**Fundamental Baptist Churches vs. Biblical Baptist Assemblies**

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**Introduction**

Having been saved in a Fundamental Baptist church and educated in Fundamental seminaries, and having ministered in several Fundamental Baptist churches, I think know a thing or two about the Fundamental Baptist Church movement. I am currently the pastor of Bible Baptist Church of Cromwell, CT, which is an independent Baptist church with an independent Baptist theological seminary under her *aegis*. Although some may posit that the Fundamental Baptist Church movement is indeed biblical, or some may claim that their churches are not in the Fundamental Baptist Church movement but are Independent Baptist churches, biblical clarity will settle the issue.

**Fundamentalism**

The origin and consequently nature of organized and practical Fundamentalism is that it started somewhat “officially” in America in the 1920’s as Protestant denominations attempted to battle the encroachment of liberal higher criticism which eventually permeated their seminaries and churches. The Protestant theologians and pastors (especially Presbyterian and Methodist) united in their fight with the liberals over the “fundamental” doctrines of the Christian faith, including, Biblical inerrancy, the nature divine of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, and His return. Other doctrines were considered “non-essential” in the embroglio. The major “non-essential” doctrine in Fundamentalism was ecclesiology, the nature, doctrine, and practices of the “church.” Consequently, the term church had two meanings, namely the local church and the universal church. The practices in the local church were heavily influenced by all of the varieties of Protestantism, which movement originated in 1517 as “reformed” Roman Catholicism (Luther, Calvin, Henry the VIII, *et al*)! Obviously, the RCC held in doctrine and practice to the universal (catholic) church and this heretical doctrine continued in the Reformers with their territorial churches. Luther coined the term “invisible church” since he was disciplined out of the visible church of RCC. Calvin maintained that the “invisible church” was made up of the elect. Fundamentalists and Baptist Fundamentalists employed erroneously the term “Body of Christ” to the mystical, universal, invisible, ghost, church of the elect. Although fundamentalists would and do aver that they believe in the local church, they also advocate that the Body of Christ is the invisible ecclesiological entity in Scripture. This grievous theological error led to the perpetuation and proliferation of para-church ministries designed to “help” small and feeble local churches. American Christianity and Protestant Fundamentalism took on the aura of “the white man’s religion” whether rightly or not. Certainly Fundamental Baptists exacerbated this concept with their creation of COEBA (Conference On Evangelizing Black America). The origin and nature of Fundamentalism and Baptist Fundamentalism is American, Protestant, and Caucasian.

**New Testament Ecclesiology**

It is absurd and biblically reprehensible to posit two diametrically opposed concepts to the same biblical word, namely the word *ekklesia*. The noun *ekklesia* appears 115 times in canonical text of the *Textus Receptus* and always refers to a visible assembly, either religious (Acts 7:38), secular (Acts 19:32, 39, 41), or Christian (Mt. 16:18-Rev. 3:14). Scripture defines the *Body of Christ* as the visible assembly to which the biblical books were written. For instance, Paul revealed that the Corinthian church designation was with the expression *“Body of Christ*, saying, *“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular”* (I Cor. 12:27; see also Eph. 4:12 and Col. 1:18). The invisible universal entity in the New Testament is the KOG; it is universal (Jn. 3:3, 5, 7) and invisible (Lk. 17:20). The realm of regeneration overlaps with the *ekklesia* but it is not identical.

Since the only divinely authorized entity in the New Testament is the baptizing institution (Mt. 28:19-20), there is no need or legitimacy for para-church organizations to evangelize, to baptize, or to catechize! The unbiblical concept of the Para-church movement had its initial roots in the Monastic movement of the RCC wherein lay Catholics organized their individual ministries in the big universal church of RCC. This was followed by individual Anglicans within the Anglicanism of England forming their organizations to help Christianity within the national Church of England (i.e., the Wesley brothers and their Methodism; the YMCA was founded in the 19th century in London).

**Fundamentalist Practices in Churches**

Nevertheless, Fundamentalist ecclesiology influenced Fundamental Baptists about the mystical nature of *ekklesia* and with Protestant practices in Baptist churches. Fundamental Baptists co-labour with and support Para-church organizations such as mission boards, Bible colleges and seminaries, evangelistic associations, tract and literature organizations, and a number of other Christian causes and organizations, NONE OF WHICH are under a local church or answer to the pastor and congregation of its single church. The following is a list of Roman Catholic and/or Protestant perspectives and practices that are in disharmony with New Testament ecclesiology.

