



# Systematic Theology and Preaching

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# The Founders Journal



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# Systematic Theology and Preaching

*Tom Ascol*

"Our pastor is not a theologian, he's a *preacher*." If ever a sentiment betrayed the roots of modern indifference to doctrine, this one does. Doctrinal ignorance in the pew is the result of theological apathy in the pulpit.

The conviction that theological understanding is integral to pastoral ministry--especially preaching--was commonplace among our Protestant forebears. For them it was axiomatic that without the former one dare not enter the latter. Today, by contrast, it is not only possible, but highly probable, that a ministerial student will graduate from seminary with as little as one tenth of his classwork consisting of formal theological studies. With as few as eight credits in theology such a student can be awarded a "Master of Divinity" degree.

The division of the "pastor-theologian" into two separate, unrelated roles has not occurred without dire consequences for the Church. On the one hand preaching has become increasingly void of doctrinal content. On the other, contemporary theology has become increasingly esoteric. God's sheep are left sick and malnourished and "theology" (as well as the theologian) is maligned as irrelevant.

What is needed is a return to the older, more biblical understanding that theology must be preached, and preaching must be theological. This mind-set is clearly demonstrated in the great Reformers of the sixteenth century. Calvin (and to a lesser degree), Luther, and Zwingli are remembered today as influential theologians. Yet, each viewed himself in and actually fulfilled the role of pastor-teacher.[\[1\]](#) For these men, theology resulted from and was given expression in expository preaching.

This heritage was passed down to the Puritans of the seventeenth century[\[2\]](#) and to many of our Baptist forefathers after them. John Bunyan, John Gill, Andrew Fuller, Charles Spurgeon, and B. H. Carroll are representative of historic Baptist pastors whose sermons bulge with doctrinal content. Such men regarded both theology that does not preach and preaching that is not theological as being unworthy of their respective names.

## The Demise of Systematic Theology

The near extinction of doctrinal preaching today strictly correlates to the modern disenchantment with systematic theology--the discipline which seeks to arrange in an orderly and coherent (i.e. "systematic") fashion the revealed truth concerning God in His various relationships.[\[3\]](#) Quite obviously such an attempt is valid only if there is an inherent unity in the Scriptures. If there is no overall unity in the Bible, no coherence in all its parts, then the systematic theologian is on a fool's errand.

This is precisely the conclusion of much of the modern theological world. By accepting the "assumptions of the literary and historical criticism which rejects the Bible's own representations" many contemporary theologians are compelled to find genuine inconsistencies, contradictions, and errors in the text of the Scriptures.[\[4\]](#) Once such discrepancies are assumed, any notion of theological unity within the Bible must fall.

An error-ridden Bible cannot be expected to teach a system of truth. One would be foolish, therefore, to attempt a systematization of its teachings. Further, instead of talking about biblical theology, one should now speak of biblical theologies (plural).

At the same time that systematic theology was falling into disfavor the study of Pauline, Petrine, Johannine, etc. theologies was growing in popularity.[\[5\]](#) Thus this kind of "biblical" theology has been heralded as the proper domain of the

legitimate theologian and the study of systematics has been relegated to the realm of philosophy (where "systems" are acceptable).

Such conclusions can stand only when their presuppositions are left unchallenged. For if the Bible is without genuine discrepancy, inconsistency, or error, then the analytical search of its text for a system of truth is not only legitimate, it is mandatory. If God has consistently, albeit progressively, revealed His truth to us in the Scriptures, then it is incumbent that we analyze the whole Bible when seeking to know His mind on any particular point.

It is specious to argue that "biblical" theology is by definition more concerned with the Bible than is "systematic" theology. Both are concerned with the text of Scripture. It is the comprehensive, coherent teaching of that text which concerns the latter. Careful exegesis is no more valued by one than the other and neither can be slighted in any thorough study of God's Word.

Systematic theology is a necessary discipline in the pursuit of both knowing and proclaiming the whole counsel of God.<sup>[6]</sup> It will curb careless exegesis which results in fanciful, contradictory expositions of various texts. Where it is depreciated doctrinal instability prevails, and God's people are robbed of Christian vitality.

