

“When Christian Fundamentalism Goes Too Far”

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Holding tightly to the five fundamentals, as Christian fundamentalists call them, is according to doctrinal truth. We should all believe in the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the blood atonement, the bodily resurrection, and the inerrancy of Scripture. Too many in modern evangelical circles aren't sure about any of those five any longer. But in addition to the temptation to err on the side of liberalism and compromising doctrinal truth, there is also a temptation to move too far in the other direction. It is not that one can be too fervent in pursuing doctrinal truth and the sanctified life, but it is in how that is redefined by some in fundamentalist circles that creates a danger zone. The fact is that there can be false teaching among those who devote themselves to not propagating false teaching. This can happen in the schools and seminaries that train future pastors and leaders and which shape young minds, and it can and is reinforced by the churches that associate formally or informally with said schools and seminaries. A failure of a so-called independent fundamentalist church to speak out against the false teaching perpetrated in fundamentalist schools and seminaries is part and parcel to affirming its truth. It is not all innocent and harmless, for the deceptions are real.

After studying more what is actually practiced and taught and how it affects a person's spiritual well-being, I feel the need to point out some fallacies that I have uncovered. I am going to be speaking in general about fundamentalism, though I recognize that there is a significant variance even within churches that self-label as fundamentalist. Please just take the points if and when they apply so that what follows can be edifying, challenging, and encouraging.

First, fundamentalism teaches that Christian testimony is defined by being externally distinct from the world. Said otherwise, fundamentalism is not content to engage the culture with the gospel, but they prefer to be anti-cultural or separated and taken out from what defines the culture. One handbook says: “Holiness entails separation from the godless ‘world’ system (1 John 2:15–17; Ezra 6:21) by discerning where one's culture reflects evil values. Therefore, students at _____ commit themselves to *obey God not by ‘fitting in’ comfortably with the world* but by being transformed by the Gospel” (italics mine). I included the italics in the above quote to emphasize where the confusion comes in. There is, of course, a Biblical mandate to not conform to the world, but it is in how this is understood and applied that makes all the difference. Fundamentalists emphasize more of establishing anti-cultural modes, codes, and behaviors, whereas the Bible only commands that we engage the culture with the gospel and not copy its sin. Dressing more formally, listening to classical music, not allowing males and females to talk without somebody supervising, or attending a plethora of church functions does not constitute gospel witness. It is anti-cultural, but it does nothing to engage the lost with the love of Jesus Christ.

While we must not copy the evil ways of the world, certain elements of culture can be morally neutral. Paul became all things to all people to win some without compromising his morality (1 Corinthians 9:22). He engaged the people of the various cultures he encountered in different ways, but what never changed was his message or his integrity. He wanted people to evaluate him based upon his heart rather than the externals. Too many who shape fundamentalist thinking view Christian testimony not so much on the grounds of love, holiness, unity, and good works, but they seem to be more concerned with being viewed by the world as having external differences. For example, one school mandated that its male students wear shirt and ties as they leave campus to go on break. This does nothing to shine God's light, but if they donned the fruit of the Spirit or the full armor of God, that would be much more potent. Thus, there is a great confusion between a Spirit-led internal testimony that impacts how we behave externally versus just looking and playing the part of what certain individuals believe religious people should look like and how they should behave. By concentrating on externals, it is much easier for the powers that be within these schools and churches to control public behavior and appearance, but it does nothing for shepherding the heart of individuals when nobody is looking. Young girls are no more Christian ladies if they wear full-length dresses than if they wear pants or jeans. This nonsense sends a false signal of differentiation to a world that is watching and looking for true spiritual differentiation and love that is unique to Christ. Anybody can dress the part, look the part, and behave a certain way. Even the flesh can be trained through behavior modification, but love and holiness when nobody is watching is something only the Spirit can create and cultivate from the inside out by faith, not by externals.

