

Independent Baptists in America

Dr. Gerald McKelroy

11-7-10/3-26-25

2Co 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Pr 22:28 ¶ Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

1Ti 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Intro: It would be hard to know what an Independent Baptist Church is without knowing J. Frank Norris. Dr. Norris was the “father of Fundamental Independent Baptist.” Our church is a direct descendent of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. It is important to know who we are, what we believe and how we got here.

J. Frank Norris was born in [Dadeville, Alabama](#), but the family shortly moved to [Arkansas](#) and then back to [Columbiana, Alabama](#). In the late 1880s, the Norrises bought land near [Hubbard, Texas](#), about thirty miles from [Waco](#), where they farmed.^[1] James Warner Norris was an alcoholic, and Frank Norris claimed that his father once severely injured him after he had emptied his liquor bottles. In 1891, both were shot by an acquaintance of Warner Norris, and Frank said he did not fully recuperate for three years.^[2]

Norris was converted at a Baptist revival meeting in the early 1890s and became pastor of Mount Antioch Baptist Church in 1897.^[3] The following year he enrolled in [Baylor University](#) (1898-1903). He earned a master of theology degree from [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in [Louisville, Kentucky](#). In 1905, Norris returned to [Texas](#) as the pastor of the McKinney Avenue Baptist Church in [Dallas](#), resigning in 1907 to become editor of the *Baptist Standard*. Norris is credited with ending the Texas Baptist newspaper war, with moving [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) from [Waco](#) to [Fort Worth](#), and with persuading the state legislature to abolish racetrack gambling.

In 1909, Norris sold his interest in the *Baptist Standard* and accepted the pastorate of the First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, where he served for forty-four years until his death. In 1912, Norris was acquitted of both arson and perjury charges related to a fire that destroyed the church auditorium.^[4] Norris was also the radio pastor of station [variously KFQB, KTAT and then KSAT](#) (not to be confused with KSAT in [San Antonio](#)),^[5] where he started the first regular radio ministry in the United States in the 1920s.

The height of Norris's career came in the 1920s, when he became the leader of the [fundamentalist](#) movement in Texas by attacking the teaching of "that hell-born, Bible-destroying, deity-of-Christ-denying, German rationalism known as [evolution](#)" at [Baylor University](#) in [Waco](#), Texas. Because of his attacks on Baylor and denominational leaders, Norris and his church were denied seats at the annual meeting of the [Baptist General Convention of Texas](#) in 1922 and 1923.

In his 1926 sermon series "Rum and Romanism," Norris attacked [H. C. Meacham](#), the [Catholic](#) mayor of [Fort Worth](#), accusing him of misappropriating funds for Catholic causes. That same year, Norris was indicted for the murder of lumberman Dexter Elliot Chipps, a friend of Meacham's, in the church office. Norris claimed that Chipps (who may have been unarmed) had threatened his life. Norris was acquitted on grounds of self-defense.^[6]

During 1928, Norris campaigned against the election of [Al Smith](#) to the presidency, voicing his anti-Catholic views from the pulpit, his radio station, and his weekly newspaper. In 1935, he accepted the pastorate of a second church, Temple Baptist Church in [Detroit, Michigan](#). By 1946, the combined membership of the two congregations was more than 26,000. For sixteen years, Norris commuted by train and plane between the two churches. In September 1947, while on a tour of Europe, Norris secured an audience with Pope [Pius XII](#) and declared that the pope was "the last Gibraltar in Europe against Communism." Thereafter, Norris took the position that communism was more dangerous than Catholicism, and some of Norris's erstwhile allies, such as T. T. Shields, criticized him for his "folly."^[7]

In the late 1930s, Norris organized the [Premillennial Missionary Baptist Fellowship](#) (today known as the World Baptist Fellowship), a group of independent, premillennial Baptist churches, in an attempt to combat what he believed were socialist, liberal, and "modernist" tendencies within the Southern Baptist Convention. After [World War II](#), when [John Birch](#), a graduate of his seminary in Fort Worth, was killed by the Chinese communists, Norris renewed his attack on Communist influences in the United States. Norris's [premillennial](#) views^[8] led him to urge President [Harry Truman](#) to recognize and support the new state of [Israel](#).

Norris published a religious newspaper, *The Searchlight*, the front page of which had a picture of Norris grasping a [Bible](#) in one hand and a searchlight in the other while [Satan](#) cowered in the opposite lower corner. Norris died of a heart attack while attending a youth camp at [Jacksonville, Florida](#) in 1952. He was succeeded at the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth by Homer Ritchie, who pastored the church for 30 years. ^[9]

How did we pick up this name; “Fundamentalist”?

