

Lesson 4 – Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism and Liberalism

*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God – Matt. 4:4*

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,
by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive – Eph. 4:14*

As Christians, we are followers of Jesus. That means we believe and follow what He said, and we believe what He did. It is ludicrous to think that we could be followers of Jesus without actually believing and following Him.

In today's lesson, we are going to look at the truths we learned in Lessons 2 and 3, and we are going to apply those truths to analyze what is going on in the church world today.

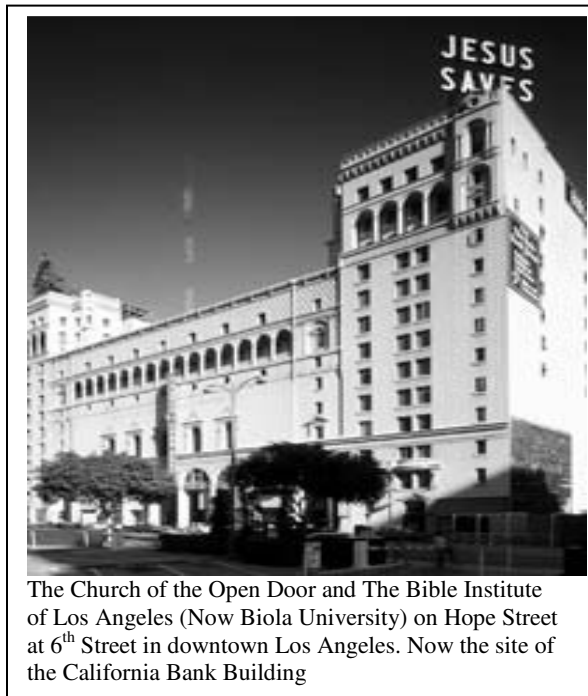
It is very important that we understand where we fit in so that we don't get carried away by those who profess to teach Christian truth, who sound good, and yet they teach things that are directly opposed to the things Jesus taught.

The world wants to think that your religious beliefs are irrelevant. The world thinks your religious beliefs are merely religious opinions – insignificant for living in the 21st Century. As born again Christians, we know better. God has revealed His eternal truth to the world, and He has committed it to us. And it is our job to communicate that to anyone who will listen. (Mark 16:15).

1. Definitions

a. Fundamentalism, Fundamentalist

- i. Many major denominations were moving away from Biblical Christianity during the latter part of the 19th Century.
- ii. God burdened R.A. Torrey, pastor of the Church of the Open Door and president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, to do something about it. (R.A. Torrey had been a famous evangelist and a brilliant scholar).
- iii. In 1909, Torrey compiled a series of 5 books on 5 Fundamental Truths of the genuine Christian faith. The series of books was called *The Fundamentals*.
 1. The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.
 2. The Deity of Christ.
 3. The Virgin Birth.
 4. The Substitutionary atonement.
 5. The physical resurrection of Christ and His personal, bodily return to earth.
- iv. Who believed in the 5 Fundamentals at the time?
 1. Almost all Baptists



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2. Most Protestants
 - a. Most Methodists
 - b. Most Presbyterians
 - c. Many Congregationalists
 - d. Many Reformed Churches
 - e. Some Lutherans
 - f. Some Episcopalians
- v. Was Fundamentalism a new movement?
 1. Liberals today say yes. They like to think that we are a departure from them, when they are the ones who departed from the Word of God.
 2. *Fundamentalism*, in actuality, became a new term for the old faith – “the faith once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3)
- b. *Evangelicalism, Evangelical***
 - i. Originally was a synonym for Fundamentalism
 - ii. In the 1950’s, some Christian leaders who were educated at liberal seminaries began to think that they were intellectually superior to other Christians.
 - iii. They started a movement of Christians that began to compromise with the liberal seminaries, and they began to move away from the Christians who refused to compromise the Word of God..
 - iv. Some of the Evangelical institutions have joined – or are in the process of joining the Liberal camp – but they still claim to be Evangelical Bible-believing Christians.
 1. *Christianity Today* magazine
 2. Fuller Seminary –
 - a. Teaches that the Bible is not inerrant
 - b. Teaches that inerrancy is a recent invention, and that previous generations of Christians did not believe it.
 - c. Claims to be Evangelical but teaches Theological Liberalism. Jesus described those who do this as wolves in sheep’s clothing – Matt. 7:15
- c. *Liberalism, Liberal***
 - i. Unbelievers who claim to be Christians. They deny many or all of the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith.
 - ii. They generally put human knowledge and human opinions above the revealed Word of God. They don’t believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God.
- d. *Sacramentalism, Sacramentalist***
 - i. People and churches who believe that salvation comes through strict adherence to church ordinances.
 - ii. Some of them also fall into the Liberal classification
 - iii. Some of them preach the Gospel as it is written in the Bible and downplay the role of sacraments in salvation. These would primarily be some Lutherans and some Anglicans, or Episcopalians.