Christians should not seek to be anti-cultural or to try to pull themselves out of the world, but rather they are to be in the world and yet not of it. They ought to engage the culture as Paul did in Acts 17, confront its errors, and explain the distinguishing realities of Christ and the gospel. The gospel should be what sets us apart, not something as shallow as certain clothing styles.

Second, fundamentalists tend to take an overly narrow view when it comes to music. Understanding a fundamentalist view of music will shine more light on the whole anti-cultural emphasis versus focusing on worshipping in spirit and in truth. One handbook says concerning music: "Because believers are to love not the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15), students are expected to refrain from singing, playing, possessing, purchasing, or listening to certain kinds of music." Now Christians had better use discernment and discretion when it comes to music, for Satan does use certain styles and forms of music to control the mind and warp our thinking. We need to think on what is good, true, right, and pure (Philippians 4:8). But what they are saying goes beyond this. Describing "approved music", they say:

"Semi-classical (light concert music, music from operettas, and such as has passed into the concert repertoire), band music, old familiar songs such as the music of Stephen Foster, or early American songs where the album is obviously serious music. Note: _____ considers Contemporary Christian Music to be generally unacceptable and in many cases even offensive. Any unapproved music is subject to confiscation."

They also offering the following guideline for whether music is appropriate or not: "Is the music filled with a heavy bass, loudness, a driving beat, or breathy or sensual characteristics?" In the end, what is

approved is a certain style of music that was popular during a particular historical period of time. Ironically, it seems not to matter if the composers were pagan to the core as long as the music is classical. It totally ignores, for example, the loudness and emotive dancing of traditional Jewish music as described in the Old Testament. Are syncopation and drums really the archenemies of our sanctification? Of course not, but this is an argument about more than just music. It is about setting up an alternative culture, music being one subset of that culture. The philosophy will certainly extend to dress and other externals. Thus, rather than teaching church-goers how to define music that is truly worshipful even if stylistically popular, fundamentalists prefer carving out a very narrow type of music that is largely irrelevant to the modern culture. Choosing to be anti-cultural is not the same as being able to discern good and God-honoring music.

But think on this: one could keep their particular prescribed standards and not be sanctified in the process. Furthermore, one could be given demerits for listening to contemporary Christian music and actually be sanctified, assuming, of course, said music is Spirit-led and anchored in truth. Thus, the distinguishing, delineating standards are based on false premises. Christian music can have loudness and a driving beat and still be honoring to God. To state otherwise is just plain untrue. The gospel doesn't advance simply because we look different, listen to music that is defined by being not what is modern, and are "conservative." Being anti-cultural is no different than the monks who withdrew from the world in order to try to be sanctified. It doesn't work, and it is a failure in gospel testimony.

Third, fundamentalism redefines sanctification itself, putting way too much emphasis on what we do rather than on what God is doing in and through us. From a fundamentalist handbook, we read, "From the University's beginning in 1927, we've recognized the necessity of an edifying atmosphere on campus and an environment that promotes spiritual growth." The Christianese sounds good, moral, and helpful when our brains gloss over what is actually being asserted. They are saying that what they offer is absolutely necessary for optimal spiritual growth and sanctification. Furthermore, they put their hope in the environment that they seek to create as a necessary part of the sanctification process. This presupposes that a person cannot be sanctified by Christ alone and through His Word alone, or at least not as optimally. In other words, they have a better, superior way to advance and accelerate spiritual growth. This results in people becoming dependent on an environment to make decisions and to look for people in positions of influence within the system to tell them what to think and do. The reality is that the system itself is portraying itself as a false construct in that it claims to be needed when in reality it is optional. That claim itself is false and dangerous, for all we need is Christ and His Word. It is also an implicit judgment or condemnation on those who have not partaken in the so-called benefits of the system.

The handbook continues by saying, "Justification is entirely an act of God, but sanctification involves our active participation." Inasmuch as faith is our response and responsibility to God's gracious call upon our hearts in salvation, so, too, it is our response and our responsibility to walk by faith throughout the course of our lives. But it is not true to say that justification is all God, and sanctification is God plus man. Both require faith, and the works will follow. Our "active participation" is not keeping rules and upholding standards according to a prescribed environment as the handbook asserts, but it is faith. Our faith will lead us to pray, to make wise decisions, to read God's Word, and to obey our Savior. It is pure

and simple faith in Christ and in His Word that sanctifies, regardless of whether we are in a hostile or friendly environment.