## **The Need for Expository Preaching**

If the Bible has an inherent unity and coheres in all of its constituent parts, then it follows that any attempt to preach a part of its message must, at some point, be concerned with the whole of its message; In other words, the proper interpretation of any passage partially depends upon its comparative analysis by the rest of the Bible. This long esteemed principle of hermeneutics is known as the "analogy of Scripture." It is given expression in the Second London Confession of Faith in the following words:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture it self [sic]: And therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one) it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>[7]</sup>

This statement assumes the overall unity and consistency of the Bible. To apply this principle requires that the interpreter venture into the region of systematic theology.

For example, what exactly does John 3:16 teach about the power of man's will? Does this verse teach that fallen man has the innate moral ability to believe in Christ? Does not the phrase, "whoever believes in Him should not perish" indicate that anyone can believe?<sup>[8]</sup>

The question centers upon man's ability. In order to gain the "true and full sense" other passages which speak to this issue must be investigated. John 6:44 & 65 state unequivocally that no man can come to Jesus unless he is drawn by God. This is corroborated by Rom. 8:7-8, which state that sinners cannot comply with God's law, neither do they have the ability to please God.

These and other passages which must be incorporated into a systematic construction of the biblical doctrine of man restrain the honest interpreter from claiming too much about man's will from John 3:16. Further, such an approach to interpretation will help save the expositor from the embarrassing prospect of contradicting last week's sermon with this week's lesson.

Where this principle is ignored or violated, expository preaching greatly suffers. Sometimes there is an effort to redefine the art altogether in exclusive terms of detailed grammatical, syntactical, and etymological considerations. Sermons are then filled with references to tense, mode, case, and gender. While this method may teach much about individual trees, it completely misses the forest.

The pastor who conscientiously applies the analogy of Scripture will be forced to reason theologically in his sermons. He will inevitably become more doctrinal in his preaching with the various points of his sermons being informed by the systematic teachings of all the Bible. He will find himself constantly challenged to add both breadth and depth to his biblical knowledge as his own theological convictions come under scriptural review. In short, he will find himself doing the work of a theologian, because his chief pastoral duty requires it.<sup>[9]</sup>

The people who receive such a ministry have the opportunity for great spiritual benefit. If the first profit of Scripture is doctrine, then doctrinal preaching is an essential ingredient for the growth and thorough equipping of Christian men and women (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Under such preaching believers are compelled to confront the biblical teachings on any and every matter. When God's people have confidence in the unity and coherence of the Bible, their fellowship is characterized by a Berean spirit. They will receive the message with all readiness and then search the Scriptures to find out if what they are hearing is true (Acts 17:11).

How can God's undershepherds settle for anything less?



### **John Calvin on the Ministry**

Today hardly one in a hundred considers how difficult and arduous it is faithfully to discharge the office of pastor. Hence many are led into it as something trivial and not serious; and afterwards experience teaches them, too late, how foolishly they aspired to the unknown. Others think themselves endowed with great skill and diligence and promise themselves great things from their talent, learning, and judgment; but afterwards they experience too late how limited their equipment is, for their powers fail them at the outset. Others, while knowing there will be many serious battles, have no fear, as though they were born for contention, and put on an iron front. Still others who want to be ministers are mercenaries. We know indeed that all God's servants are wretched in the eyes of the world and common sense, for they must make war on the passions of all and thus displease men in order to please God.



<sup>1</sup>Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), pp. 53-56, 108-119, 181. For a more detailed treatment of Calvin's preaching see also John Leith's helpful article entitled, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today" in Timothy George, ea., *John Calvin and The Church: A Prism of Reform* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 206-229.

<sup>2</sup>For an excellent treatment of Puritan preaching see J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), pp. 277-89.

<sup>3</sup>John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 4: *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12. See also Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 172-78.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to disparage or undervalue biblical theology in general or such courses in particular. Both biblical and systematic studies are needed in any comprehensive theological curriculum. However, as Ramm contends, it should be recognized that the study of various biblical theologies (i.e., of Paul, John, Peter, etc.) emerged under the belief propagated by liberalism and neo-orthodoxy "that the Bible contains a medley of contradictory theologies" (*Interpretation*, p. 174).

