

DOCTRINAL NON-ISSUES IN HISTORIC FUNDAMENTALISM

by
Rolland D. McCune*

Historic fundamentalism has always been characterized by a core of biblical, historic, orthodox doctrines.¹ Those concerned mainly the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. Coupled with the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation and the practice of a militant propagation and defense of those beliefs, they have given fundamentalism its identity. The precise number of explicit doctrines or an “official” list of fundamentalist beliefs would be difficult if not impossible to ascertain since the agreement among fundamentalists has been somewhat general. Most fundamentalists would be content with terms like “major doctrines” or “cardinal doctrines” to describe their consensus.

Periodically, other doctrinal issues, usually on matters peripheral to the basic orthodox core, have arisen and have caused concern and controversy. In some cases efforts were made to make a particular insight an article of fundamentalist faith. Historically, these attempts have not been successful and the movement has not been characterized as a whole by these kinds of views. They remain non-issues in that regard. Fundamentalist individuals and groups have almost always gone beyond the general doctrinal consensus so as to positionize more definitively their own local church, association, or cause but have not insisted on those same distinctives for fundamentalism as a movement.

BIBLE VERSIONS, TEXTS, AND TEXT TYPES

Historically, fundamentalists have held that the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible pertained to the autographs only and that copies, translations, and reproductions of the Scriptures derived inspiration from the original manuscripts insofar as they faithfully reproduced those

*Dr. McCune is President and Professor of Systematic Theology at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, MI.

¹See Rolland D. McCune, “The Self-Identity of Fundamentalism,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1996), pp. 19–22.

originals. Historic fundamentalists did not accord any special, much less miraculous, protection to any particular reproduction of the biblical text. They held that God preserved His Word providentially in the various manuscripts, copies, and reproductions of the original biblical text, and by diligent study and comparison, the original words of the Scriptures are available for translation into the English language.

The biblical evidence indicates that inspiration proper is confined to the autographs. Paul categorically affirmed that the things which “I write” are the Lord’s commandment (1 Cor 14:27). In Acts 1:16 Peter said that the Holy Spirit spoke the Scripture “by the mouth of David” (cf. Acts 4:25). In Acts 28:25 Paul said that the Holy Spirit spoke “by Isaiah” unto the fathers. In other words, inspiration and inerrancy took place miraculously when the Spirit breathed out the Scriptures through a David or an Isaiah. Inspiration proper did not take place when the scribe or copyist made the manuscript that Peter or Paul was using. Edward J. Young captured this point when he wrote that if holy men spoke when they were borne along by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), “then only that what they spoke under the Spirit’s bearing is inspired. It would certainly be unwarrantable to maintain that copies of what they spoke were also inspired, since those copies were not made as men were borne of the Spirit.”²

Writing in *The Fundamentals*, a series of articles written in 1910–1915, James M. Gray said,

*The record for whose inspiration we contend is the original record—the autographs or parchments of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul or Peter, as the case may be, and not any particular translation or translations of them whatever. There is no translation absolutely without error, nor could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle to secure it.*³

Another wrote, “We take the ground that on *the original parchment*—the membrane—every sentence, word, line, mark, point, pen-stroke jot, tittle was put there by God. On *the original parchment*. There is no question of other, anterior parchments.”⁴ L. W. Munhall wrote in *The Fundamentals*, “The original writings, *ipsissima verba*, came

²Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 55.

³James M. Gray, “The Inspiration of the Bible,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 4 vols., ed. by R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint, 1980), 2:12.

⁴George S. Bishop, “The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves,” *The Fundamentals*, 2:92.

through the penmen direct from God.”⁵ Also R. A. Torrey, an undisputed scholar in early fundamentalism, said concerning the extent of inspiration, “Because of this inspiration of Prophets and Apostles, the writers of the Bible, the whole Bible *as originally given* becomes the absolutely inerrant word of God”⁶ [italics added]. And again, “‘The Word of God’ which we have in the Old and New Testaments, *as originally given*, is absolutely inerrant down to the smallest word and smallest letter or part of a letter”⁷ [italics added].