Our sanctification is not something a system can control or dictate. As we minister to others with the Word of truth, we plant spiritual seeds and water them, but God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). We can pour all the “fertilizer” of whatever sanctification formula we have on the seeds, but ultimately only God will give the growth. If the fertilizer takes the credit, pride is the delusion. This is because there is no fast track to salvation or sanctification, only God’s track. Our response is faith. As Jesus said in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” A system never sanctified anybody, and it never will.

So when a handbook asserts that its school standards or community guidelines “are effective in developing Christian character traits and Christlikeness,” we should remember that only Jesus is capable of doing that as He works the commands of Scripture into our hearts by faith. I understand the purpose of campus standards which students choose to conform to while they attend, but I can’t agree with believing that those rules which are add-ons to the Bible can actually stimulate sanctification. That is where the danger zone is entered. We are sanctified by the Word (John 17:17), not by a church’s or school’s dictated lifestyle choices and limits on Christian liberty. Fundamentalists really struggle to allow for Christian liberty and for giving a person freedom to seek God’s individual and personal will for their lives. They would rather just have people all conform to the same standards, the same limits of freedom, and the same code of behavior and service. But life in Christ is just not that simple because God wants us to walk by faith. He gives us freedom to choose to obey Him and to demonstrate our love for Him, even if we don’t all go to the same summer camp, university, church, or mission.

It is better to teach discernment and wisdom principles than trying to craft endless pages of rules to keep somebody from having to make a difficult choice. We keep Jesus’ commands because we love Him, not because an additional rulebook taught us how to love Him. Unless Jesus was wrong about the Pharisees and their rules and supposed righteousness, we need to flee this kind of teaching.

Fourth, fundamentalists are vulnerable to letting their preferences and priorities cloud their reading of Scripture. For example, one document says, “Reflecting Christ hinges on active participation in a local assembly of believers.” Hebrews 10:24-25 makes it clear that we should be sure to gather together with other believers to be encouraged together to do good works. It does not say that assembling together means that we have to live in a closed community or that our ability to be a testimony for Christ is dependent upon our church attendance record. Reflecting Christ does not “hinge” upon local church service, but local church service is one way that we can use our gifts to please God. Their assertion is a flat out lie.

There is a huge emphasis in fundamentalist circles in going to Sunday School and morning worship plus Sunday evening plus Wednesday night plus other ministry activities plus chapel daily plus conferences plus, plus, plus.... The argument then becomes, whether verbalized or not, that the more church activities we do, the more we can reflect Christ. The less we do, the less we are able to reflect Christ. And, by inference, those Christians who are not actively participating in a church for whatever reason

even if they cannot find a doctrinally sound one must necessarily be unable to reflect Christ. That is a serious accusation and judgment of somebody's character. While we should eagerly seek out the teaching of God's Word and use our gifts to build up the body of Christ, life is just not so neat and simple as many fundamentalists would like it to be. Life in Christ is not a controlled environment, nor is it homogenous. Things are different in different parts of the world, let alone in a city. Everybody's story is different, their circumstances are unique, and people who believe the Bible with no agenda or extra-biblical attachments are hard to find. But they are out there, and they might even exist outside of the membership rolls of a fundamentalist church! I know fundamentalists don't claim to have a monopoly on the gospel, but it is difficult for many fundamentalists to believe that God can be working through a person even if they are not deeply and formally connected to a fundamentalist church. These "anomalies" are hard for them to understand, for they put so much confidence in the formalities and the system. For example, can a person be a missionary or evangelist without being first commissioned by a home church that holds to the fundamentals? Yes, but many fundamentalists scoff at the notion.