<sup>6</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

"To me there is nothing more important in a preacher than that he should have a systematic theology, that he should know it and be well grounded in it. This systematic theology, this body of truth which is derived from the Scripture, should always be present as a background and as a controlling influence in his preaching." *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>W. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969) pp. 252-53.

<sup>8</sup>This popular verse is used as an example because it arises so frequently in discussion about the nature of man's will. Actually, the most that can be claimed on that subject is that this verse may imply that anyone can believe. All that is explicitly stated, however, is that everyone who believes will be saved. There is no direct claim here regarding how one comes to believe.

<sup>9</sup>Nowhere is this approach better exemplified than in Puritan preaching. Packer writes,

"The Puritans received the Bible as a self-contained and self-interpreting revelation of God's mind. This revelation, the 'body of divinity' as they called it, is, they held, a unity, to which every part of 'the best of books' makes its own distinct contribution. It follows that the meaning of single texts cannot be properly discerned till they are seen in relation to the rest of the 'body'; and, conversely, that the better one's grasp of the whole, the more significance one will see in each part. To be a good expositor, therefore, one must first be a good theologian. Theology--truth about God and man--is what God has put into the texts of Scripture, and theology is what preachers must draw out of them. To the question, 'Should one preach doctrine?', the Puritan answer would have been, 'Why, what else is there to preach?'" *Quest For Godliness*, pp. 284-85.



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# Doctrine and Devotion (Part 2)

*Ernest Reisinger*

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In the last issue we considered the first part of this two-part series on doctrine and devotion. I pointed out that sound doctrine is to Christian experience what the bones are to the body, or, what the foundation is to the superstructure.

Doctrine and Christian experience must never be separated because God has joined them together. The Westminster Confession, The London Confession of 1689 and The Heidelberg Catechism are the clearest expressions of the doctrinal content of the Bible. There is one thing, however, missing in each of them. What is it? PEOPLE--people with Christian experience.

Christian experience is the influence of sound biblical doctrine applied to the mind, the affections, and the will by the Holy Spirit. True religion is not some mystical, nebulous thing, floating around in the sky. It cannot be anything less than right thinking in respect to God, right feeling in respect to God and right acting in respect to God. Therefore, true religion must reach the whole man. It must reach his mind because that is what he thinks with, it must reach his affections because that is what he feels with, and it must reach his will because that is what he decides with.

It is impossible, therefore, to over-emphasize the importance of sound doctrine as the foundation for the Christian life, Christian worship and Christian witness. Bishop J. C. Ryle said it well when he said, "You can talk about Christian experience all you wish but without doctrinal roots it will be like cut flowers stuck in the ground--they will wither and die."

In the last issue of this journal I focused exclusively on the importance of sound doctrine. In this issue I want to call your attention to the other side of the same coin--Devotion.

I am using devotion and Christian experience synonymously. To put it another way: the devotional house must be built on a doctrinal foundation. We must ever keep before us, however, the realization that doctrine and creeds are not an end in themselves. Many fail at this very point. That is, they make doctrine an end in itself. This will produce nothing but dead orthodoxy. Many never get off the foundation. They are doctrinally as straight as a gun barrel and just as empty. They are very sound doctrinally, but unfortunately, they are sound asleep.

A devotional house, therefore, must be built on a sound doctrinal foundation. The Holy Spirit uses this doctrinal foundation to produce a holy life because the gospel is a holy-making gospel.

Some Christians are afraid of biblical holiness. I wish they were as much afraid of sin as they are of holiness.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "It is a holy making gospel. Without holy fruits all evidences are vain. Dear friends, you have awakenings, enlightenings, experiences, and many due signs; but if you lack holiness, you shall never see the Lord. A real desire after complete holiness is the truest mark of being born again. Jesus is a holy Saviour, He first covers the soul with His white raiment, then makes the soul glorious within--restores the lost image of God, and fills the soul with pure, heavenly holiness. Unregenerate men among you cannot bear this testimony."

It is strange that so many church members either have a false standard of holiness, or else they are afraid of holiness altogether.

