

Biblical Christians Will Never Fit into Polite Society!

The Beginnings Of “New Evangelicalism”

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Evangelicals are usually very sensitive as to what people say and think about them whereas the driving force for Fundamentalists generally is not their perception by others, but their faithfulness to Scripture. Many years ago Evangelicals sold their souls for respectability. However, genuine Christians will always be persecuted and scorned as Paul wrote in I Cor. 4:13, “We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.” Evangelicals will polish all the liberal apples and “make a deal with the devil” to gain the favor and acceptance of polite society, seeking to fit in rather than follow the Scriptures.

In the late 40s, pastors who rejected strict Bible teaching associated with other pastors of the same opinion and began to disavow the term, “Fundamentalist.” Some felt fundamentalism was a term of honor, but others decided it had become an embarrassment. These men, given the New Evangelical label, went their own way, started their own schools and journals, and moved to the top of Mount Olympus away from uncouth Fundamentalists. It started in 1947 with Carl F. Henry’s book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* which strongly criticized Fundamentalist separation from unbelievers, so Evangelicals separated from Fundamentalists!

Soft Fundamentalists, called “New Evangelicals,” got as uncomfortable as a dog in hot ashes when preachers or authors demanded separation from the world and from religious unbelief. Fundamentalists taught, “Come on out” while the New Evangelicals taught, “Stay in and fight.” Two problems with that: it is disobedience to the Word and they didn’t do any fighting. They talked but refused to fight. Compromising Evangelicals seldom barked and never bit anyone. Most Evangelical leaders are not toothless but they are spineless.

Dr. Harold Ockenga started the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1947 as dissatisfaction was simmering throughout fundamental churches. Desiring to be known as “intellectuals,” New Evangelicals ended up with pseudo-intellectualism. They started Fuller Seminary taking the name and reputation of old time Fundamentalist Charles E. Fuller; however, the seminary was a poor imitation of historic Christianity. It is even more so today.

R.C. Sproul, Jr. (himself an Evangelical) said that an Evangelical is a Fundamentalist who wants the respect of Modernists, and sells his soul to get it. Some wags would say that Evangelicals are better at selling souls than saving souls. Sproul added, “We evangelicals are they who cut this deal with the Modernists, ‘We will call you brother, if you will call us scholar.’” Ah, yes, “scholar.” That is the driving desire of most Evangelicals—intellectual respectability.

Sometimes, the strict Fundamentalists were not very intellectual plus they sometimes wore shiny vinyl shoes and white socks with a blue suit and clip-on tie! Gasp! We were told that the alleged anti-intellectualism of Fundamentalists made it impossible to win Modernist preachers; however, the problem with the Modernist was not his self-professed intellectualism but his unspoken, unacknowledged, and unconfessed sin. This intellectualism argument is one of the main strings Evangelicals pluck ad nauseam and it smacks of arrogance and elitism.

Evangelical leader Billy Graham hit the big time in his Los Angeles Tent Crusade in 1949. In 1956, Graham, his father-in-law Nelson Bell, and Harold Ockenga started the magazine Christianity Today. Since that time, CT has been the obedient and reliable mouthpiece for loosey-goosey Evangelicalism.

Graham was the most successful promoter of “ecumenical evangelism” or “cooperative evangelism.” Few Fundamentalists would object to cooperative evangelism but see compromise, compliance, and corruption in ecumenical evangelism. Billy Graham, in order to reach the masses, decided that he would cooperate with unbelieving religious leaders, contrary to his former assurances to Bob Jones, John R. Rice, William B. Riley and others. He decided that he would preach anywhere under any sponsorship as long as there were no strings attached. At first blush that may sound noble and desirable but it is the anteroom to compromise.

After 1949, in Graham’s crusades the leading unbelieving pastors were in control, making decisions, leading in prayer, while the few Fundamentalists sat in the shadows. Often Billy sneered at Fundamentalists and refused to be called one, although it is a fact that Fundamentalists educated him and gave him his start in evangelism.

Thousands of times, Fundamentalist pastors in various cities served faithfully preaching the Word, and then Graham came to town insisting on cooperating with unbelieving religious leaders for his crusade. That compromise is the most visible difference in fundamentalism and evangelicalism. It is a fact that many Christians who defend Graham would never put up with their pastor calling lost pastors, even Catholic priests, their brothers and recommending their work.

One can discuss and debate whether ecumenical evangelism is scriptural or not but if II John 10-11 is right then such compromise is sinful. However, it is not debatable that Graham has colluded and compromised, but has never challenged unbelievers who supported his crusades. His cooperation with these pastors endorsed their false ministries. The fact that some people trusted Christ in the crusades is no justification for clear disobedience to Scripture.

I have often noticed the defensive, defiant, and distasteful attitude that many Evangelicals have toward Fundamentalists. Not sure, but I think they are guilt-ridden over their cowardice in facing the truth and making amends for a lifetime of compromise. I invite the guilt-stricken Evangelicals to “come home” to the roots of their fathers. All will be forgiven and I for one will personally kill, dress, and barbeque the fatted calf, wash off the stink of the pigpen, put a ring on their finger, shoes on their feet and may even dance a jig (solo, of course) upon their return.

The split should not have happened in midcentury and the breach can be healed. The last sixty plus years were summed up by R. C. Sproul, Jr. in “Our Fundamentalist Betters.” “The fundamentalists of the last century were laughed at and scorned. And for that they earned the praise of Jesus. May we find the courage not only to affirm the fundamentals, but may we be given a double portion of the spirit of the fundamentalists. They fought the good fight, while we collaborated. They kept the faith, while we merely kept our positions in our communities. May we learn to fear no man, and to fear God. For such is the beginning of wisdom.”

That says it all. Are you fitting or following?

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