



Faith Pulpit

Keeping Institutions True

Keeping Fundamental Baptist institutions true to their original purpose and position demands constant vigilance. In view of the transition of the academic leadership at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary (see announcement on page 4), we present this article by Dr. Robert Delnay, the founding dean of Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. This article expresses Faith's continuing commitment to its historic Fundamental Baptist position.

As fellowships of churches get on toward middle age, certain patterns keep repeating. One pattern is that nothing stays fixed. Institutions age in somewhat the same way that people age. Second Timothy 3:1–5 and 4:2–4 suggest that the aging process has a certain finality, a finality that requires in God's people a holy vigilance lest they lose what took so long to build.

A second pattern is that their schools go first. Only then does the change appear in the key pulpits, the denominational offices, the publishing houses, and the mission agencies. While the reason for that sequence seems almost self-evident, it is not so easy to look at a situation and see existing currents already at work. It is human to believe that at least some institutions and agencies are permanent, that whatever else turns aside, these will remain true until Christ comes for us. That assumption has dulled the sensitivity of many and permitted the loss of schools that once trained men and women of God.

One could wish that we believers had put more time into reading history. I have had occasion to observe colleges and seminaries that once were true to the faith. With the passing of years, however, they moved by tiny steps away from their founding principles. Most of them moved by the same steps that others took, and we do well to observe so that we may better recognize the process when we see it again. Perhaps by learning how the process works we can succeed under God in keeping our Fundamental Baptist schools true to the Lord.

Dangerous Trends

Commonly Fundamental Baptist schools come from humble beginnings but with a passion to produce men of God. From those humble beginnings each tends to move to affluence and prestige. That level of achievement tends to lead to a high level of self-confidence. In the interest of academic integrity, they then bring in young men with top doctorates, men who glitter in the classroom, who attract student followings, but who do not share the founders' passions. Those young men tend in time to take control of the schools, but with no individual commitment to the founding principles of the institution from which they draw their salaries.

In a typical case, the school would become increasingly tolerant of innovative practices, meaning a breakdown in the personal standards of separation in both students and teachers. There would follow a tolerance for innovative doctrinal positions, which is to say, for heresies. As anti-Biblical doctrines come to be accepted, older teachers protest the changes, only to learn that while false doctrine may now be tolerated, whistle-blowers are not.

As the school continues its doctrinal shift, it would tend to drive off the more serious students. The administration would then counter this decline by talking up the exciting things happening on campus and solemnly affirming that the school is in better shape than ever. Eventually, as false doctrines became evident to the alumni and as innovators take control, the enrollment slips further, and the school would announce that it is opening a wonderful new development in its history by broadening its appeal and relaxing its rigid entrance requirements.

At that point, however, such schools do not necessarily close. Those that stay open continue to pour their graduates into the pulpits of the constituency. The new grads carry with them the new emphases, and eventually church members find themselves sitting under the ministries of men who are not quite convinced of the verbal inspiration of the Bible or of the historicity of Daniel.

Doctrinal Shifts

As schools change, probably the key doctrinal shift comes in theology proper, the school's view of the holiness and majesty of God. In one of his books on American revivalism, religious historian William G. McLoughlin remarked that Jonathan Edwards set a sort of high-water mark from which later evangelists moved downward. God became less and less majestic, decreasingly holy but more and more accessible. As a school moves away from its founding Biblicism, it takes an increasingly casual attitude toward God. The students tend to neglect or belittle personal devotion, and the standards tend to reflect the shift, but few people in the churches seem to notice it.

Over the years I have observed the following doctrinal shifts:

Dispensationalism—One of the first of these shifts is the way that dispensationalism goes out of fashion. It is too much to believe that a literal rapture can happen at any moment, and the teachers tend

to postpone it to the remote future. The Kingdom smacks too much of “pie in the sky,” and the sweet here and now becomes more urgent. A less evident, but equally dangerous, shift is the move to progressive dispensationalism in which a school blurs the lines between Israel and the church and adopts a modified Reformed position. Some drifting schools may still tolerate the founders’ dispensational approach, but they no longer advocate it.

Infallibility and Inspiration—The second shift usually follows the first one. Biblical literalism and premillennialism tend to go together. Accept one and you have the other. So the doctrine under attack then is the infallibility and even the verbal inspiration of the Bible. The attack begins on a low key, perhaps suggesting that maybe Paul wasn’t really current on the status of women in the divine economy. Given time, however, the drifting school will tolerate the implication that the Bible is a human book and that inspiration covers only the general ideas.

Creation—The third shift is to modify the Genesis teaching of creation. For a generation some Christian liberal arts colleges have been teaching theistic evolution, perhaps followed by a local flood. Now schools that once accepted the reproach of the cross and taught verbal inspiration are beginning to follow the lead of others. Fiat creation is no longer fashionable, and the yearning for prestige has modified the historic doctrinal position of the school. The first step is to take Genesis as myth, which leads to the suggestion that the earth is very old. When that happens, the implication of evolution can follow in a few years.

Salvation—A fourth shift relates to salvation itself. No longer do we talk about the lost; we are to refer to them as the unchurched. But how many have realized that a yawning abyss lies between those two words? Many schools and churches have come to accept the notion that the unsaved are not as bad off as the doctrine courses used to teach it. Along with the Pauline view of depravity has gone the doctrine of justification by faith. Faith alone has given way to commitment, but the two are not the same. The book of Romans makes it clear that our works can add nothing to Christ’s finished work and that only by faith can the sinner lay hold on eternal life. We are not saved by committing our lives to Christ—that’s a step Paul urged believers to take in Romans 12:1.

Eternal Punishment—Along with soteriology has gone the Biblical teaching of the unending punishment of the lost. We now have a creeping universalism side-by-side with annihilationism. Both have become preferable to a generation which likes its creature comforts, even at the expense of doctrines clearly taught in Scripture. An unending Hell may be repugnant, even unthinkable, to our minds. However, to the Bible believer, it is clearly taught in the Scripture, and it is but the logical implication of the absolute holiness of God.

This survey brings us back to the beginning of the doctrinal shifts: theology proper has shifted, and God’s holiness (Isaiah 6) has given way to a loose benevolence. Surely a heavenly Grandfather could not get really angry with his creations. The current evangelical shifts in doctrine are strikingly parallel

to the shifts that one and two centuries back led to such destructive apostasies of Unitarianism and Modernism.

Unless we open our eyes and look, we will one day see our churches changing and the schools that they trusted producing false teachers. In that day let us not wonder how it could have happened. The price of doctrinal liberty is eternal vigilance.

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Dr. Robert Delnay

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Dr. Robert Delnay (Th.D., Grace Theological Seminary) was a distinguished theologian, educator, and author whose ministry spanned over seven decades. A graduate of Wheaton College, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Grace Theological Seminary, Dr. Delnay served in numerous leadership and teaching roles, including at Faith Baptist Bible College, where he was a beloved professor known for his commitment to expository preaching and biblical scholarship.

A prolific author, he wrote several books and articles, leaving a lasting legacy of theological insight and pastoral wisdom. Dr. Delnay's deep love for God's Word and his dedication to training the next generation of Christian leaders impacted countless students and ministries worldwide. He went home to be with Christ in 2023.