

The Church

History of Independent, Fundamental Baptists

We will pick up where we left off with last week's presentation on Baptist History. Sadly we ran out of time to look at the origins of our own "branch" of Baptists, so we will devote this lesson to this overlooked subject.

- I. The Rise of Fundamentalism
 - A. Christianity has always battled false doctrine and teachers, and Baptists in America are no different.
 - B. Often, three sides can be identified:
 1. The Liberal, Modernist, or Left Wing.
 - a) Prone to rethink the core components of Christianity
 - b) Very influenced by society and academia
 2. The Moderates, or Centrists
 - a) Lie somewhere in the middle, not actively engaged
 - b) Slowly trend towards liberalism
 3. The Conservative, or Right Wing
 - a) Concerned with holding the truest forms of doctrines
 - b) This does not mean they cannot change, as they often seek to purify their own positions and move closer to the right.
 - C. The 1800's were a hotbed for liberalism, often called "higher criticism".
 1. This was heavily influenced by German theologians
 2. This questioned or rejected the Bible and Christian theology.
 3. A very famous case is the "Down-Grade Controversy" fought by C.H. Spurgeon in the late 1880's.
 - D. These modern doctrines took hold in the post-Civil War years, especially in the North.
 - E. Some preachers of the day took a stand for the Bible and orthodox Christianity.
 1. These were the first Fundamentalists and were from a wide variety of denominations.
 2. Very few Baptists took part
 - a) Perhaps this is because Baptists in general were slower to adopt the burgeoning liberalism
 - b) Two prominent exceptions: George Needham and A.J. Gordon.
 - F. Fundamentalism as a broad movement was perhaps strongest in the 1920-30's
- II. The Rise of Independence
 - A. Baptists have always been (and hopefully always will be) proponents of local church autonomy,
 - B. Two key elements arose in the 1800's that fueled a rebirth of independence among Baptists:
 1. Doctrinal Disputes
 - a) Partly in response to groups like the Church of Christ, some Baptists began to reemphasize distinctive Baptists principles.

- b) Most popular among them were the Landmark Baptists, led by J.R. Graves.
- 2. Rise of Denominationalism
 - a) Groups like the Southern Baptist Convention began to grow in power, prosperity, and influence.
 - b) Some Baptists felt this was in contrast to local church autonomy.
- III. The Convergence of Fundamentalism and Independence
 - A. During the early 1900's these two ideas began to meld together as Baptists grew more involved in the Modernist-Fundamentalist wars.
 - B. Three Baptist leaders come to the forefront
 - 1. W.B. Riley (Minneapolis), T.T. Shields (Toronto), and J. Frank Norris (Fort Worth)
 - 2. These three were influential in a fellowship called the Baptist Bible Union
 - C. The key figure for us is J. Frank Norris
 - 1. Norris was a complex and often controversial individual, but one cannot doubt his impact.
 - 2. Many key attributes of today's IFB churches can be traced to Norris, including premillennialism, door-to-door evangelism, tenacious defense of doctrine, disdain of "conventions" and "boards", practical training through Bible colleges, and strong pastoral authority in local churches.
 - 3. Practically all of the churches that our church is in fellowship with have ties back to Norris.
- IV. Today and Beyond
 - A. We, like our spiritual forefathers, seek to serve God, glorify Him, preach the Gospel, baptize converts, and grow in our Christian life.
 - B. The battles that define us still rage, even if they do not gather the attention they once did.
 - C. We, like so many others before us, seek to serve God as faithfully as we can through returning to the Bible as foundation for practice and belief.
 - D. I personally believe that God is not finished with IFB churches, and that if we remain active and faithful "the best is yet to come"!