



The Battle for the Bible

2 Timothy 3:16–17

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I. THE BIBLE COMES UNDER ATTACK

- The rise of Rationalism (which emphasized human reason) and Empiricism (which focused on the scientific method) began to replace the religious traditionalism that had been prevalent throughout the Middle Ages.
- This shift is known as the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason.
- Armed with reason and science, some Enlightenment thinkers openly questioned the inspiration, authority, and accuracy of Scripture.
- This attack on the trustworthiness of the Bible caused some professing Christians to question whether Scripture should be regarded as the foundation for the Christian faith.
- As a result, a new category emerged in church history—the category of "liberal Christianity" or "theological liberalism."
- Broadly speaking, liberalism rejected the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and redefined the church's mission in terms of things like social activism.
- By the early twentieth century, theological liberalism was prevalent in both Europe and the United States.
- In addition to rejecting:
 - (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, many proponents of liberalism also denied
 - (2) the deity of Christ,
 - (3) the miracles recorded in the Bible,
 - (4) the substitutionary atonement of Jesus' death on the cross, and
 - (5) the bodily resurrection of Christ.

- In response to these attacks, Bible-believing Christians from various Protestant denominations (Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and more) banded together to defend the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.
- In the 1920s, these Christians became known as “fundamentalists” because they believed the fundamental truths of Scripture and were willing to contend earnestly for them (see Jude 3-4).

II. PRINCETON THEOLOGY

- Princeton Seminary was started in 1812 by Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), who served as the school's first chair of systematic theology.
- Notable nineteenth-century faculty members included:
 - **Charles Hodge (1797-1878)** is best known for the Systematic Theology that he published in 1872. Hodge taught at Princeton for more than fifty years. During that time, he staunchly defended the Christian faith from attack.
 - **A. A. Hodge (1823-1886)** was the son of Charles and was named after Princeton Seminary's first president, Archibald Alexander. He became a professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary when his father died in 1878. He, too, defended the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.
 - **Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)** succeeded A. A. Hodge as the professor of systematic theology in 1877. He was a prolific writer and an ardent defender of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

The true church is characterized by its commitment to:

1. The _____ of God (in Scripture): The true church views Scripture alone as its final authority. Followers of Jesus submit to Him by submitting to His Word.
2. The _____ of God (in salvation): The true church understands that sinners are justified by God's grace through faith apart from works. They recognize their salvation is based entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ, who rose bodily from the grave.
3. The _____ of God (in spirit and truth): The true church worships the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in purity of devotion and purity of doctrine. This includes a clear affirmation of the deity of Christ.

III. THE RISE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

- As modernist ideas became increasingly popular in America, _____ Christians worked together to confront theological liberalism.
- The conflict within the mainline denominations reached its peak in the early 20th century.
- In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this movement included well-known evangelists like _____ (1837-1899), _____ (1843-1921), and _____ (1882-1935).
- The movement was also associated with various Bible conferences, like the Niagara Bible Conference (which met annually from 1876-1897).
- In 1878, a group of scholars associated with this conference articulated fourteen doctrinal principles outlining Christian beliefs. These fourteen points comprised the “Niagara Creed.”
- In 1910, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church identified “five fundamentals.”
- These fundamental doctrines included:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
- From 1910–1915, a number of Bible-believing Christian authors wrote a series of essays that were published in a volume called The Fundamentals.
- In 1920, a reporter named Curtis Lee Laws coined the term “Fundamentalist” to refer to Christians who believed the Bible and were willing to contend for the truth.

IV. FUNDAMENTALISM VS. MODERNISM

- In the early 1900s, an ideological battle was fought within the mainline American denominations between Bible-believing Christians and theological liberals.
- The conflict began to brew when several Presbyterian seminary professors were removed because they denied the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.
- In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal Baptist minister, preached a sermon at the First Presbyterian Church New York entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" He adamantly insisted they should not.
- Fourteen years later, in 1936, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) left the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) to establish the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).
- This controversy within Presbyterian circles was representative of what was happening in all of American Christianity.
- Public opinion against fundamentalism increased as a result of the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925.
 - John T. Scopes (a substitute high school biology teacher in Tennessee) was accused of teaching the theory of evolution in a public school, which violated Tennessee state law.
 - The prosecution was led by William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate. The defense attorney, Clarence Darrow, was also well-known, which brought national attention to the trial.
 - Although Scopes was found guilty, the trial itself generated negative publicity for fundamentalists (and their creationist views)-which were perceived to be outdated and contrary to scientific progress.
- In both the mainline denominations and the court of public opinion, fundamentalism began to lose support.
- Fundamentalists started new organizations such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Conservative Baptist Association of America (CBAmerica), and the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC).

V. THE RISE OF NEW EVANGELICALISM

- In the 1940s, a group of Bible-believing Christians sought to distance themselves from fundamentalism.
- In particular, they were concerned that the fundamentalist movement had become known for infighting and anti-intellectualism.
- This group began to identify themselves as "New Evangelicals," or later simply as "Evangelicals."
- In 1942, they established an organization called the _____.
- These early evangelicals openly affirmed their belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Christ, His atoning death on the cross, and His bodily resurrection from the grave.
- However, they insisted their tone needed to be more friendly than that of earlier fundamentalists.
- In the 1950s and 1960s, a preacher named Billy Graham became the most well-known representative of the evangelical movement.
- In the 1970s and 1980s, evangelicals became increasingly engaged in political activism.
- The term _____ comes from the Greek word for _____.
- Historically, evangelicalism has been defined by an affirmation of both Scripture's veracity, and the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Sadly, the term "evangelical" has largely lost its distinctive meaning in contemporary culture.
- In their quest for influence, evangelicals have sometimes compromised their fidelity to biblical truth. Too often, success is measured in terms of numbers or popularity rather than in terms of faithfulness to God.
- At the same time, we can be grateful for the many churches, across the world, that have been faithful to honor God's Word and contend earnestly for the faith.

VI. STANDING FIRM IN THIS GENERATION

- If evangelicals are to stand firm in this generation, they must ground their convictions in the doctrinal pillars articulated by the New Testament.
- **First**, we must hold fast to the authority of God's Word without wavering. The Reformer's commitment to "Scripture alone" should be our commitment as well.
- **Second**, we must contend for the purity of the gospel. Sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone based on the finished work of Christ alone.
 - **Acts 4:12** "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
- **Finally**, we ought to do all of this as an act of worship for the glory of God alone.
- As we discussed in Lesson 1, we desire to be characterized by a right understanding of the Word of God, the work of God, and the worship of God.
- Armed with biblical convictions, we can stand firm in this generation of church history. We recognize the strength to do this does not originate in us. It is found in Christ.
- He is both the Lord of the church and the Lord of history. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.