Sunday, October 27, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 112
Carl Henry's Uneasy Conscience

Introduction/Review

- In Lesson 111 we began looking at the neo-evangelical movement in the United States after WWII. We discussed the historical meaning and usage behind the terms; Evangelical, Fundamentalism, and Neo-Evangelical.

- We further noted how Carl F.H. Henry's book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* in 1947 along with the formation of Fuller Theological Seminary sounded an alarm that Fundamentalism needed to change.

- In order to better understand the origins of the neo-evangelical mindset, the Grace History Project has deemed it necessary to consider some of the specific questions Henry raised in his book.

- Please recall that the reason we are spending time studying the neo-evangelical movement is to better understand what happened in the Grace Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter 1 The Evaporation of Fundamentalist Humanitarianism

- In Chapter 1, Henry takes aim at what he calls a lack of humanitarianism within Fundamentalism.

  - "Against Protestant Fundamentalism the non-evangelicals level the charge that it has no social program calling for a practical attack on acknowledged world evils. . . what is almost wholly unintelligible to the naturalistic and idealistic groups, burdened as they are for a new world order, is the apparent lack of any social passion in Protestant Fundamentalism. On this evaluation, Fundamentalism is the modern priest and Levite, by-passing suffering humanity. The picture is clear when one brings into focus such admitted social evils as aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, the liquor traffic, and exploitation of labor or management, whichever it may be. The social reform movements dedicated to the elimination of such evils do not have the active, let alone vigorous, cooperation of large segments of evangelical Christianity. In fact, Fundamentalist churches increasingly have repudiated the very movements whose most energetic efforts have gone into an attack on such social ills. The study's Fundamentalist avoidance of, and bitter criticism of, the World Council of Churches and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America is a pertinent example. Now, such resistance would be far more intelligible to non-evangelicals were it accompanied by an equally forceful assault on social evils in a distinctly supernaturalistic framework. But, by and large, the Fundamentalist opposition to social ills has been more vocal than actual." (Henry, 16-17)

- As anecdotal evidence, Henry cites a message he delivered to over one hundred evangelical pastors in which he asked, "How many of you, during the past six months, have preached a

sermon devoted in large part to the condemnation of such social evils as aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, the liquor traffic, exploitation of labor or management, or the like. . ." To which not one pastor, Henry reports, responded in the affirmative. Henry calls this reluctance to come to grips with "social evils" a "predominate trait, in most Fundamentalists preaching." (Henry, 18)

- Henry argues that Fundamentalists were hard on individual sin while at the same time being soft on social evils.

  o "But from the standpoint of not a few religious modernists, ethical idealists and humanists, the common strand that runs through Fundamentalism and pessimism is that both are viewpoints from which the humanism or humanitarianism has evaporated. This is not to suggest that Fundamentalism has no militant opposition to sin. Of all modern viewpoints . . . Fundamentalism provided the most realistic appraisal of the condition of man. The sinfulness of man, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and that God alone can save man from his disaster . . . were heard with commonplace frequency only within the evangelical churches. But the sin against which Fundamentalism has inveighed, almost exclusively, was individual sin rather than social evil." (Henry, 20)

- After discussing the varying personal ethical codes within Fundamentalism, Henry concludes Chapter 1 by stating:

  o "The failure of the evangelical movement to react favorably on any widespread front to campaigns against social evils has led, finally, to a suspicion on the part of non-evangelicals that there is something in the very nature of Fundamentalism which makes a world ethical view impossible. The conviction is widespread that Fundamentalism takes too pessimistic a view of human nature to make a social program practicable.