Going back to the 1878 Confession of Faith of the Niagara Bible Conference,⁸ we read in Article I that inspiration is to be understood

in the sense that the Holy Ghost gave the very words of the sacred writings to holy men of old; and that His Divine inspiration is not in different degrees, but extends equally and fully to all parts of these writings, historical, poetical, doctrinal and prophetic, and to the smallest word, and inflection of a word, *provided such word is found in the original manuscripts* [italics added].

The Confession of Faith of the Baptist Bible Union,⁹ drawn up in 1923, states concerning the Scriptures (Article I): “By ‘THE HOLY BIBLE’ we mean that collection of sixty-six books from Genesis to Revelation, which, *as originally written*,...IS the very Word of God” [italics added]. One of the famous “five fundamentals” of the 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church was “the inerrancy of the *original manuscripts* of Scripture”¹⁰ [italics added].

In a recent (1995) annual meeting of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship (the continuation of the original Fundamentalist Fellowship of the old Northern Baptist Convention, begun in 1920), this clear resolution was passed:

The FBF, while recognizing that God has used the King James Version of the Bible in a special way in the English speaking world, reaffirms its belief that the original manuscripts of Scripture are the documents which are inspired by God and that Bible translations may be considered trustworthy only if they accurately reflect the original manuscripts (2 Timothy 3:16).

⁵L. W. Munhall, “Inspiration,” in *The Fundamentals*, 2:44.

⁶R. A. Torrey, *The Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Faith* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918), p. 34.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸See David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), appendix A, pp. 375–79.

⁹Distributed by the Baptist Bible Union of America (no publishing data), p. 3.

¹⁰See Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, p. 149.

The historic fundamentalist position was given classic expression by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1893 and was quoted by more than one contributor to *The Fundamentals*.¹¹

The Bible as we now have it, in its various translations and revisions, when freed from all errors and mistakes of translators, copyists and printers, is the very Word of God, and consequently without error.

R. A. Torrey also framed the issues very clearly regarding inspiration and translations when he wrote:

I have said that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments *as originally given* were absolutely inerrant, and the question of course arises to what extent is the Authorized Version, or the Revised Version, the inerrant Word of God. The answer is simple; they are the inerrant Word of God just to that extent that they are an accurate rendering of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given, and to all practical intents and purposes they are a thoroughly accurate rendering of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given.¹²

Early fundamentalists did not champion a particular version of the Bible as their official version or elevate a particular codex, text type, or translation to the special status of being inspired or of being the very Word of God to the exclusion of all others. While the King James Version was used overwhelmingly in public, the *American Standard Version* (1901), for example, was widely assigned and used as a study Bible in fundamentalist schools and was used by many teachers in the classroom. Pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers had no hesitation in recommending it for clarity of reading and understanding. Even the *Revised Standard Version* New Testament, in use from 1946 to 1952, before the Old Testament came out, was used, recommended, and even advertised for sale by some fundamentalists.¹³ Bible versions, text types,

¹¹For examples, see *The Fundamentals*, 2:43, 45.

¹²R. A. Torrey, *The Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Faith*, pp. 36–37.

¹³There was very little, if any, fundamentalist opposition to the RSV New Testament when it came out in 1946. It was not until the Old Testament was published in Sept 1952 that there was a general fundamentalist outcry concerning some of the translations (notably Isa 7:14), the lack of orthodox credentials on the translation committee, and the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches. One early fundamentalist review of the RSV New Testament appeared somewhat tepid (J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *The Sunday School Times*, Mar 16 and 23, 1946). Writing in 1952 of his earlier (1946) review, Buswell said that it recognized “the general merits of the work yet pointed out a number of instances of bad judgment and even doctrinal bias in the translation of particular passages” (*The Sunday School Times*, Nov 1, 1952, p. 319). Buswell went on to state that in the six years the New Testament had been out, he had recommended it for English-speaking nationals on the foreign mission field. Nothing was ever said at the time against the RSV regarding its textual background. Even more interesting is the fact that John R.

and manuscript preferences were non-issues.