Fundamentalists are prone to judge everybody based upon how much church they do rather than upon who they are in Christ. This is dangerous because it leads to pride and self-sufficiency and the thinking that it is possible to use a formula or system to work our way to increased sanctification. It also makes it easy to judge others' holiness based upon what we see of them in regard to their external church participation activities.

Fifth, fundamentalists are way too preoccupied with what other people think of them. For example, one handbook states: "Since people cannot see our hearts and are not always aware of our motives, we are often judged only by what others see; therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we remain above reproach in our actions." It is true that man judges based on outward appearance, but his judgment is usually wrong. Thus, rather than try to appeal to his erroneous judging skills, we are to shine a light of good works, unity, holiness, and love which God promises will be clearly revelatory to man of Himself (John 13:34-35, John 17:21, Matthew 5:16, Hebrews 12:14). Being above reproach is not defined by external appearance. It is a matter of motive and of the heart because that is what God cares about and how He will judge what we do (2 Chronicles 16:9, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). We are supposed to do all that we do for God rather than for men (Colossians 3:23), but in fundamentalism it is sure easy to start trying to control and manipulate how people perceive us rather than letting them simply perceive God in and through us. One method is full of self, and the other is all about God. One is pride-filled, while the other is humble enough to trust God to reveal Himself through our selfless love. If we would only concern ourselves with how we represent Christ and stop caring about what other people might think or how they might judge us, we can actually live in freedom and faith. The whole lifestyle that is preoccupied with the externals and with what other people think is vain and empty, and it is not of God.

Sixth, what fundamentalists actually think is a good testimony is actually a turn off to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, consider the following rule on dating: "On and off campus, physical contact between men and women students is not allowed." Here is another one: "Couples are not to engage in physical contact and are to maintain observable space between them." Now, obviously the world has it wrong with its hyper-sexed approach to everything, but is it really a testimony to abstain

from giving a high-five to a friend of the opposite sex? What does it really communicate? Is physical touch inherently evil? And “observable space”? Can’t you just feel the piercing, scowling glare of big brother ready to write up the demerit? The reality is that, while some rules may be reasonable to agree to for a time, others are not and can actually be harmful to our normal human development. But it is either all or nothing in these environments, and so harm is guaranteed to come with the territory. Aside from the fact that the system doesn’t speed up sanctification through its restrictions, it can actually confuse people and cause them to seek out ways to beat the system or rebel from it entirely. For example, when pressed so far away from what is normal human interaction, is a young person more or less likely to be vulnerable to doing something he or she will regret just so that he or she can feel close to somebody? Sin is always a bad testimony, and the world pays attention to that. We are not supposed to be preaching to them that our rulebook and anti-cultural ways of life have the power that only Christ has to sanctify. That clouds the gospel and turns people off. They are looking for love, true unity rather than uniformity, and progressive holiness on the inside, not just external modifications.

Seventh, fundamentalists too often turn themselves into judge and jury under the guise of accountability. If you have ever been guilt-tripped for not going to Sunday School or for not showing up for some church function, the implication is that you are not doing God’s will for your life. There is definitely a tendency to tell people that they are not up to par if they are not fully participatory. It is just tough for fundamentalists who rely on the system as a means to evaluate their own sanctification to allow for a person to be fully walking with God even if they attend one hour of church instead of two, let alone three or four. It is too easy to get caught up in a mindset that concludes that spiritual growth is directly proportional to hours of church involvement, dollars given, and what school a person went to.

Then there is this: “Always be attentive during the services. Others are always watching you.” It is easy to be judge and jury if the heart can be judged simply by whether a person has his or her eyes on the pastor while he is preaching. But since when does simply appearing attentive automatically imply a heart that is delighting in God? However, one can be sure that there are watching eyes to see who is the model student or prospective deacon or elder based upon such superficial observations. It is too easy to play to the system when one knows the system. Just bring a big black KJV Bible with abundant underlining along with a well-worn notebook and pen, and that should impress all around, especially the pastor. I know this because I used to play these games, even without realizing I was doing it. Please understand that I am only making these points because I know firsthand how damaging even elements of this lifestyle were to my walk with Christ. All of the hours of Bible reading and prayer are worth nothing until God teaches us that we must not have pride in the fact that we did those things. God is delighted in faith, not gold stars.