2. How God’s church degenerated by losing Vision, Passion and Mission:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was no more than a hut, and there was only one boat; but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day and night, tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to be associated with the station and give their time, money, and effort to support the work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

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Some of these new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those who were saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as sort of a club. Fewer members were interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a memorial lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them were foreigners. The beautiful new club was in chaos. Immediately, the property committee hired someone to rig up a shower house outside the club, where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities because they felt they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. A small number of members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. The small group's members were voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast.

They did.

As the years went by, however, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old station. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the passengers drown.

As Disciples of Jesus, our primary task is to go and make disciples. (See Matthew 28:19.) To put it another way, we are to go and save lives. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget our purpose. We need to recover our passion for lifesaving. We need to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. (See James 1:22.)

When an organization loses the vision, passion and mission of its founder, it loses its Cutting Edge. This is common in all human organizations – churches, political movements, nations, labor unions, etc.

When the church lost the vision and passion, it immediately began to degenerate. That is the spiritual reason behind the rise of Liberalism and Sacramentalism.

Theological Liberalism is not an intellectual problem, as many would have you think. It is a spiritual problem because they refuse to believe God.

Every Organization Seems to Have a Life Cycle (Even Communism)

1. First 1-2 generations
 - a. Big vision – focuses on what *can* be done

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- b. Strong sense of mission
- c. Willing to sacrifice for the mission
- d. Action oriented
- e. Moved by leadership
2. Second generation (Approximately)
 - a. Second-hand vision
 - b. Some sense of mission
 - c. Willing to sacrifice for the mission, but not as much as the first generation
 - d. Somewhat action oriented
 - e. Begins to move into management mode.
3. Third generation (Approximately)
 - a. Begins to lose sight of the founder's vision
 - b. Mission turns inward
 - c. More interested in comfort than sacrifice
 - d. Focus on maintaining the *status quo*
 - e. Fully into maintenance mode
4. Later generations
 - a. Develop their own agenda which can be diametrically opposed to the vision of the founder
 - b. May develop a sense of mission based on their new agenda
 - c. May be willing to sacrifice for their mission and agenda
 - d. May be action oriented for their new mission and agenda.
 - e. May move out of management mode for their new agenda.
5. Remedy
 - a. Must have a strong leader with his own vision that is compatible with the vision of the founder. Leader must successfully infect the others with his vision.
 - b. Leader must have a strong unwavering sense of mission.
 - c. Must be willing to sacrifice for the mission
 - d. Must be action oriented
 - e. Leadership must move the members. The members who don't like the vision need to change or leave.

This cycle not only affects the church; it affects almost every human organization:

Example of Labor Unions

(David Kamerschen, Professor of Economics, University of Georgia)

“Once the union gains respectability . . . the labor leaders begin to lose their missionary zeal and begin to take on the trappings of management.

“Eventually, the labor leaders begin to lose touch with the rank and file but continue to seek their own self-interest. . . . (They) become more interested in settling problems and maintaining peaceful relationships, and are more concerned with the ease and convenience of administrators with employees. . . . The leaders seek the minimum gains required to keep in office while securing the maximum gains for themselves. . . . Moreover, in some cases the unions become ripe for corrupting influences such as racketeering.

“The third stage the union labor movement begins to decline.”