In the early 1970s an element in fundamentalism developed a “King James-only” type of thinking, breaking with fundamentalist scholarship and history. The spectrum of this group is fairly wide. Some feel that the KJV in English is inspired and inerrant, although which KJV is meant is debatable among them, ranging from the original 1611 version (which contained the Apocrypha) to the KJV in standard use today (which is actually the 1769 edition, one of many revisions of the 1611 edition¹⁴). Others claim superiority for the Textus Receptus, a Greek text put out in the 16th century that became the received or standard text in Europe. Still others hold to the Majority or Byzantine text as the special, God-protected text type from which the KJV came. Granted, some of these may only be textual preferences and not intended declarations that the King James Version is the only Word of God today. But often these nuances are too subtle to detect easily.

The truth is that the KJV is principally a revision of the Bishops’ Bible, and in the preface the translators expressly disclaimed that their

Rice as late as Oct 17, 1952 ran an ad in *The Sword of the Lord* (p. 8) for the RSV New Testament, with an order form to purchase it from his establishment. The following issue (Oct 24, 1952, p. 2) carried an answer by Rice to a letter regarding the RSV. In it he acknowledged the modernistic leadership of the National Council of Churches but also said that “this modernism did not have much chance to come out since the translation made by many scholars would be checked so that one man’s opinion would be corrected somewhat by another.” His main reply was that the RSV was not as good as the ASV or the KJV for accuracy of translation. In the Oct 31, 1952 issue (p. 2), Rice printed a statement by Carl McIntire about the RSV. The thrust of this statement was that the RSV should not displace the KJV for a number of reasons such as the translation of Isa 7:14, the copyright of the National Council of Churches, the liberal scholarship on the committee, and the omission of italics to show words added by the translators. The Nov 7, 1952 issue of the *Sword* (p. 1) carried a short review of the RSV by McIntire which pointed out three key Old Testament passages in which the deity of Christ was “consistently removed or toned down.” On Nov 14, 1952 (p. 2) Rice put in an “Important Correction” in which he asked his readers for forgiveness for carrying the ad for the RSV on Oct 17, citing some of the criticisms made by McIntire previously printed in the *Sword*. Rice still maintained that the RSV was not as accurate as the KJV although he personally continued to use it for “reference and comparison.” In the Nov 28, 1952 issue (p. 12) he advertised a pamphlet by McIntire, “The New Revised Standard Version—Why Christians Should Not Accept It.” Later on the *Sword* published numerous articles “denouncing and showing the perversion of the RSV” (as so stated in the *Sword*, June 4, 1965, p. 7).

However in all of this comment, text types and matters pertaining to textual criticism and theories of translation were never an issue. In fact the Oct 17, 1952 ad in *The Sword of the Lord* expressly said that “inaccuracies and errors of older versions have been corrected in the light of ancient manuscripts.” This statement brought no notice whatever, much less objection.

¹⁴Geddes MacGregor, *The Bible in the Making* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1959), p. 183.

version or any other version was inerrant. This has been the fundamentalist consensus historically and continues to be the mainstream position. The King James-only proposal met strong opposition from some fundamentalist standard-bearers of the time. Bob Jones University faculty member, Edward Panosian, argued that “no *version* is inspired, except to the degree that it conforms to the original meaning of the words of the original manuscripts. Fundamentalists have always contended this.”¹⁵ Another, Stewart Custer, wrote a booklet setting forth the errors of attributing inspiration and inerrancy to the Authorized Version.¹⁶ Paul Tassel, then the National Representative for the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, issued a call to resist the “new fundamentalists” who were making the KJV issue a test of fellowship. He called also for a rallying around the doctrine of the verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures in the original manuscripts.¹⁷

The 75th annual meeting (1995) of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship passed a resolution on the issue that reflects and reiterates the historic fundamentalist position. It says in part:

In light of the considerable discussion among fundamentalists about the issue of manuscripts and textual theories, no particular belief about the best textual theory should be elevated to the place of becoming a core fundamentalist belief. Fundamentalists may hold the doctrine of inspiration with equal strength without embracing the same belief about textual criticism. Additionally, proper evaluation of the doctrinal integrity of any particular English translation can only be done by examining its faithfulness to the original languages, not by comparing it to another English translation. While the process of comparing it with other translations may be profitable for matters of clarity and readability, this process cannot pass as the test of doctrinal accuracy since it is illegitimate to check one copy by another; one must compare the copy to the original. In a day when translations abound, fundamentalists must exercise careful discernment in both the selection and rejection of translations. Some professing fundamentalists have wrongfully declared one translation to be the only inspired copy of God’s Word in the English language and have sought to make this a test of fundamentalism. Since no translation can genuinely claim what only may be said of the original, inspired writings, any attempt to make a particular English translation the only acceptable translation of fundamentalism must be rejected.

