

# Christian Ethics

## A Brief History of American Fundamentalism

### Part 2

Matthew 16.3

# At the 1919 World's Christian Fundamentals Association Conference

- A.C. Dixon called for an extension of fundamentalism
- He saw a connection between theological decline and decline in American culture
- Evolution in particular was to blame

- Dixon said evolution was part of “the conflict of the ages, darkness versus light, Cain vs. Abel, autocracy vs. civilized democracy.” Marsden, p. 161
- This helped birth a new type of fundamentalist: the moral reformer
- They argued for the combination of patriotism, evangelism, and Biblicism.
- Two leading figures of this viewpoint are John Roach Straton, and J. Frank Norris

## John Roach Straton (1875-1929)

- Became pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City in 1918
- Shortly after arriving, he preached a sermon titled, “Will New York Be Destroyed If It Does Not Repent?”
- In it, he compared New York with Nineveh and Babylon
- His message was clear: the battle for the Bible was the battle for civilization

## J. Frank Norris (1877-1952)

- Norris was a Southern Baptist (formed in 1845, in support of slavery)
- He became pastor of FBC of Fort Worth in 1909 (and in 1935 simultaneously became pastor of Temple Baptist in Detroit)
- Who went to war against the liberalism of the SBC. Baylor was teaching “that hell-born, Bible destroying, deity of Christ denying, German rationalism known as evolution.”

- Norris' life was filled with sensationalism: he killed a man who had threatened him, he was tried for arson (burning the Church building. Acquitted), and was convicted of libel (for comments he made about another Baptist pastor in his newspaper *The Fundamentalist*).
- After World War 2, he became a staunch critic of communism

- Here's what he said about preaching: "The question of sensational preaching was a serious one with me. I knew that with a great many people it was taboo, especially among the so-called conservatives."
- But he switched to it because the preachers who did were most successful in winning converts.
- He once preached "Should a Prominent Fort Worth Banker Buy the High-Priced Silk Hose for Another Man's Wife?"

By the early 1920's, denominations were dividing over liberalism and fundamentalism

- Fundamentalists controlled both the Northern and the Southern Baptists
- Liberals went on the attack in the Northern Baptist Convention
- In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick preached, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"



- Conservatives wanted members of the NBC to sign the New Hampshire Confession of Faith
- When that didn't happen ( a victory for the modernists)
- W.B. Riley, and J. Frank Norris established the Baptist Bible Union, 1923
- The BBU took over a failing Baptist college in Des Moines (Des Moines University)
- The BBU soon fragmented, and it ended in 1932, with some of its members forming the GARBC.

The 1925 Scopes trial had a strong influence on how the world viewed fundamentalism

- Tennessee prohibited teaching evolution
- Scopes was a science teacher, who agreed to teach it, in order to be arrested, in order to bring the matter to trial
- He was convicted and fined
- But fundamentalism was publicly mocked and ridiculed
- Fundamentalism was “rural,” “uneducated,” “anti-science,” “anti-modern world”

By the mid 1920's, organized fundamentalism was in disarray

- In 1926, the liberal magazine *Christian Century* said, “so decisive a rout of fundamentalism was unexpected”
- Fights about leadership, doctrine, organization, and association, gave rise to numerous groups and associations

# From the Southern Baptist Side

- World Baptist Fellowship (J. Frank Norris)
- Bible Baptist Fellowship (1950, over fight with J. Frank Norris about leadership of the World Baptist Fellowship)
- Independent Baptist Fellowship International (Split from the World Baptist Fellowship in 1984)

# From the North Baptist Side

- Baptist Bible Union, 1923
- General Association of Regular Baptists, 1932
- Conservative Baptist Association, 1946.  
Broke away from Northern Baptist Convention
- Fundamental (now Foundations) Baptist Fellowship International. Split from the CBA, 1967

## Since that time

- Fundamentalism has existed in less organized ways
- It works primarily through local Churches and Bible colleges
- And in recent days, many of these have been in decline