    This modern mindset, insisting that evangelical supernaturalism has inherent within it an ideological fault which precludes any vital social trust, is one of the most disturbing dividing lines in contemporary thought. In the struggle for a world mind which will make global order and brotherhood a possibility, contemporary speculation has no hearing whatever from a viewpoint which it suspects has no world program. It dismisses Fundamentalism with the thought that, in this expression of the Great Tradition, the humanitarianism has evaporated from Christianity." (Henry, 23)

Chapter 2 The Protest Against Foredoomed Failure

- In Chapter 2, Henry continues his critique of modern Fundamentalisms' lack of social conscience by discussing the widely held notion that society is working toward total ruin.

  o "An evangelical message vitally related to world conditions is not precluded by New Testament doctrine. Indeed, conservative Protestantism insists, only this estimate of the sinfulness of man and his need of regeneration is sufficiently realistic to make at all

possible any securely grounded optimism in world affairs. . . evangelicalism is disturbed. There is a growing awareness in Fundamentalist circles that, despite the orthodox insistence upon revelation and redemption, evangelical Christianity has become increasingly inarticulate about the social reference of the Gospel. The conviction mounts that the relationship of the church to world conditions must be reappraised, even if the doctrinal limits are regarded as fixed within which solution is likely to be found. While the modern mind wrestles with its global dilemma, the evangelical conscience is troubled because the historic Christian message is dismissed arbitrarily as a dead option for dissolving the ills of Occidental culture. Fundamentalism is wondering just how it is that a world changing message narrowed its scope to the changing of isolated individuals."

- Reading between the lines it becomes apparent that Chapter 2 is largely an attack on the underlying assumptions of dispensational theology. Henry is critical of the pessimism of a society embedded with the Premillennialism understanding of Scripture.

    o "It should be emphasized that this despair over the present world order grows, for contemporary Fundamentalism, not out of any lack of confidence in the ability of the supernaturalistic Gospel. Rather, it issues from the fact that Scriptures, as interpreted by premillenarians and amillenarians, hold forth no hope for the conversion of the whole world, and center upon the second coming of Christ as crucial for the introduction of a divine kingdom. The despair over the present age, then, is grounded in the anticipated lack of response to the redemptive Gospel, rather than in any inherent defect in the message itself. . . Fundamentalism in revolting against the Social Gospel seemed also to revolt against the Christian social imperative." (Henry, 29-32)

- In short, according to Henry, Fundamentalism offered no vision for society on par with Augustine's *The City of God*. (Henry, 30)

Chapter 3 The Most Embarrassing Evangelical Divorce

- Chapter 3 opens with the following statements, "For the first protracted period in its history, evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movements. . . As a consequence, Protestant evangelicalism without a world program has largely relegated itself to a secondary, or even more subordinate, role of challenge to the prevailing cultural mood." (Henry 36-37)

- Henry viewed contemporary Fundamentalism as having lost its Biblical imperative to affect the culture.

    o "For Fundamentalism in the main fails to make relevant to the great moral problems in the twentieth-century global living the implications of this redemptive message. Hebrew-Christian thought, historically, has stood as a closely-knit world and life view. Metaphysics and ethics went everywhere together, in Biblical intent. The great doctrines implied a divinely related social order with intimation for all humanity. The ideal

Hebrew and Christian society throbbed with challenge to the predominant culture of this generation, condemning with redemptive might the tolerated social evils, for the redemptive message was to light the world and salt the earth." (Henry, 38)

- Henry concludes the Chapter by criticizing Protestant Fundamentalism for deserting the "social imperative" of the Christian gospel.

    o "Today, Protestant Fundamentalism, although heir-apparent to the supernaturalist gospel of the biblical and Reformation minds, is a stranger, in its predominant spirit, to the vigorous social interest of its ideological forebears. Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world; it does not challenge the injustices of the totalitarianisms, the secularism of modern education, the evils of racial hatred, the wrong of current labor-management relations, the inadequate bases of international dealings. It has ceased to challenge Caesar and Rome, as though in futile resignation and submission to the triumphant Renaissance mood. The apostolic Gospel stands divorced from a passion to right the world. The Christian social imperative is today in the hands of those who understand it in sub-Christian terms." (Henry 44-45)