¹⁵Edward M. Panosian, “What Is the Inspired Word of God?” *Faith For the Family* (Feb 1979), p. 3. See also other articles that were negative toward the King James-only position (July–Aug 1979; Oct 1979; July–Aug 1982).

¹⁶Stewart Custer, *The Truth About the King James Version Controversy* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1981).

¹⁷Paul Tassel, “Information Bulletin” (Sept 1981). He issued a similar plea in *The Baptist Bulletin* (Oct 1981, p. 10).

The danger facing certain fundamentalists who wish to elevate a particular version or text type to a special, miraculous, God-protected status is that of confusing inspiration with preservation and thereby compromising verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Inspiration is a miracle of God by which He caused His propositional revelation to be written and recorded without error in the original human languages. Inspiration was a direct work of the Holy Spirit on the biblical authors (2 Pet 1:21). Biblical inspiration was a confluence of God and the human writer in a unitary authorship that resulted in a miraculous, inerrant product with a divine and a human aspect. Copyists, translators, and revisers had no such ministry of the Spirit nor was any promise made by God for it. As a result, mistranslation, miscopying, or misprinting has crept into every version and reproduction of the biblical text, however minor.¹⁸ Thus to attribute either direct inspiration or miraculous preservation to any translation or reproduction would appear to deny verbal inerrancy, given the inevitability of these mistakes. This seems to create the anomaly of affirming both a miracle (inspiration or preservation) and a non-miraculous result (erroneous versions). The biblical and historic fundamentalist approach is that copies and reproductions of the text *providentially* derive inspiration and authority in linear fashion from previous copies and reproductions to the extent that they accurately convey the autographs which were directly, *miraculously* given by God.

Controversy over text, text types, and translations of the Bible is one of fundamentalism's greatest present distractions. Historically, this has been a non-issue and, in the interests of the integrity of the Bible and the future of the fundamentalist movement, should remain so.

CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM

Fundamentalism has never had a united voice on Calvinism-Arminianism issues although by and large it has been moderately Calvinistic, probably three or four-point Calvinism. But some have been five-point Calvinists and others outright Arminians. While there have been provincial skirmishes on the subject,¹⁹ fundamentalism has never

¹⁸Some were not so minor, such as the omission of the word "not" in the Seventh Commandment (Exod 20:14) of the 1631 edition of the King James Version, earning that translation the dubious label of "The Wicked Bible." See David Ewert, *From Ancient Tablets To Modern Translations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 202.

¹⁹The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches went through some stress on this subject in the 1970s. See Kenneth H. Good, *Are Baptists Calvinists?* (Oberlin, OH: Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, 1975) (a pro-Calvinist stance), and the definitive but favorable review by Gregg J. Farrier in *The Baptist Reformation Review* 4 (Winter 1975). For the Arminian response to the controversy, see Robert L. Sumner's anti-Calvinist review of Good in *The Biblical Evangelist* (Jan 1976, p. 4). His *An Examination of Tulip* (Brownsburg, IN: Biblical Evangelist Press, 1972) is a general attack on five-

spoken with anything like unanimity on it. Occasionally someone may assert that fundamentalism is too Calvinistic or excessively Arminian,²⁰ but these complaints often reflect a local brush fire or a fundamentalist turf war of some kind. Robert Delnay put the matter in proper perspective when he wrote, "And wherever we [fundamentalists] find ourselves along the line between strong Arminianism and strong Calvinism, we have tried to treat each other with Christian grace; and even though somebody must be in error, we have refused to divide over that matter."²¹ While individual fundamentalists and specific groups or institutions may rightfully take a definitive position on certain Calvinism-Arminianism issues, these have not achieved the status of fundamentalist articles of faith. In terms of the movement, they are non-issues.

DENOMINATIONAL DISTINCTIVES AND POLITY

Fundamentalism has been non-denominational/interdenominational as a movement. Humanly speaking, this was probably unavoidable given the transdenominational character of liberalism and the need to combat it on different denominational fronts.