If you cannot persuade yourself to be holy you will have no success with others. We must taste and see that the Lord is good. We must taste before we can tell. One thousand wonderful sermons on holiness will not cover a cold, carnal, careless life. A holy sermon is but for an hour, but a holy life is a perpetual sermon.

Richard Baxter said, "A minister's life is the life of his ministry. I say, a Christian's life is the life of his Christianity.

The importance of a devotional life (sometimes called "religion") is clearly brought out by our Lord's rebuke of the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2:1-6. Here we note that Jesus commends this church for:

1. Their service: "I know your works, and your labor."
2. Their sacrificial life: "You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."
3. Their separation (ecclesiastical separation): "You cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars."

What, then, was their problem? They were lacking in their love for their Lord--devotion: "you have left your first love."

What equipment is needed to maintain this devotional life? I suggest three things:

1. A Quiet Place
2. A Quiet Hour
3. A Quiet Heart

Consider Paul's deep personal hunger expressed in Phil. 3:10 "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death."

Paul's doctrine led to his deep personal hunger for Christ-likeness. Notice also that Paul's devotion affected him in his desire for souls. Rom. 9:1-3: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh." This tells us something about his devotional life.

The Shulamite's testimony is too frequently true of ministers and other Christian workers: "They made me keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard I have not kept." (Song of Solomon 1:6)

The New Testament corollary passage is I Cor. 9:27: "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." This graphically describes Paul's concern for his own spiritual life.

We must keep the weeds out of our own garden by maintaining a devotional life. We must never be satisfied with being the instrument of grace without being the subject of grace.

What does it cost if you are to have a doctrinal foundation and a devotional house?

I once heard Dr. Gwin Walters preach to seminary students, and I remember his warnings. He warned the young ministers of laziness. He warned them of looseness. He warned them of levity and he warned them of lethargy--that is, morbid drowsiness, an inertia arising from soft living.

To build a devotional house there must be some self-denial. Self-denial is not denying oneself of sin. The Christian is never at liberty to sin. Self-denial is foregoing *lawful* liberties.

The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

(1) *Fear of God*. As the servant of Christ, all actions must be moved by a motive of love to God, and all objects must be used for his glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4-5; 1 Peter 2:15-16).

(2) *Love of Brethren*. Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow-saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:9).

(3) *Compassion for Sinners*. Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and that behavior chosen which is likely to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

(4) *Watchfulness over the Soul*. Though the believer is free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded of him because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain for the sake of perseverance (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

Self-denial is the character of the cross. "Be not conformed to this world" means something. "Be not entangled with the affairs of this life" means something. Self-denial is subordinating every secondary point to the primary object--it is singleness of mind.

Whatever experience (1) chills our fervor, (2) dissipates our mind, (3) diverts our attention, or (4) occupies an inordinate proportion of our time or interest is the right eye that we are called to pluck out and cast from us.

I do not mean that there should be NO DIVERSION. There is the other extreme of rendering the bow useless by always keeping it bent. Inordinate use of legitimate things is where most good men go down (family, home, position, sports, T.V.). Let me suggest a little paperback on self-denial called *The Shadow of the Cross*, by Walter J. Chantry (Banner of Truth).

A very simple test on self-denial is as follows:

1. What has the supreme place in your affections?
2. What is the dominating power in your life?
3. What is it that has the molding influence on your heart?

Never has apostasy from the faith (doctrine or practice) been connected with a prayerful and diligent study of God's

word. If the great doctrines we have mentioned do not produce and develop (1) true zeal, (2) true holiness, (3) self-denial and (4) evangelism, be sure they are not held properly or else they have become an end in themselves.

Our dealings with infidels and skeptics of Christianity cannot consist of cold metaphysical reasoning and dry scientific arguments. Rather, our evangelistic efforts must extend from believing the whole gospel and living the whole gospel.

Living epistles known and read are better than all the scholarship in the world. Oh, for men and women who know gospel truth and live gospel lives!

I pray these little articles will be used to sharpen us doctrinally and shape us devotionally to be conformed to the image of Him whose we are and whom we serve, whom having not seen we love. Though now we do not see Him, yet believing, we rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

The little tree on the cover illustrates what I have tried to emphasize in these two articles on Doctrine and Devotion.