The Fundamentals or *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth* edited by [A. C. Dixon](#) and later by [Reuben Archer Torrey](#) is a set of 90 essays in 12 volumes published from 1910 to 1915 by the [Bible Institute of Los Angeles](#). They were designed to affirm orthodox [Protestant](#) beliefs and defend against ideas deemed inimical to them. They are widely considered to be the foundation of the modern [Fundamentalist](#) movement.

The essays were originally financed by [Lyman Stewart](#)^[1] (founder of Standard Oil) along with his brother Milton, in 1909^[2] to set out what they believed to be the fundamentals of Christian faith.^[2] These were to be sent free to ministers, missionaries, Sunday School superintendents and others active in [Christian ministry](#).^[3]

The volumes defended orthodox Protestant beliefs and attacked [higher criticism](#), [liberal theology](#), [Catholicism](#) (also called by them [Romanism](#)), [socialism](#), [modern philosophy](#), [atheism](#), [Christian Science](#), [Mormonism](#), Millennial Dawn (an early term for a particular Christian [Bible Student movement](#) which mostly later became the "Jehovah's Witnesses" denomination), [Spiritualism](#), and [evolutionism](#) (an article by geologist [George Frederick Wright](#)). (Wright did not attack biological evolution.)

- Volume I:
 - The Virgin Birth of Christ - [James Orr](#)
 - The Deity of Christ - [Benjamin B. Warfield](#)
 - The Purposes of the Incarnation - [G. Campbell Morgan](#)
 - The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit - [R. A. Torrey](#)
 - The Proof of the Living God - [Arthur T. Pierson](#)
 - History of the Higher Criticism - [Dyson Hague](#)
 - A Personal Testimony - [Howard A. Kelly](#)
- Volume II:
 - The Testimony of the Monuments to the Truth of the Scriptures - [George Frederick Wright](#)
 - The Recent Testimony of Archaeology to the Scriptures - M. G. Kyle
 - Fallacies of the Higher Criticism - Franklin Johnson
 - Christ and Criticism - Robert Anderson
 - Modern Philosophy - [Philip Mauro](#)
 - Justification by Faith - H. C. G. Moule
 - Tributes to Christ and the Bible by Brainy Men not Known as Active Christians
- Volume III:
 - Inspiration of the Bible—Definition, Extent, and Proof - [James M. Gray](#)
 - The Moral Glory of Jesus Christ a Proof of Inspiration - William G. Moorehead
 - God in Christ the Only Revelation of the Fatherhood of God - [Robert E. Speer](#)
 - The Testimony of Christian Experience - [E. Y. Mullins](#)
 - Christianity No Fable - Thomas Whitelaw
 - My Personal Experience with the Higher Criticism - J. J. Reeve
 - The Personal Testimony of [Charles T. Studd](#)
- Volume IV:
 - The Tabernacle in the Wilderness: Did it Exist? - David Heagle
 - The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament - [William Caven](#)
 - The Bible and Modern Criticism - [F. Bettex](#)
 - Science and Christian Faith - [James Orr](#)
 - A Personal Testimony - [Philip Mauro](#)
- Volume V:
 - Life in the Word - Philip Mauro
 - The Scriptures - [A. C. Dixon](#)
 - The Certainty and Importance of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead - R. A. Torrey

- Observations of the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul - Lord Lyttleton (analyzed and condensed by J. L. Campbell)
- A Personal Testimony - H. W. Webb-Peploe
- Volume VI:
 - The Testimony of Foreign Missions to the Superintending Providence of God - Arthur T. Pierson.
 - Is There a God? - Thomas Whitelaw
 - Sin and Judgment to Come - Robert Anderson
 - The Atonement - Franklin Johnson
 - The God-Man - John Stock
 - The Early Narratives of Genesis - James Orr
 - The Person and Work of Jesus Christ - [John L. Nuelsen](#)
 - The Hope of the Church - John McNicol
- Volume VII:
 - The Passing of Evolution - George Frederick Wright
 - Inspiration - L. W. Munhall
 - The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves - George S. Bishop
 - Testimony of the Organic Unity of the Bible to its Inspiration - Arthur T. Pierson
 - One Isaiah - [George L. Robinson](#)
 - The Book of Daniel - Joseph D. Wilson
 - Three Peculiarities of the Pentateuch - Andrew Craig Robinson
 - Millennial Dawn: A Counterfeit of Christianity - William G. Moorehead
- Volume VIII:
 - Old Testament Criticism and New Testament Christianity - [W. H. Griffith Thomas](#)
 - Evolutionism in the Pulpit - Anonymous
 - Decadence of Darwinism - Henry H. Beach
 - Paul's Testimony to the Doctrine of Sin - Charles B. Williams
 - The Science of Conversion - H. M. Sydenstricker
 - The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis - Dyson Hague
 - The Knowledge of God - James Burrell
 - "Preach the Word" - [Howard Crosby](#)
 - Mormonism: Its Origin, Characteristics, and Doctrines - R. G. McNiece
- Volume IX:
 - The True Church - [Bishop Ryle](#)
 - The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch - George Frederick Wright
 - The Wisdom of this World - A. W. Pitzer