Chapter 4 The Apprehension Over Kingdom Preaching

- Chapter 4 contains Henry's strongest anti-dispensational comments. On page 52 he writes, "The writer's own convictions, while broadly premillenial, are not partial to the dispensational postponement theory of the kingdom; this is not a necessary adjunct of the premillenial view. It appears more in accord with the Biblical philosophy of history to think of the church age in terms of divine continuity rather than a parenthesis, in terms of an amazing unity of the redemptive plan rather than in terms of an amazing interlude." (Henry, 52)

- While Henry concedes that the prophecies demand a future earthly fulfillment he does not limit his conceptualization of the kingdom to a future literal fulfillment. Rather, Henry sees aspects of God's kingdom at work in the world now.

    o "No study of the kingdom teaching of Jesus is adequate unless it recognizes His implication both that the kingdom is here, and that it is not here. This does not imply an ultimate paradox, but rather stresses that the kingdom exist in incomplete realization. The task of the Bible student is to discover: 1) in what sense it is here; 2) in what sense it is to be further realized before the advent of Christ; and 3) in what sense it will be fully realized at the advent of Christ. . . The extent to which man centers his life and energy in the redemptive King now determines the extent of the divine kingdom in the present age. That kingdom is not to be totally identified with any earthly rule, though some have. . . the kingdom is not wholly future. Paul writes the Romans that the kingdom of God means "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). . . (quotes I Cor. 4:20, Col. 1:13, Heb. 12:28, and Rev. 1:9) These passages, among others, argue clearly that the

kingdom is a present spiritual reality in the lives of believers, being coextensive with the outworked redemptive and regenerative plan of God. " (Henry, 53-56)

- Henry reports how he was cautioned by a Fundamentalist preacher to stay away from the topic of the kingdom because "there is growing reluctance to explicate the kingdom idea in Fundamentalist preaching, because a kingdom now message is too easily confused with the liberal social gospel, and because a kingdom then message will identify Christianity further to the modern mind in terms of an escape mechanism." (Henry, 51-52)

- Chapter 4 ends with Henry offering contemporary evangelicalism four suggestions: 1) reawaken to the relevance of this redemptive message to the global predicament; 2) stress the great evangelical agreements in the common world front; 3) discard elements of its message which cut the nerve of world compassion as contradictory to the inherent genius of Christianity; 4) restudy eschatological convictions for a proper perspective which will not unnecessarily dissipate evangelical strength in controversy over secondary positions. (Henry, 57)

- It could be deduced from page fifty that Henry considered disagreements over the timing of the Rapture secondary discussions that should be discarded.

Chapter 5 The Fundamentalist Thief on the Cross

- "The two thieves between whom Jesus was crucified might, without too wild an imagination, bear the labels of humanism and Fundamentalism," are the opening lines of Chapter 5. The bulk of Chapter 5 deals with the "pharisaical spirit of Fundamentalism," that turns inessentials into essentials.

  - "The time has come for Fundamentalism to speak with an ecumenical outlook and voice; if it speaks in terms of the historic tradition, rather than in the name of secondary assertions or of eschatological biases on which evangelicals divide, it can refashion the modern mind. But a double-minded Fundamentalism—which veers between essentials and inessentials—will receive little of the Lord, and not much of a hearing from the perishing multitudes.

- Henry quotes the word of Dr. William Ward Ayer regarding "pharisaical fundamentalism:"

  - "Dr. Ayer deplores the "pharisaical spirit of fundamentalism" and warns that "unless there is a resurgence of love, power and breadth of mind and spirit in our midst we shall more effectively deny the faith than the religiously-shallow modernists, can ever do. Their following is limited; ours is large." (Henry, 63-64)

- Toward the end of the Chapter, Henry sums up Fundamentalism problems as follows, "if Protestant orthodoxy holds itself aloof from the present world predicament it is doomed to a much reduced role; in the previous crisis of culture, whether the challenge of the Graeco-Roman world in the apostolic age, or the challenge of a corrupt medieval Catholicism in the Reformation

movement, orthodoxy led the battle for new order, and was not content with a secondary or tertiary role. If the evangelical answer is in terms of religious escapism, then the salt has lost its savor." (Henry, 65-66)

Chapter 6 The Struggle For a New World Mind

- In this Chapter Henry argues that if historic Christianity is going to survive it must project solutions to world problems.