We cannot function well as believers in a “big brother” type environment where somebody is always looking over our shoulders to see if we are doing all the steps to demonstrate “sanctification.” It is not accountability but judgment. The best support and accountability comes from a relationship of trust, freedom, forgiveness, and love, not repression, fear, and control. Only then can a person feel free to actually be themselves, to say what they think, to legitimize their own feelings, and to actually identify how God is leading them in their own hearts apart from all the watching eyes.

It is so easy when trying to be the person who impresses others to also be the person who judges others. But the fact is that there is no spiritual superiority or credit to our spiritual account just because we don't watch television or ride in the same car with a member of the opposite sex. This is foolishness, the world knows it is foolishness, and they know that the whole thing is a farce. The world perceives that they are unloved because rather than trying to be all things to all people in order to win some, fundamentalists try to be nothing like them even in ways that having no moral bearing. This is not the gospel, and it is a false teaching.

Knowing that the world was already condemned, Jesus didn't come to condemn it but to save sinners. Why should we think we ought to be in the business of condemnation? It is hard to love sinners when we are busy judging them based on externals at the same time. This is a hard attitude to drop when we are constantly judging and being judged by other believers, particularly when it is all concerning shallow matters. It is always easier and more satisfying to the flesh to judge an unbeliever based upon their beer, hairdo, outfit, or tattoo than actually trying to let them feel loved enough to express the true feelings and beliefs of their heart about Jesus and the Bible. Fundamentalists don't trust feelings and are so focused on externals that it can be difficult for them to relationally connect, especially if they feel that a connection is the same as conforming.

Which is more helpful spiritually, deciding to get an accountability partner who is easily fooled by the external performance or having a brother or sister in the Lord who will speak to the issues of your heart because they hear your heart and because your heart is safe with them?

Eighth, fundamentalists create a repressive environment that causes people to live in fear. 1 John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." The difference between living in fear and not living in fear is the idea of punishment. Some fundamentalists create a picture of God Who is ready to open up the earth and devour His own children just as He did rebellious sinners of old. There is such a poor distinction between saint and sinner with some fundamentalists even calling Christians "redeemed sinners". While we are the redeemed who sometimes sin, we are not sinners any longer but saints. If we are rebellious sinners, then we deserve God's wrath in whatever form, but, if we are saints, then it makes sense for us to be sanctified through His kindness to us. Sure, that kindness might come in discipline if we need it, but it is never wrathful punishment. A child should never have to be intimidated or afraid of his father, for perfect love drives out fear. There should be a bond there, one of security, safety, and unconditional love. But many fundamentalists don't know this kind of God because they don't really understand the fullness of His grace. Too much grace immediately translates in their mind to licentiousness and loose living. The exact opposite is true, for the more we bask in God's grace to us, the more He leads us to repent and grow in Him (Romans 2:4). So sanctification is actually most rapidly accomplished not by a system of repression but by grace through faith in light of God's unending kindness to His children. Since God pours out grace upon grace (John 1:16), our sanctification progresses as we believe and receive His grace. Fundamentalists tend to choose a view of Christianity that lives under the heavy hand of God rather than one that is overjoyed that God holds our hands (Psalm 37:24) forever in love, mercy, and faithfulness, even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). God is not a scary, wrathful, emotionally distant, and pathetic father figure, but He is near, loving, gentle, and

true. Of course, He deserves respect, reverence, and awe because He is holy, but this is not at the expense of His goodness and kindness (Psalm 23:6).