The speakers and leaders of the Bible Conference era out of which fundamentalism formally emerged were mainly Baptists and Presbyterians, but representatives of the Congregationalists, Methodists, Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, and Anglicans, among others, could also be found.²² The fundamentalist-modernist controversy largely took place among the northern Baptists and the northern Presbyterians. This does not mean that all fundamentalists could and did cooperate organizationally with each other in every endeavor. Nor does it suggest that they must and do hold hands in every common cause today. Most separatist Baptists today would explain that "fundamentalist" does not go far enough in positionalizing them and would hastily say they are "fundamental Baptists." But that is not to deprecate the term and connotations of fundamentalism. The majority of fundamentalists today are probably Baptists. Baptists and baptistic fellowships have been the predominant stratum for quite some time. But it would be a mistake to

point Calvinism. The issue subsided after the Association in 1975 voted down a proposed article of faith supporting unconditional election.

²⁰For example, Douglas McLachlan, *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism* (Independence, MO: American Ass'n of Christian Schools, 1993), lists "excessive Calvinism" as one of the "stifling factors" to authentic evangelism along with pervasive materialism, oppressive fundamentalism, and traditionalism (pp. 57-69).

²¹Robert G. Delnay, "Ecclesiastical Separation," *Faith Pulpit* (July-Aug 1987) [published by the Faith Baptist Theological Seminary].

²²Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, pp. 47-67.

make denominational distinctives and polity part of the *sine qua non* of fundamentalism.

PREMILLENNIALISM AND DISPENSATIONALISM

The nearly unanimous consensus on eschatology in fundamentalism has been premillennial, and the major portion of that consensus has been dispensational. This viewpoint has dominated the Bible Conference era and the Bible Institute/Training School/College movement even to this day. There have been exceptions. T. T. Shields was amillennial as was J. Gresham Machen, although the latter somewhat disdained the title fundamentalist.²³ The Free Presbyterians of today have amillennialism in their ranks along with premillennialism, but their fundamentalist credentials are not questioned because of it.

One could say that fundamentalism has been characterized by premillennialism, especially through its legacy from the Bible Conference movement. But the premillennialism of the Bible conferences was not always solidly dispensational. The Niagara Bible Conference, for example, broke up in 1900 over the tribulation issue, with A. C. Gaebelein taking the pretribulational aspects to Sea Cliff, New York, and beginning the Sea Cliff Bible Conference in 1901.²⁴ There were also pretribulational premillennial fundamentalists who were not dispensational. John R. Rice is one such example.²⁵ The current revisionism going on in certain dispensational circles known as “progressive dispensationalism” raises serious doubts in some minds, including my own, if it is actually dispensationalism anymore.²⁶ It seems to make far-reaching concessions to covenant theology. But neither the tenets of dispensationalism nor covenant theology are part of the defining doctrine of the fundamentalist movement.

It would appear to be unwise to cast fundamentalism into an exclusive mold of dispensational premillennialism.²⁷ Distinctions and convic-

²³Daryl G. Hart put it interestingly: “Machen himself did not like the term *fundamentalism* because it suggested ‘some strange new sect.’ Yet when forced to choose between fundamentalism and modernism, he admitted he was a fundamentalist ‘of the most pronounced type’” (*Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], p. 63).

²⁴David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, pp. 29, 35.

²⁵John R. Rice, “Not Landmark Nor Dispensational,” *The Sword of the Lord* (Mar 15, 1975). He said clearly, “I do not regard myself as a dispensationalist” (p. 11).

²⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 162. See also Bruce A. Waltke, “A Response,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 348.

²⁷William R. Sandeen’s thesis is that fundamentalism grew out of the British and American millenarianism of 1800–1930 as coalesced in the Bible Institute movement.

tions on eschatology can and must be maintained individually and institutionally, but they have not been definitive rubrics for fundamentalism as a movement.

THE MORAL EFFICACY OF THE PHYSICAL BLOOD OF CHRIST

In the 1980s the issue concerning the physical blood of Christ arose in fundamentalism. It had to do with the preservation of His literal blood and the efficacy of its material components to make payment for sin and grant a genuine remission of ethical guilt.