**1. The Leadership**

a. The practice of exalting the elder with the office of Elder (usually by having pastor sit above and separated from the congregation (*contra*: II Cor. 12:15).

b. The practice of posturing with other “important” pastors and name dropping the big conference speakers with the big churches.

c. The practice of allowing the pastor to be puffed-up desiring the preeminence (III Jn. 1:9).

d. The practice of allowing the pastor to lord over the congregation, attempting to micro-manage the behaviour, practices, and dress of the congregation outside of the church.

d. The practice of allowing deacons, who ARE not leaders, to become the assistants to the pastor and to think they are leaders with their board of deacons to rule over the pastor whom they have hired and may fire.

e. The practice of promoting and demanding unbiblical standards and requirements for the pastor’s wife and children. All must be alive and stay home! Pastor’s children must be saved, called to the ministry, and attend Bible college (only the approved ones).

**2. The Congregation**

a. The practice of allowing pride to ooze from the high-plateau sinless saints who have arrived with their sanctimony looking like “a pickle-fied museum of saints.”

b. The practice of congregation to “vote” yea or nay on whether to receive or reject the pastor’s counsel. In fact the congregation is beholden to the Robert’s Rules of Order voting procedure on everything with at least a majority vote.

c. The practice of allowing the congregation to require a spring and fall revivalist to bring his church revival sermons.

**3. The Practices**

a. The practice of ignoring Church discipline. It is seldom practiced and restoration never is experienced. Church members come and go with no accountability to pastor or church.

b. The practice of allowing women to speak publicly and forcibly in the services of the assembly.

c. The practice of presupposing a subjective guide to “good” music. Some churches allow only the high church organ music of the Reformers and others imbibe in the honky-tonk, Southern Gospel, blue-grass, toe-tapping, contemporary music of the crossover artists which energizes the flesh.

d. The practice of somechurches to use worldly methods to raise support for the congregational purposes, such methods as bazaars, Christmas tree sales, double-tithing, Faith Promise Giving (giving from what one does not have!).

e. The practice of making some musical instruments prohibited in church services, such instruments as the guitar, etc.

f. The practice of focusing on the external appearance of individuals to the “nth” degree, forbidding facial hair on men and measuring skirts/dresses and heals on women’s shoes.

**4. The Pulpit**

a. Topical preaching galore exists and/or stories constitute the food for the sheep.

b. Pulpit mannerisms occur for effect (walking all around and not staying behind the pulpit upon which the authoritative Bible rests), and the lack of studied preparation giving the context, interpretation and application of the passage at hand.

c. The advancement of the Finney invitation system (*contra*: everyone every time in the audience makes a decision to receive and obey or to reject and disobey the preaching and teaching).

**Dangers of Fundamentalism**

a. Fundamentalism promotes the walk by sight (e.g., dress, music, buildings, programs, God’s will, etc.).

b. Fundamentalism promotes Christian pharisaicalism.

c. Fundamentalism promotes “rule keeping” without the heart behind decisions.

d. Fundamentalism promotes spiritual failure by allowing followers to think they are safe and spiritual for following rules (II Peter 1:9-10, 3:17).

e. Fundamentalism promotes discouragement and leaves guilt and shame over not conforming to humanistic and unbiblical standards.

f. Fundamentalism promotes community scorn for those who do not fit the mold.

g. Fundamentalism promotes the rejection of many Bible truths considered “non-essentials” such as translations, repentance, assurance of salvation, ordinances, Geocentricity, etc.).

h. Fundamentalism promotes the walk in the flesh and not in the Spirit; the precious Lord Jesus Christ should “lord” over the believer at all times!

**Conclusion**

The Island of Fundamentalism is sinking in the sea of confusion and contradiction. Nevertheless some still enjoy the “safety” of the tall walls with the endless lists of “do’s and don’ts.” Others see cracks in the walls and are thinking about leaving (escaping [?]). Some are tightly docked to the shore of the Island and don’t see any other options. Still others see and head for the enticing Island of the Emerging Church which has no walls. A small chosen group is called to the Island of Calvinism. However, a few Biblicists have found the Island of the Pillar and Ground of Truth and have docked their small craft, ready to settle on her firm foundation. Upon which Island do you find yourself?