### **Richard Sibbes on Preaching Christ**

Because people are in a contrary state to Christ, "to preach Christ" is . . . to begin with the law, to discover to people their estate by nature. A man can never preach the gospel that makes not way for the gospel, by showing and convincing people that they are out of Christ. Who will marry with Christ, but those that they are out of Christ. Who will marry with Christ, but those that know their own beggary and misery out of Christ? That he must be had out of necessity, or else they die in debts eternally; he must be had, or else they are eternally, miserable. Now when people are convinced of this, then they make out of themselves to Christ. This therefore must be done, . . . in order, [to make way for] the preaching of Christ; for "the full stomach despiseth an honeycomb", Prov. 27:7. Who cares for balm that is not sick? Therefore we see John Baptist came before Christ, to make way for Christ, to level the mountains, to cast down whatsoever exalts itself in man. He that is to preach must discern what mountains there be between men's hearts and Christ; and he must labour to discover themselves to themselves, and lay flat all the pride of men in the dust; for "the word of God is forcible to pull down strongholds and imaginations and to bring all into subjection to Christ", 2 Cor. 10:4. And indeed, though a man should not preach the law, yet by way of implication, all these things are wrapped in the gospel. What need of a Saviour, unless we were lost? What need of Christ to be wisdom to us, if we were not fools in ourselves? What need Christ be sanctification to us, if we were not lost and sold in ourselves to Satan, and under his bondage? Therefore all is to make way for Christ, not only to open the mysteries of Christ, but in opening and application to let us see the necessity of Christ. In a word, being to bring Christ and the Church together, our aim must be, to persuade people to come out of their estate they are in, to come and take Christ. Whatever makes for this, that course we must use, though it be with never so much abasing of ourselves.

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# The Role of Confessions in Baptist Faith

*Tom J. Nettles*

*This article is adapted from a chapter which originally appeared in The Unfettered Word, ed. R. James (Waco: Word Books, 1987).*

In my previous article (*FJ 3*) I sought to answer objections to the serious use of confessions. While much consternation and insecurity will continue to plague the minds of many, contemporary doubts surrounding confessional denominationalism, or even confessional Christianity, cannot remove one stubborn historical fact. Historically, Baptists have used confessions as determinative theological guidelines and pedagogical aids for individuals, churches, and denominational institutions. This article will emphasize the variety of ways in which Baptists have employed confessions while remaining sensitive to the loose ends necessarily involved in the intertwining of Scripture with the human attempts to understand it.

## The Pre-Confession Pattern of Authority

Baptists have stressed the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, that is, Scripture alone is the foundation of our knowledge of God and the depository (2 Tim. 1:12-14) of divine truth. This has been so often and so thoroughly enunciated, and in such decisive and emphatic terms, that it would seem none could disavow the principle, at least from a historical perspective. Other realities, such as experience, reason, and confession have served as aids in understanding but not in the full sense of an "authority."

All Christians must be careful not to place any other entity, whether existential or written, above Scripture. Neither catechism, creed, or confession--nor reason, conscience, or current experience should be allowed to eclipse a clear and plain Scripture affirmation at any time. As Philip Schaff has clearly and accurately stated, "In the Protestant system, the authority of symbols, as of all human compositions, is relative and limited, . . . always subordinate to the Bible, as the only infallible rule of the Christian faith and practice."[\[1\]](#)

Given such a proper submission to biblical authority, how should one regard confessions of faith? All should readily acknowledge, along with the preamble of the Baptist Faith and Message, that confessions are only "guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience." They are useful, however, in several ways and have been advantageous in conserving the particulars of Baptist life. From the abundance of Baptist confessions in existence, the following principles have been condensed: (1) the constructive contribution of confessions, (2) their necessary changeableness, and (3) their relation to Scripture.

## Constructive Contribution

**1. A human document.** That we acknowledge a confession as strictly a humanly composed document is an important step in a quest for unity. All conservative Christian denominations believe that their theologies and ecclesiologies are true reflections of biblical teaching. Hardly any sincere Christian would say, "You are biblical and obviously I am not, but I will stay what I am." Though they disagree, each believes his position is biblical. The human document meets the essential need of revealing the different understandings of the Bible. When these understandings differ significantly in vital areas, unity of purpose and mission become difficult if not impossible.

