differing over what compromises the gospel. In consequence, they do occasionally separate from one another. Disagreements about Bible translations or worship music, for example, often result in some self-identified Fundamentalists saying that other self-identified Fundamentalists are not, in fact, Fundamentalists.

*Old-Time Fundamentalists*

Within the movement one can easily identify a stream which might be termed **old-time Fundamentalists.** In a sense they are fighting the battles of the 1970s and 1980s. With the new Bible translations of that era, the dominance of the King James Version began to wane. Old-time fundamentalists rejected the NIV and NASB as "trash-lations" and affirmed that the KJV alone is the inspired, inerrant (or, at minimum, the preserved) Word of God.



Furthermore, the cultural shift of 1960s America led old-time Fundamentalists increasingly to demand specific codes of personal conduct. Sinful taboos included women wearing pants, men wearing facial hair, and children attending public schools. Old-time Fundamentalists are concerned with evangelism, esteeming certain evangelistic activities to be vital (e.g., bus ministry, door-to-door soul-winning).

They are usually independent Baptists and exclusively dispensational. If these websites are accurate, more self-identified Fundamentalists fall into this category than into any other. While there are certainly different currents within this stream, it is represented by institutions like Pensacola Bible Institute, Hyles-Anderson College, West Coast Baptist College, Crown College (TN), and Pensacola Christian College.

*Traditional Fundamentalists*

A second stream, to the left of old-time fundamentalists, may be called **traditional Fundamentalists.** Traditional Fundamentalists are fighting the battles of the 1940s and 1950s. They have a strong sense of loyalty to their forefathers who separated from the Neo-evangelical movement. Their aversion to Billy Graham is just as strong as it was in 1957, and their commitment to separate from anyone who aligns with Graham has not diminished.

Traditional fundamentalists, however, are not obscurantist like most old-time Fundamentalists. While many might prefer the KJV, most would recommend other formal equivalence translations. Standards of personal conduct are crucial, but they recognize more liberty in application than most within the first group. They are conservative in their musical choices (both corporately and privately), and they tend to see the need for discipleship more than most old-time fundamentalists. (The latter's discipleship is often little more than soul-winning training.)

This group is largely independent Baptist, but a fair number of non-denominationalists and Presbyterians comfortably reside here as well. Among the institutions that are a part of traditional fundamentalism are Bob Jones University, Northland Baptist Bible

College, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and Geneva Reformed Seminary.

***Historic Fundamentalists***

One other matter merits attention in this discussion of contemporary Fundamentalism. Some traditional Fundamentalists—including many in the younger generation—are rethinking the applications of separatism. Their desire to see greater unity around the gospel reflects a mindset akin to the Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s. Though they are currently a subset of traditional fundamentalism, for the sake of distinction one might call them *historic fundamentalists.*



(Aside to my Fundamentalist friends: I am well aware that many traditional Fundamentalists would describe themselves as historic Fundamentalists, but would not fit into this category as I've defined it. I am not seeking to stir up a debate about labels, which are often inadequate tools for discussion. I am simply trying to describe what I see happening.)

As 1957 moves further into the past, historic Fundamentalists seem to be less inclined to see Graham as the single litmus test for fellowship. That does not mean Graham's compromise is unimportant to them. They would agree that Graham has done serious harm to the evangelical movement. But the fact that right-wing evangelicalism acknowledges the disastrous state of their movement leads historic Fundamentalists to probe whether they can and should link arms with them. Their desire is not so much to leave traditional Fundamentalism; indeed, their appreciation of men from both traditional fundamentalism (e.g., Mark Minnick, Kevin Bauder, David Doran) and right-wing evangelicalism (e.g., John Piper, John MacArthur, D. A. Carson) compels them to bridge the two. Thus, conferences like Together for the Gospel, organizations like Ligonier Ministries, and music producers like Sovereign Grace are appealing because their emphasis on the person and work of Christ has the potential for unifying the two camps.

What remains to be answered is whether the rest of traditional Fundamentalists consent. Some may be driven by conscience to disagree, seeing T4G or Ligonier as fundamentally flawed because of its ties to broader evangelicalism. Concerning music, there is significant debate today concerning whether non-traditional music should be used in corporate worship or whether this would be in violation of the doctrine of separation, regardless of the style used. If historic Fundamentalists pursue fellowship with right-wing evangelicals, some—probably many—traditional Fundamentalists will wrestle with the question of separation. The burden resting on historic Fundamentalists is how to build a bridge to right-wing evangelicals without burning the bridge to traditional

Fundamentalists. At this time, however, because of some of the conclusions that historic Fundamentalists are drawing, many traditional Fundamentalists question whether the former are Fundamentalists at all.

**CONCLUSION**



As Fundamentalism moves into the new century, profound disagreements over the very identity of the movement threaten its future. At its worst, Fundamentalism has the potential for an endless series of divisions that could result in unfair accusations, broken relationships, and—saddest of all—a sullied testimony before a fallen world. At its best, however, Fundamentalism reminds broader Christendom of its need to be doctrinally pure and bear the reproaches of Christ. The question is whether Fundamentalists can fulfill that mission without first caving in on itself.

Of course, whatever impact Christian Fundamentalism will have in twenty-first century America, like the rest of the world, ultimately lies in the hands of the One who knows the end from the beginning. And what he does is always better than we could imagine.