

Fundamentalism

The value of fundamentalism is its reminder that there are basics of the Christian faith that are a necessary core. We need to hold fast to our faith in God in Christ, Who is bringing all the world to Himself.

Besides the basics of faith like John 3:16, they add some beliefs to the list of basics. These five were chosen by Fundamentalists about 100 years ago:

- The virgin birth
- The inerrancy and verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible,
- Penal substitutionary atonement
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus
- The imminent return of Jesus.

Two and a half of these are in the creeds of early Christianity (300's), but there is a lot more in the creeds that aren't in this list.

Here are some of the problems with Protestant Fundamentalism.

- Fundamentalism claims to take the Bible literally. This is true for some of the verses, but they don't take all the verses literally, nobody does that. Some statements were obviously meant by God and their authors to be metaphors, symbols. Fundamentalists interpret a certain meaning and then deny they are interpreting. It is truer to God when we take it seriously but not always literally. Sometimes taking it literally gets in the way of the message. Isaiah 8:12 says "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread."

- Fundamentalism provides easy certainty. It provides more certainty than the Bible does. This is attractive to those who want easy answers to hard questions, but it is not what God has given us. There is a whole lot more to faith in God than answers to our questions. Answers can add to trust, but they can also substitute for trust.

- Fundamentalism takes the Bible's statements about the second coming of Jesus and the end of times and gives them an order which the Bible doesn't give. Fundamentalism tells us more than God does.

"When will the Kingdom come?" people asked Jesus. He gave them some signs but also says things that add up to "its not your business". Mark 13:32 is an example. Prophecies are warnings, not predictions. They are not meant to tell the future, they are meant to change the future. Revelation must be seen in its native habitat in order to be understood. It is part of a large group of literature of the oppressed. It is a way of telling the truth covertly (behind the scenes). It tells that the Kingdom of God overcomes any oppressive human Kingdom.

- Fundamentalism takes verses from here and there in the Bible to prove beliefs about baptism, the second coming of Jesus, who is saved and who isn't, and more. Taking verses from here and there to prove a belief has led to proving God approves slavery,

God approves us making war, God approves destroying the physical world to make money. But when we read the whole Bible, we find that God doesn't approve those things. That's why we try to understand the whole Bible on a subject before we judge what God means. We don't just take verses from here and there that prove our belief.

- Fundamentalists emphasize that the purpose of Jesus was to die for our sins so we would go to heaven. But that's only part of it. The Bible shows that Jesus was here for a more complete purpose than that. If the only reason Jesus came was to die for our sins, then why would he have preached?

His beatitudes (Matthew 5 and Luke 7) overturned common assumptions of the blessings from power. His criticism of religious authorities was not just to give them an excuse to kill him. His parables about the Kingdom of God were about the present life, not life after death.

Why would he have done miracles? If he had done it only to show that he was God, why would he have fed people and healed people and changed water into wine and walked on water and calmed a storm? He did drive out demons to show his power over sin and raised the dead to show he could be raised. But those and other miracles show his great compassion for those who needed help.

Jesus fulfilled prophecy, came to live in human life, introduced us to a personal loving God, was crucified, rose, ascended and is returning for a lot more than just to save individuals from hell.

He instructs us. He gives instructions in sermons to refuse murder, insults, revenge, lust. He tells us not to carry anger and judge others and worry about daily needs. He gives instructions to reconcile with those you disagree with, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, give, love your enemies. He tells us not to be misled by religious talk but to live by his teaching.

Why would he teach about sin as internal motives as well as outward actions? Because the eternal life is meant to be lived this side of death as well as the other side. We don't do these things to get to heaven, we do them to enjoy it and spread it now.

He did all these things to demonstrate the Kingdom of God, and then said it was among us now, as well as coming in the future. He expects us to live in it now, even before we go to heaven. His teaching was not so much about getting out of this world into heaven, it was about getting heaven into this world.

- Fundamentalism emphasizes a personal faith in Jesus only. It is all about my personal salvation. They ignore, or individualize, all the things in the Bible about social faith.

One group of religious people at the time of Jesus was the Pharisees. They were strong on blame, shame, guilt, separation, and belief in future resurrection when this world is purified. They had lots of rules. Jesus criticized the Pharisees sometimes, but not because he disagreed with their beliefs. His criticism was about their spiritual pride. They felt holier than everyone else because they thought they were right and everyone else was wrong. That's the temptation modern day Fundamentalists have fallen for. Spiritual pride. Fundamentalism is the Phariseeism of our day. It is rules that exclude those who are not for our interpretation of Jesus. It is overly narrow boundaries. It is judgments based on outward, visible things rather than the heart.

Dangers

One danger of Fundamentalism is refusing to use our God given gift of reason and believing something because somebody else tells us to. It is turning our brain over to somebody else and letting them do our thinking for us. This is easier for people who would rather just feel their faith and not use any thought, but that doesn't make it Godly.

Another danger is separatism. Associating only with people who agree with your beliefs makes a small world, and a small faith. It cuts us off from hearing God speak through others outside our little group of friends.

Another danger is small religion. In their way of making it basic and simple, they make religion too small. It doesn't have the change to enjoy the mysteries of the God who is beyond us.

Another danger is overemphasis on rules and, for some, overemphasis on feelings.

These have been the main complaints of those who came out of Fundamentalism, who believe Christ saved them from it.

Fundamentalism is one part of the Christian family. It has its benefits and its negatives. We can gain from the benefits and stay away from the mistakes. I appreciate its lessons, but I won't let its rigid doctrines get in the way of loving God.