Ninth, fundamentalists tend to deny the reality of the new life in Christ. Scripture clearly says that once we are in Christ, our depraved and deceived hearts are changed and purified into new hearts that are able to love Christ (Psalm 23:3-4, Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Corinthians 5:17). In fact, rather than seeking to control our depraved heart and manage our inner dark dragon, as some fundamentalists say, the Bible says that we are actually controlled by the love of Christ which indwells our hearts (2 Corinthians 5:14). If we delight in God, He gives us the desires of our hearts, which by default will be good, right, and pure (Psalm 37:4). It is our flesh that cannot be trusted, and it must be daily put to death by faith. By confusing the nature of the new heart, fundamentalists come to believe that they need external rules, standards, and boundaries beyond what Christ has said in His Word in order to protect them from themselves. Thus, their faith becomes placed in the structure, the environment, and the system for being able to obey rather than in what the Bible says when it says that the love of Christ controls us. The world needs to see true life change from the inside out, people controlled by love and whose choices are dictated by the Spirit. There is great freedom in being a new creation in Christ and great hope, whereas fundamentalists tend to keep beating themselves up with various spiritual drills and exercises to try to keep their heart under wraps. Thus, they distrust their feelings and emotions, and they have trouble expressing their desires freely. The irony is that while they don't trust their own hearts, they thrive on dressing up the outside as if that is going to help. It is the heart that God is interested in, for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). It is not what goes into a man that defiles him, as fundamentalists so concern themselves about, but it is what comes out of a man that defiles him (Matthew 15:11). Thus, it is the state of the heart that matters according to Christ, for it will win out in terms of our behavior eventually, no matter how many rules, how many demerits, and how repressive the environment.

Tenth, the fundamentalist environment is a system of performance, earning favor, earning privileges, and earning responsibilities. As one handbook says, "To that end, we want to give you a handbook that will help you develop discernment and earn more responsibility and privileges over time." Huh? Earn privileges and responsibility? The God Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3) and Who has given us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) requires us to earn the right to those blessings and to prove our worth in order to participate in His commission? I think not! Imagine growing up with a father who wouldn't love you or give you anything freely unless you earned it. Even if you managed to jump through enough hoops, your view of love has been tainted because it is supposed to be unconditional, it is by definition free, and it is never something that is supposed to be earned. Under God's paradigm of grace, we freely give because we have freely received (Matthew 10:8, 1 Corinthians 2:12). He will never leave us or forsake us or give us a look of scorn or intimidation so that we "fall back in line." We have a gentle God, and gentleness does not thrive in an environment where activities trump relationships and clichés trump normal conversation. Why open up and be free when eyes of intimidation lurk? Frankly, fundamentalism often consists of an environment that sucks the life out of a person, confuses people in terms being able to make decisions for themselves, and causes them to act in a robotic fashion. In no way am I advocating an attitude that doesn't take sin seriously or

revere the holiness of God, but fundamentalists need to learn individuality, freedom of expression, and, above all, the grace of God. God's love is perfect because His grace, not a system, guarantees our sanctification. Grace is never earned or merited but freely given. Grace doesn't judge because judging means that we earned our status. Grace refutes that pride and reminds us that we are nothing save for the grace of God. Fundamentalists say this, but in the practicalities of sanctification, they deny it, choosing a system of performance, appearance, externals, and watching eyes. God's eyes roam to and fro throughout the earth, and they will see the hearts that are fully His (2 Chronicles 16:9). He will support those hearts, even if they are not fundamentalist.

Eleventh, fundamentalists tend to create an authoritarian environment which is conducive to spiritual abuse. Authoritarianism is how the military works where people are intimidated and forced to be broken such that they do whatever their sergeant tells them they must do. It is about breaking the will and being trained to obey without thinking like a cog in a machine. While that serves an obvious purpose in the military, it is not how it is supposed to work in the church. Regimented living does not guarantee sanctification and protection from the flesh, and pastors who rule with a heavy hand of intimidation need to learn to love and show grace. Some in fundamentalism enjoy pounding the pulpit and scaring their people into submission. They yell and sweat and use intimidation techniques to get people to do more church activities. This is not good, and it is spiritually abusive. Spiritual abuse is a misuse of a position of power, authority, and trust by creating people who become dependent on the leader to do their thinking and to tell them what to do. In some groups, even seeking God's will for one's life is predicated upon seeking the input of the elders. It is one thing to ask somebody for advice or input, and it is another to need their approval for what to do, what career to take, who to marry, etc. In a top-down, controlling, authoritarian fundamentalist church, the leaders are in a ripe position to take advantage of people who need them in order to be able to think and make decisions. Rather, the church should focus on discipling others to be able to know and discern God's will for themselves and to be able to teach others also.