It appears that fundamentalists have always generally held that the physical blood of Christ was literally shed on the cross and that the phrase "blood of Christ" stood principally for His sacrificial death for sin.²⁸ One of the earliest notices of Christ offering His own physical blood in the heavenly courts was by J. Vernon McGee in 1937.²⁹ The moral efficacy of Christ's literal blood was also addressed by M. R. DeHaan.³⁰ R. B. Thieme, Jr., in the early 1970s, openly deprecated the

See his *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint, 1978). John Fea regards Sandeen's proposal as reductionist ("Understanding the Changing Facade of Twentieth-Century American Protestant Fundamentalism: Toward A Historical Definition," *Trinity Journal* 15 [Fall 1994], p. 188).

²⁸The shedding of Christ's blood in sacrificial atonement is that of a sinless, infinitely meritorious life yielded up in death in the place of the guilty sinner. For an early source on the meaning of the blood of Christ, see Dyson Hague, "At-One-Ment By Propitiation," in *The Fundamentals*, 3:78-97. The expression he most often used is "death of Christ" and is obviously in synonymy with "blood of Christ." Hague says, "This atonement consisted in the shedding of blood. The blood-shedding was the effusion of life; for the life of the flesh is in the blood." Later on the same page he noted: "Shed blood represented the substitution of an innocent for a guilty life" (p. 79).

²⁹J. Vernon McGee, "Theology of the Tabernacle," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 94 (April-June 1937), pp. 169-74.

³⁰M. R. DeHaan, *The Chemistry of the Blood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943), pp. 9-44. DeHaan taught that sin resided in the literal physical blood of human beings (pp. 13-14). He also held that this blood is contributed by the father to the child (p. 31ff.) so that all people except Christ have Adam's sinful blood coursing in their veins (p. 13). Jesus, not having a human father, did not have human blood and therefore was sinless because "the Holy Spirit contributed the blood of Jesus" (p. 36); His blood was "directly from God" (p. 41). He "escaped having one single drop of Adam's human blood within Him" (p. 26); He was "without one drop of human blood in His veins" (p. 25). Christ's blood, being non-human, was materially and ethically sinless and thus could make atonement for sinners. DeHaan's views were never widely accepted because they contradicted both theology and genuine biological science. In the early 1950s, when I was in Bible college, the president of the school took a chapel to address the basic problems of DeHaan's views.

physical blood of Christ, but this had little influence, if any, on fundamentalism as a whole although there was some reaction from certain fundamentalists.³¹ In the mid 1970s John MacArthur drew a theological distinction between Christ's physical bleeding and His atoning death as far as eternal saving efficacy was concerned.³² But it was not until the mid to late 1980s that his views were made a point of controversy within fundamentalism.

There are fundamentalists today who do not believe that the physical/chemical components of Christ's blood in and of themselves give it its power to forgive sin.³³ The blood of Christ is efficacious because of His infinitely meritorious life which was yielded up in a sacrificial, atoning death in the place of the guilty sinner. The reason that animal blood could not finally expiate sin (Heb 10:4) is that it had no such moral worth (Heb 9:25–26; 10:10, 12). The efficacy of the death of Christ on the cross is in His perfect *obedience* to the moral law of God (Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8) so that infinite merit was earned (Rom 8:4; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21) and payment for the guilt of God's broken law was made (Rom 8:1–3; 1 Pet 3:18). Both forgiveness and merit are necessary to go to heaven; both remission and righteousness are required to stand before God. Jesus kept all the positive demands of God's moral law (Matt 3:15; John 8:46) and paid the last farthing of its penal sanctions in an infinite substitutionary death (1 Pet 1:19; Rom 6:23). Because of this there is "power in the blood."

On the other hand, there are fundamentalists who do believe that the material/chemical elements of the physical blood of Christ have eternal moral saving efficacy.³⁴ These would generally hold that Christ's literal blood is divine and not human blood, totally unlike the physical blood of the rest of the human race, and as such has the ability in and of

³¹John R. Rice, "Colonel Thieme Again," *The Sword of the Lord* (Oct 20, 1972), p. 5; Robert G. Walter, "The False Themes of Pastor Thieme!" *The Baptist Bulletin* (Oct 1972); and Stewart Custer, *What's Wrong With the Teaching of R. B. Thieme, Jr.?* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1972).