- Holy Scripture and Modern Negations - James Orr
- Salvation by Grace - [Thomas Spurgeon](#)
- Divine Efficacy of Prayer - Arthur T. Pierson
- What Christ Teaches Concerning Future Retribution - William C. Procter
- A Message from Missions - Charles A. Bowen
- Eddyism: Commonly Called Christian Science - Maurice E. Wilson
- Volume X:
 - Why Save the Lord's Day? - Daniel Hoffman Martin
 - The Internal Evidence of the Fourth Gospel - Canon G. Osborne Troop
 - The Nature of Regeneration - Thomas Boston
 - Regeneration—Conversion—Reformation - George W. Lasher
 - Our Lord's Teachings About Money - Arthur T. Pierson
 - Satan and His Kingdom - Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis
 - The Holy Spirit and the Sons of God - W. J. Erdman
 - Consecration - Henry W. Frost
 - The Apologetic Value of Paul's Epistles - E.J. Stobo
 - What the Bible Contains for the Believer - George F. Pentecost
 - Modern Spiritualism Briefly Tested by Scripture - [Algernon J. Pollock](#)
- Volume XI:
 - The Biblical Conception of Sin - Thomas Whitelaw
 - At-One-Ment by Propitiation - Dyson Hague
 - The Grace of God - C. I. Scofield
 - Fulfilled Prophecy A Potent Argument for the Bible - Arno C. Gaebelein
 - The Coming of Christ - [Charles R. Erdman](#)
 - Is Romanism Christianity? - T. W. Medhurst
 - Rome, The Antagonist of the Nation - J. M. Foster
- Volume XII:
 - Doctrines that Must be Emphasized in Successful Evangelism - L. W. Munhall
 - Pastoral and Personal Evangelism, or Winning Men to Christ One-by-One - John Timothy Stone
 - The Sunday School's True Evangelism - Charles Gallaudet Trumbull
 - Foreign Missions or World-Wide Evangelism - Robert E. Speer
 - What Missionary Motives Should Prevail? - Henry W. Frost
 - The Place of Prayer in Evangelism - R. A. Torrey
 - The Church and Socialism - Charles R. Erdman
 - The Fifteen Books Most Indispensable for the Minister or the Christian Worker

The Fundamentals are not just 5 things we all agree on but rather many things we agree that we don't believe. The Fundamentals were hot sermons by the leading fundamentalist of the day preaching against every liberal tendency of the day. Not only Baptist, but most evangelical denominations were a part of this movement. Unfortunately, the name "fundamentalist" has been tainted by the Muslim world. But make no mistake, we believe in the fundamentals of the Word of God!

I. We are independent by conviction.

- A. Conviction not to follow the liberal path of denominationalism.
- B. Conviction not to send our money to a cooperative program places tithe and mission dollars toward unbiblical purposes.
- C. Conviction that each church is to be autonomous according to the scripture.
- D. Conviction that congregational polity is the New Testament pattern.

II. We are fundamental by conviction.

- A. Conviction that the Bible is the final authority in all faith and practice.
- B. Conviction that creeds of man are subject to error, but the Word of God is perfect.
- C. Conviction that those churches who turn from the truth of the Word of God to the leadership of denominationalism are corrupting themselves.

III. We are Baptist by Conviction.

A. Conviction that the B. A. P. T. I. S. T. acrostic outline represents the New Testament church pattern.

- **B**iblical authority ([Matthew 24:35](#); [1 Peter 1:23](#); [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))
- **A**utonomy of the local church ([Matthew 18:15-17](#); [1 Corinthians 6:1-3](#))
- **P**riesthood of all believers ([1 Peter 2:5-9](#); [1 Timothy 5](#))
- **T**wo ordinances ([believer's baptism](#) and the [Lord's Supper](#)) ([Acts 2:41-47](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-32](#))
- **I**ndividual soul liberty ([Romans 14:5-12](#))
- **S**aved church membership ([Matthew 16:18](#); [Ephesians 5:23-32](#); [Colossians 1:18](#))
- **T**wo offices of the church (pastor and deacon) ([1 Timothy 3:1-13](#); [Titus 1-2](#))
- **S**eparation of Church and State ([Matthew 22:15-22](#))

B. Conviction that people should be able to readily identify who we are and what we believe.

C. Conviction that our Christian and Baptist heritage is godly and worthy of upholding.