  - "If historic Christianity is again to compete as a vital world ideology, evangelism must project a solution for the most pressing world problems. It must offer a formula for a new world mind with spiritual ends, involving evangelical affirmations in political, economic, sociological and education realms, local and international. The redemptive message has implications for all of life; a truncated life results from a truncated message." (Henry, 68)

- Henry argues that even if this redemptive message cannot create a full Christian civilization that it should not stop evangelicals from Christianizing as many areas as possible.

  - "That evangelicalism may not create a fully Christian civilization does not argue against an effort to win as many areas as possible by the redemptive power of Christ; it can engender reformation here and overthrow paganism there; it can win outlets for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus reminiscent of apostolic triumphs. If Christianity cannot bring new life to Russia, that is no argument for not bringing it to China; if it cannot bring reformation to Spain, that is no reason for not bringing it to South America." (Henry, 69-70)

- In order for Evangelicalism to create this "new world mind," Henry advocates for a new ordering of the education system.

  - "Evangelicalism will have to contend for a new order in education. The western concept of popular education has its legitimate rootage in the determination of the church to indoctrinate the masses in the major doctrinal essentials of the Christian world-life view. For the past three centuries, the state has steadily supplanted the church as the indoctrinating agency, and today secular education largely involves an open or subtle undermining of historic Christian theism. Evangelicalism must contend under such circumstances for two great academic changes. First, it must develop a competent literature in every field of study, on every level from the grade school through the university, which adequately presents each subject with its implications for the Christian as well as non-Christian points of view. . . Second, evangelicalism must not let the fact that the state has now become an agent of indoctrination obscure the evangelical obligation to press the Christian world-life view upon the masses." (Henry, 70-71)

Chapter 7 The Evangelical "Formula of Protest"

- As the title suggests, the bulk of this Chapter is taken up with presenting an evangelical formula for advancing their agenda.

    - "This creates the most favorable opportunity evangelicalism has had since its embarrassing divorce from a world social program, to recapture its right leadership in pressing for a new world order. . . Therefore, the path of evangelical action seems to be an eagerness to condemn all social evils, no less vigorously than any other group, and a determination: 1) when evangelicals are in the majority, to couple such condemnation with the redemptive Christian message as the only true solution; 2) when evangelicals are in the minority, to express their opposition to evils in a "formula of protest," concurring heartily in the assault on social wrongs, but insisting upon the regenerative context as alone able to secure the permanent rectification of such wrongs. Thus, evangelicals will take their stand against evil, and against it in the name of Jesus Christ the Deliverer, both within their own groups and within other groups. To do this, is to recapture the evangelical spirit." (Henry, 76-79)

Chapter 8 The Dawn of a New Reformation

- In the final Chapter of his book, Henry calls for a new reformation within evangelicalism with "ecumenical significance."

- "The cries of suffering humanity today are many. No evangelicalism which ignores the totality of man's condition dare respond in the name of Christianity. Though the modern crisis is not basically political, economic or social—fundamentally it is religious—yet evangelicalism must be armed to declare the implications of this proposed religious solution for the politico-economic and sociological context for modern life." (Henry, 84)

- "The battle against evil in all its forms must be pressed unsparingly; we must pursue the enemy, in politics, in economics, in science, in ethics—everywhere, in every field, we must pursue relentlessly. But when we have singled out the enemy—when we have disentangled him from those whose company he has kept and whom he has misled—we must meet the foe head on, girt in the Gospel armor." (Henry, 86)

- "The evangelical task primarily is the preaching of the Gospel in the interest of individual regeneration by the supernatural grace of God, in such a way that divine redemption can be recognized as the best solution of our problems, individual and social. This produces within history, through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, a divine society that transcends nations and international lines." (Henry, 88)

Works Cited

Henry, Carl F.H. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B.
    Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947.