Retail Life Cycle

(American Marketing Association)

This cycle can be partitioned into four distinct stages:

1. Innovation

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2. Accelerated development
3. Maturity
4. Decline

How does this apply to churches?

1. As the Church in Rome (Rom. 1:1) moved through the stages (see above)
 - a. It gradually forsook the message of the Founder – the Lord Jesus Christ. – and drifted into sacramentalism.
2. As for Baptist and Protestant Churches
 - a. Many of them started away from the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith in the mid 19th Century.
 - b. It is our responsibility to God to recapture the vision and passion that Jesus passed on to the apostles
 - i. God brought us from death unto life
 - ii. He brought us into His family – John 1:12
 - iii. We were once far from God; now we know Him – Eph. 2:13
 - iv. Heaven is eternal reality – as real as anything on earth, and far more permanent. – 1 John 5:11-13
 - v. We, as Christians, have the only remedy that the world so desperately needs. – John 14:6; Acts 4:12
 - vi. God wants to use us to give it to them – Acts 1:8
 - vii. They won't be saved if we don't – Romans 10:14
 - c. As a church, Christ's mission must be our priority – Acts 1:8
 - i. In our City – (Jerusalem)
 - ii. In the surrounding areas – (all Judea)
 - iii. To the people we really might not prefer to associate with and don't have much in common with – the down and out, skid row, other races and nationalities, etc. – (Samaria)
 - iv. To the ends of the earth
 - d. If we focus on what we should be doing, we won't have time to wander into what we shouldn't be doing.

This is a life and death matter –
Eternal Life and Eternal Death.
Do we really take it that
seriously?

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	Fundamentalism (Most Classic Fundamentalists don't use that term any more).	Evangelicalism	Liberalism	Sacramentalism
When started	Jesus and the Apostles	1950's	Mid-19 th Century	Around the 3 rd or 4 th Century AD
Belief about the Bible	The verbal plenary inspired Word of God. Inerrant.	The Word of God. Some are not sure that it is inerrant.	A good religious book containing good principles mixed with myth and errors. Some will call it the Word of God, but they do not mean what the Bible says about it.	The Word of God as interpreted by the church. Some Sacramentalists hold a more liberal view of the Bible.
Interpretation of the Bible	Literal, except for parables and figures of speech, where it is important to look for the literal meaning of the figurative language.	Mostly literal, but not always.	They pick and choose the parts they would like to interpret literally. Some believe more of the Bible than others.	Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches place the authority of the church over the Bible. Most Episcopalians and Lutherans take the Liberal approach.
Deity of Christ, Miracles, Virgin Birth, Physical Resurrection	Yes	Yes	Some believe it; some don't	Most believe it. Some Episcopalians don't.
Miracles of Christ	Yes	Yes	Some believe them; some don't.	Most believe He performed miracles.
Salvation by Grace through Faith	Yes	Most believe it	No. Most of them don't believe that people need to be saved at all.	No – salvation is dependent on works and sacraments.
Christ's atonement for our sins	Yes	Yes	Most don't believe it.	Most believe it, but it is accessed through their sacraments.
Second Coming of Christ	Yes	Most believe it	Most don't believe it	Most say they believe it, but it is very insignificant in their teaching.
Denominations Represented	Most churches in the following denominations: Baptists Nazarenes Assemblies of God Wesleyan Church Independent churches Calvary Chapel Many Charismatics Some Presbyterians Some Lutherans	Some Baptists Evangelical Covenant Evangelical Free Many independent churches Many of the following Nazarenes Wesleyan Churches Christian Reformed Alliance Church of God	Almost all of the following: Methodist Congregational Disciples of Christ United Ch. of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Reformed in America	Roman Catholic Eastern Orthodox Armenian Apostolic Coptic Church Episcopal Most Lutherans Church of Christ
Leaders	Jerry Falwell James Dobson Charles Stanley Avery Rogers James Kennedy Rick Warren? John MacArthur	Billy Graham <i>Christianity Today</i> Rick Warren? Carl F. H. Henry Harold Ockenga	Robert Schuler	Pope John Paul Mother Theresa