For this reason, the scheme of Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell was impracticable. In 1809, Thomas Campbell set forth the ideal in his *Declaration and Address*, in which he called for a subduing of all inferential theology to a direct "Thus saith the Lord." Claiming admirably that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith . . . but

what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God," he also insisted that "no such deduction or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession;" such confessional extrapolations Campbell called "stumbling-blocks--the rubbish of ages."[\[2\]](#)

His son Alexander continued this call for freedom from confessions. Campbell's anti-confessional crusade led Robert B. Semple, of Virginia, to characterize Campbell's view as unbaptistic.

Some of your opinions, though true, are pushed to extremes, such as those upon the use of creeds, confessions, . . . In short your views are generally so contrary to those of Baptists in general, that if a party was to go fully into the practice of your principles I should say a new sect had sprung up, radically different from the Baptists, as they now are.[\[3\]](#)

When Baptist Associations began to disfellowship the followers of Campbell, one of his sentiments repugnant to those Associations was "That no creed is necessary for the Church, but the Scriptures as they stand."[\[4\]](#)

J. P. Boyce himself saw this danger in the ideas of Campbell and warned the trustees of Furman against a repeat of Campbell's error. "Playing upon the prejudices of the weak and ignorant among our people, decrying creeds as an infringement upon the rights of conscience, making a deep impression by his extensive learning and great abilities, Alexander Campbell threatened at one time the total destruction of our faith."[\[5\]](#) Boyce noted that Baptists had used creeds in two ways: to declare their own faith and to test its existence in others.[\[6\]](#)

Campbell had strange bedfellows in his attempt to throw away inferential theology. One hundred-fifty years before the Campbells, the Quakers asserted themselves to be "found in the one Faith with the Primitive Church and Saints" and seemed to think that their approach of using only the language of Scripture "without Consequences or Commentaries" demonstrated that. Robert Barclay, a Scottish Quaker theologian and apologist of the seventeenth century, lamented "those strained and far fetched Consequences, which Men have invented." He was sure that his catechism, "plainly couched in Scripture Words . . . without Niceties and School-distinctions" held more promise of edification for those who were in earnest about their search for the truth.[\[7\]](#) The problem with this approach, however, is that none would disagree with the Scripture passages; from the vocabulary, logic, and implications of the questions, however, some would find reason to dissent.

A large part, therefore, of the constructive contribution of a confession lies precisely at the point of its being a human and interpretive document. The exegetical and explanatory character of confessions makes them valuable for creating and testing the unity of Christians on the teachings of Scripture.

**2. Witness to the coherence of truth.** Confessions are possible and necessary as witnesses to a belief in the coherence of truth. Scriptural data related to any subject can be synthesized (obviously with proper attention to contextual interpretation) so as to produce a biblical doctrine.

The most obvious example of such a doctrine is that of the Trinity. With the mention of Father, Son, and Spirit as separate personal subsistences in Scripture and the clear monotheistic commitment of all the Bible--plus the ascription of the attributes of deity to each of the three Persons--one can do justice to the total biblical witness only by confession of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. This necessary synthesizing of biblical data is most thoroughly done under the power of a commitment to inerrancy (that is, the pervasive, coherent truthfulness of Scripture). This conviction, therefore, constitutes the clearest and most consistent foundation for a biblical confession of faith. Without such commitment, some part of a doctrine could be dismissed on the basis of a bias toward another authority.

The treatment of 1 Samuel 15:3 is a case in point. The command to utterly destroy Amalek, "man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (RSV) is viewed by some unworthy of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This represents a clear case where no discrepancy about numbers, order or events, or textual variants clouds the

discussion. The text is rejected as it is and forms no part of theology for that person. This part of Scripture loses its authority because it violates an independent standard held by the rejecter. Whether this standard arises from another place in Scripture, an autonomous ethical commitment, or a rationalistic assumption, it is clear that a commitment to the coherent truth of the entire corpus of Scripture is absent, and Holy Scripture is not the authority.

