

Musings from Pastor's Office:

We use the terms "fundamental" and "conservative" interchangeably these days, not knowing the differences between the two. Both terms may refer to sets of religious beliefs. Fundamentalism has been in existence for a long period in Christian history and is predominant in the formation of evangelism and biblicalism. It's not surprising to know that all the Christians and Christian theology existing before the rise of biblical criticism in the early 20th century (which accepted a scientific way of studying the Bible) were more or less fundamental in their understanding of the authority of the Bible.

Fundamentalists believe that the Bible has no errors because it was inspired by God. Accordingly, they believe that the Bible should be interpreted "literally" and applied "literally" across generations and cultures without considering the socio-economical and historical contexts of when it was written, read, and inherited. On the contrary, conservatives uphold the values of tradition, sacred texts and rituals, and orthodox teachings, but they don't accept biblical literalism.

When Fundamentalists say, "God inspired the writers of the Bible," it means that they believe God dictated word by word to the authors of the scriptures. The no-error-Bible doctrine of fundamentalism is based on the belief that God is the sole and ultimate source of the Bible. A literal interpretation of the Bible, characterizing fundamentalism, refuses all the modern methodologies of biblical studies because fundamentalists believe human intellect is not submissive to the faith in God and can't grasp the essence of the holy message. They're convinced that the only way of interpreting the Bible is by not interpreting the Bible. A God-inspired Bible isn't a subject of study or interpretation.

The Fundamentalist understanding of the Bible has been challenged by modern biblical studies. For example, fundamentalists can't answer why Psalm 19 reflects geocentric theory and an ancient world-view like a tent for the Sun: "In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hidden from its heat." This verse reflects a pre-modern scientific era when it was believed that the Sun orbited the earth.

Fundamentalists can't answer why Jesus traveled to Jerusalem three times in his public life, according to the Gospel of John, while the other gospels say Jesus did this only once. Modern scholars can't reconstruct Jesus' life in chronological order because of significant differences among the gospels. Fundamentalists couldn't answer why Jesus' grandfather's name was Joseph in Matthew's genealogy but Hella in Luke's.

Inspiration? Yes, the Bible is inspired by God. But, we couldn't find any clue that God dictated the words to the writers. God didn't treat humans as typewriter machines. God has worked through, with, in, and for us. Writers of the Bible, having lived thousands of years ago, tried to explain their God-experiences in their languages that employed the worldviews and culture of their days. This is why we **MUST** look into the historical context and culture of biblical times and can't take a risk of applying the word of God literally to our life without proper interpretation.

--Blessings in Christ!

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