³²John MacArthur, "Letter To A Learning Member," *Today* (May 1976). See also, among others, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 237, and his article, "I Believe In the Precious Blood," *Grace To You* (Summer 1988). His point was that the physical blood of Christ did not have magical or mystical saving power, that it was not materially preserved in heaven, and that the expression "shedding of blood" was not simply a reference to bleeding but to violent death in sacrificial atonement.

³³Daniel T. Borkert and Ken R. Pulliam, "The Blood of Christ," *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1987). See also Samuel Fisk, "The Blood of Christ," *Biblical Evangelist* (April 1, 1990), p. 3.

³⁴Curtis Hutson, "Editor Answers Dr. John MacArthur," *The Sword of the Lord* (March 4, 1988), p. 1.

itself to bring about remission of sin.

The field on this subject is full of theological land mines having to do with the full and complete humanity of Christ. Fundamentalists have always insisted on the full and complete deity of Jesus of Nazareth, but some are apparently oblivious of the problems with not affirming His genuine and total humanity. Some of these problems concern the integrity of His person as the God-man, that is, One with a fully human nature and a fully divine nature united inseparably in an indivisible person. Any denial or diminishing of His full humanity is to that extent a denigration of the hypostatic union and thus His person as the God-man. Furthermore, the integrity of His person as the God-man is necessary to enable His death to provide an ethical basis of atonement for human sin. If He is less than fully human, He could not atone for human sin. And that calls into question the moral justice of His forgiveness of human sin.³⁵

The doctrinal implications of denying the genuine and complete humanity of the physical blood of Jesus Christ are far-reaching indeed. Most who attribute deity to His material blood do not seem to be aware of the depth of the problem they are causing themselves. In a theological sense this whole matter, as in other doctrinal matters, can become a profoundly serious issue because of the factors outlined above, factors dealing with the person of Christ, atonement, and forgiveness of sin. But it should not become such an issue or a load-bearing point in the fundamentalist structure.

LORDSHIP SALVATION

This is a phrase that has become attached to an issue that really has to do with the essence or genius of saving faith. The real question is, does saving faith involve a commitment of oneself, a trust in and an obedience to the sovereign Savior, or are these to be reserved for an experience subsequent to salvation? Is the title "Lord" an expression of the deity of Christ only or is it also of the claims He makes on a would-be follower? Is discipleship synonymous with believing or is it something a Christian enters into at a crisis experience of consecration after the initial

³⁵For a good handling of the meaning of "the blood of Christ," see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 108–24. For the necessity of His full humanity, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 540–43. Loraine Boettner framed the necessity of both His full humanity and deity in almost classic fashion: "It was necessary that the Redeemer of mankind should be both human and Divine. It was necessary that He be human if He was actually to take man's place and suffer and die, for Deity as such was not capable of that. And it was necessary that He should be Divine if His suffering and death were to have infinite value" (*Studies in Theology* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964], pp. 198–99; see also p. 203).

salvation experience? Fundamentalists are divided on the issue,³⁶ but the greater question here is, is a particular position on this matter a necessary part of fundamentalism's self-identity? The answer historically has been no.

There is evidently a certain amount of semantic confusion among fundamentalists on the issue. The real heart of the controversy seems to be whether or not saving faith has a genuinely significant volitional element, leaving aside for the moment the meaning of Jesus Christ as "Lord" (Rom 10:9, 12; 1 Cor 12:3) and what constitutes "discipleship" (Matt 28:19). The common testimony of theologians, at least since the Reformation, is that faith must converge on biblical content as well as have a personal assent and a volitional reliance or commitment. Even non-lordship proponents recognize this.³⁷ If it is agreed that trust is ultimately the defining ingredient of saving faith, and it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that this faith commitment in principle cannot be less than total, there appears to be more consensus on the issue than is usually recognized.

Saving faith is a complete reliance on the finished work of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures that precludes all vestiges of self-help. Put another way, how much *doubt* can one entertain about the truth claims and saving work of Christ and still exercise genuine faith, since any degree of doubt is not simply a lesser amount of faith but a frontal assault on true faith? This is especially poignant since saving faith is termed "obedience" in numerous contexts (Acts 5:32; 6:7; Rom 1:5; 15:18; Heb 5:9) and, conversely, unbelief is called "disobedience" (John 3:36; Heb 3:18–19). Fundamentalists probably have more unanimity on this issue than they realize, but in the last analysis it is not a defining element.