The admission of such a principle immediately outlaws any attempt to construct a biblical confession. The confession may represent the beliefs a person has as a result of familiarity with the *part* of the Bible that he or she has chosen to accept, for whatever reason; but it cannot be a confession in the historic sense that the confession expresses beliefs arising from an engagement with and submission to the authority of "all Scripture" (2 Timothy 3:16).

This very tendency in his own day led B. H. Carroll into a strong affirmation of the use of "creeds" and their purpose of reflecting the total of Scripture. In his comments on Ephesians 4:1-16, Carroll pointed out that a "Christian's creed should enlarge, and not diminish, up to the last utterance of revelation in order that each article might be transmitted into experience." Each church should aim at the same goal, for "The more doctrines a church can agree on, the greater its power.... The fewer its articles of faith, the fewer its bonds of union and compactness." In fact, according to Carroll, "The longest creed of history is more valuable and less hurtful than the shortest."[\[8\]](#)

Carroll also spoke to the apparent tension between creed and liberty in uncompromising terms. "The modern cry, 'Less creed and more liberty,' is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish," Carroll insisted, "and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy." After warning his reader against any who decried doctrines, Carroll continued, "We are entitled to no liberty in these matters. It is a positive and very hurtful sin to magnify liberty at the expense of doctrine."[\[9\]](#)

Carroll entertained no doubts or mental reservations about the veracity of any part of Scripture or its coherent relationship with all other parts. Thus his call for the enlarged and continually refined "creed."

**3. Commitment to unity.** Confessions represent a commitment to guarantee a faithful and conscientious unity. The Baptist Faith and Message affirms that "Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience." This resonates clearly the position of Richard Furman, two hundred years ago, when he wrote, "Churches have not power to make rules of faith and practice; and the articles contained in their systems have not a claim to our faith and obedience, because they are agreed upon by the churches; but because they are truths, and supported by the word of God."[\[10\]](#) This is certainly as it should be. Baptists have, however, insisted that all who sign a confession do so conscientiously and make every effort to maintain the unity implicit in a confession of faith.

Richard Furman, in addition to voicing a necessary caution about confessions, considered it the church's obligation, as the "pillar and ground of the truth," to exhibit to her sister churches and the world at large "a just view of the great doctrines and ordinances of the gospel in candor and godly simplicity." Such an exhibition will edify those who know and love the truth, give necessary information to those who are ignorant of religion, and will protect against errors which are "fathered upon the scriptures." In addition, "an agreement in sentiment respecting the meaning of those sacred oracles, forms an important part of the union subsisting among the true disciples of Christ." As long as one recognizes the strengths of these uses of a confession, "objections against the use of confessions of faith in churches, must appear ill-founded, and the consequences of such objections be pernicious."[\[11\]](#)

When General Baptists in England were rescued from destruction by a doctrinal reformation under the leadership of Dan Taylor in 1770, a confession of faith was adopted which required strict adherence from all ministers of their new connection. The preface to the confession stated:

We agree, that no minister be permitted to join this assembly, who does not subscribe the articles we have now agreed upon; and that those who do subscribe, and afterwards depart from them, shall be considered as no longer belonging to this assembly.

The Philadelphia Association, the first Baptist association in the United States, considered a conscientious acceptance of its confession a matter of grave importance. Answering a query concerning some doctrines of the confession, that is, the foreknowledge of God and its implications, the Association then set the matter of conscience and confessions in a startling light. The question was posed:

Whether such a member of the church holding such an opinion endeavors to propagate it, and obstinately persists in it, is not worthy of the highest censure, notwithstanding he pleads matters of conscience?