Sadly, in too many fundamentalist churches, it is the leadership that manages to avoid true accountability by making decisions in secret and by avoiding transparency. The people who have the right to hold them accountable and demand transparency have been trained to submit to and obey their leaders. We cannot afford to be brainwashed into a lack of discernment simply because somebody goes by "Pastor" or "Reverend."

Consider this quote from a fundamentalist seminary: "Always be Christ-like in your communication. Do not speak negatively about [your university], your family, etc. *Always be supportive of the church and the ministry* (italics mine)." Christlike communication is all of a sudden interpreted as never saying anything bad about a school, ministry, church, or pastor. Wait, isn't the system supposed to teach discernment? Well, it won't because it can't. In fact, it makes people vulnerable to believing precisely only what the system wants them to believe or to simply pretend they do. Either way, true believer in the system or not, the people in the system are complicit by not speaking up against the lies. The only thing we need to always support is Jesus Christ and His gospel, and we are only to support a church as long as it holds tightly and rightly to that gospel. If any person adds or takes away from the gospel, they are in grave danger spiritually (Revelation 22:18-19). If they tell people not to evaluate what they say

and do but to only always support them, watch out! We can only serve one Master, either Christ or a system of man. The devil uses both liberalism and extreme conservatism to prey on people, so please do not be naïve.

Twelfth, and lastly, fundamentalism creates mental and spiritual paralysis. I know many who were involved in a fundamentalist church who really struggled when the church collapsed amidst proven allegations of corruption within the leadership. They were taught that their leaders were needed as part of what would help them grow spiritually, so they struggled to know how they could function on the Bible alone. Others struggled to know what standards to keep for themselves because the system obviously didn't work. Some erred on the side of becoming too much like the world, while some still covered in fear of anything different. Some just gave up trying to figure things out altogether. They had been trained that church was life, and they didn't know how to live without the confines and structures of an abundance of church meetings and corporate standards. But then there were others who turned to the Bible and, piece by piece, verse by verse, determined to figure out what they believed for themselves. This journey always requires more faith and discernment, but it is good, right, and healthy.

Lots of people have lots of opinions and doctrinal views, but we must decide for ourselves what we believe and why. We can either try to build on the sand of doubt and uncertainty, or we can build upon the rock of Christ because of confidence in what He wants for our lives. At the end of the day and at the end of life, it doesn't matter what other people think, but we will be judged based upon what we have believed and how we have chosen to live our lives in Christ. There is wisdom in just blocking out all the noise and simply focusing on what pleases Jesus.

Conclusion:

Those caught up in the fundamentalist system cannot understand how a person can walk before God without the help of the system. It seems to be a mystery to them, even something worth scoffing at. But I scoff at lies, lies that say sanctification comes by not going to the movies, not owning a set of face cards, wearing dress clothes off campus, not listening to music with a beat, not having earphones so that others can hold a person accountable for what they listen to, and having pink sidewalks for girls and blue sidewalks for boys. This is lunacy, and it makes a mockery of the work of Christ on the cross and His power to sanctify those whom He has died to save. While some rules have been rolled back, new ones are added all the time because the principles behind the system and the philosophy behind the methodology remains the same. The truth is that salvation and sanctification are by grace alone through faith alone by the work of Christ alone with full confidence in the sanctifying power of Scripture alone. Fundamentalists might agree with that statement, but by their actions, too often they deny it. This is where the real soul-searching must happen. Fundamentalists can talk all the gospel talk they want, but if they live holding tightly to their system or at least see no harm in it, change needs to take place.