CONCLUSION

The founders and early leaders of fundamentalism were very solicitous about Bible doctrine. For that reason they gave first place to matters of faith. Failure to do so can only result in decline and eventual malaise. This has already happened before our eyes to the new evangelicalism. It has experienced a doctrinal collapse in recent years, mostly at the hands of the psychological self movement and the market-oriented philosophy of church growth.³⁸ It is difficult to find evangelical publishers whose

³⁶John G. Balyo, "Lord of All," *The Baptist Bulletin* (Mar 1989), p. 23 (favorable). Manfred E. Kober, "Lordship Salvation: A Forgotten Truth or a False Doctrine?" *Faith Pulpit* (Mar 1989; Apr–May 1989) (unfavorable).

³⁷Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 31, 38–39. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1987), pp. 326–27.

³⁸David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). This is a withering analysis of evangelicalism's doctrinal woes.

name you can really trust.³⁹ And one wonders how much longer Clark Pinnock, for example, will go on claiming to be, and be recognized as, an evangelical, given his leftward pilgrimage of the last twenty-five years or so.

Lest fundamentalists be tempted to infer that the doctrinal non-issues in the movement can become an excuse for a general doctrinal complacency, consider the example of one fundamentalist institution that crossed over to the less restrictive and more inclusive (developing) new evangelicalism in the late 1940s and 50s. This happened during a relatively few years after the passing of its leader. W. B. Riley, founder of the Northwestern Bible Training School in Minneapolis in 1902, was a great fundamentalist leader and a militant defender of the faith against modernism. The foundation of his ministry was always doctrinal. While interdenominational in much of his practice, he based it on doctrine when most others were purely pragmatic. That is, he fellowshipped with those who held to the same biblical core of fundamental truth that he did. It was his intent and burden that his successor at Northwestern Schools be a doctrinally oriented fundamentalist. This proved not to be the case. Following his death in 1947, his immediate successor (Billy Graham) and those thereafter did not have strong doctrinal moorings. As a result Northwestern went in a different direction from its founder, and today it is most unlikely that it will return to the fundamentalist convictions and practices of its early years.⁴⁰

Fundamentalism's doctrinal saga suggests at least two lessons applicable to this study. One, doctrine is extremely important. It is very easy for doctrinal matters to give way to the "practical" when the concerns of lost and hurting people are all around. This relaxation of doctrine soon shows up not only in how ministry is done but also in how it is prepared for. Christian college and seminary curricula are constantly pressured to reduce content courses in favor of methods courses. But the track record of such proposals is not very good. The practical usually comes at the expense of slow but sure doctrinal disintegration. "How-to-do-it" and relational courses tend to suffocate a curriculum by the sheer momentum and weight of their appeal. Two, fundamentalists must be doctri

³⁹InterVarsity Press seems to be making a name for the avant-garde in evangelical theological novelties. Books such as *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* by Stanley J. Grenz (1993) and *The Openness of God* by Clark Pinnock, et al. (1994) make doctrinal proposals not heard of before in historic evangelical circles. Eerdmans departed from its original publishing philosophy decades ago.

⁴⁰For an excellent chronicle of the turn-about of Northwestern Schools and related incidents, see Dell G. Johnson, "Fundamentalist Responses in Minnesota to the Developing New Evangelicalism" (Th.D. dissertation, Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis, 1982).

nally grounded so that what should be non-issues do not rise to become divisive turf wars. Some would-be fundamentalist leaders and spokesmen are actually skating near the thin ice of heresy and seem totally unaware of where they are going. Biblical and theological ignorance can rapidly lead to a situation where a non-issue suddenly becomes the big issue and division results.

Fundamentalism has a core of crucial orthodox doctrines or biblical teachings that are clear and unambiguous, centered principally on the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. These do not of themselves comprise the full identity of the movement, but a denial of any of them calls into serious question any claim to be a fundamentalist. At the same time there are other doctrinal distinctives that some may claim for themselves as fundamentalists. But to make these beliefs articles of fundamentalist faith would cut the movement's channel more narrowly than history will allow.