Answer. We judge such worthy of the highest censure; because a church is to proceed against a person who is erroneous in judgment, as well as one vicious in practice, notwithstanding they may plead conscience in the matter. Tit. iii 10; 2 Thess. iii 14.[\[12\]](#)

Is this a violation of the heritage of Roger Williams? Not at all. It is the proper application of a confession of faith which expresses the position of a voluntary body. J. P. Boyce presented this same viewpoint in his argument for the signing of an abstract of doctrine by seminary professors. Boyce argued, "No difference, however slight, no particular sentiment, however speculative, is here allowable." Furthermore, continued Boyce, "His agreement with the standard should be exact. His declaration of it should be based upon no mental reservation, upon no private understanding with those who immediately invest him into office."[\[13\]](#)

Boyce considered this no violation of conscience, for it inflicts no bodily punishment or civil disability in the church-state relation but is a protection of the spirituality of the church and simplicity that is in Christ. His encouragement of the trustees at Furman to require the adherence to an abstract of doctrine clearly foreshadowed his own intention for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

You will infringe the rights of no man, and you will secure the rights of those who have established here an instrumentality for the production of a sound ministry. It is no hardship to those who teach here, to be called upon to sign the declaration of their principles, for there are fields of usefulness open elsewhere to every man, and none need accept your call who cannot conscientiously sign your formulary.[\[14\]](#)

The same conviction was expressed by J. B. Gambrell when he was editor of the *Baptist Standard* in Texas. With equal intensity he declared both his willingness to fight for the protection of freedom of thought and speech as well as the rights of Baptists to insist on doctrinal purity in the pulpit and classroom. If a man departs from Baptist doctrine, Gambrell insisted that none should seek to "abridge his thinking, nor his defense of his thinking." But that man "passes the bounds of liberty" and indulges in "arrogant license" when he uses an institution and its resources to dilute or overthrow "the faith which the institution was founded to build up." Such a man should "resign his place and exercise his liberty without infringing on the rights of others."[\[15\]](#)

Baptists have insisted on liberty of conscience within civil society in order that conscientious union with voluntary societies, such as the church, be possible. Confessions of faith have defined the framework of conscientious commitment for Baptists.

## **Changeableness of Confessions**

The progression, digression, and regression of men's belief result in changed confessions. History is filled with men whose convictions and loyalties change either for the better or the worse. A look at the lives of John Smyth, Thomas Collier, Benjamin Keach, Abraham Booth, and a myriad of others demonstrates this.

Confessions change for other reasons, too. Historical challenges to the "faith once delivered to the saints" have brought to

birth sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, sometimes more precise, and sometimes more ambiguous confessions. Each change came about from a perceived theological need.

The Creed of Nicea (325) did no harm to the universally accepted rule of faith (now known as the Apostles' Creed) but strengthened its affirmation of the deity of Christ with at least four ingenious verbal additions to refute soundly the heresy of Arius. In like manner, the Tome of Leo, in 451 at Chalcedon, became the source for a four-fold clarification on the relation between the divine and human natures of Christ. In both cases, the additions were made necessary by theological tension and incipient or confirmed heresy. Neither statements was out of harmony with the historic belief of the church or the currently received creeds. Both, however, captured the theological necessities of their age perfectly.

Baptists have been willing to clarify confessions when such revisions grow "out of present needs." They have affirmed strongly that "Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time."[\[16\]](#)

Because confessions normally are worded carefully and arise from intense deliberation and represent the considered, settled, and mature convictions of a large body of people who have saturated themselves with Scripture, as well as the questions and answers of past and current theological deliberations, alterations in a major confession should be pursued only under the pain of intense need. Sometimes confessions have noses of wax, purposefully to be bent this way or that if both bends are considered within biblically evangelical parameters. And, sometimes an ambiguity is discerned in the heat of later controversy which has the potential of being theologically destructive if left uncorrected. Such was the case with the confession of Eusebius at the Council of Nicea. Everything it affirmed was right, but it left enough unsaid that Arius himself could sign it. Enter, therefore, Athanasius. Stability and alterability must characterize a confession and a people's attitude toward it.

Three attitudes toward confessions indicate an unhealthy view of them. The first, already discussed, consists of a refusal to give legitimate conscientious affirmation to it in its proper sphere of influence. The second consists of imputing immutability to its phrases and words; the result of this is that it can become static and not dynamically related to vital theological concerns.[\[17\]](#) The third consists of conceding the presence of extraordinary divine activity and guidance in the production of a confession in a way that would attribute to it the characteristics of inspiration. Claims of providence in the production of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message so as to render alteration impious, unfaithful, divisive, and pharisaical have appeared in our day. These objections are aimed primarily at suggestions that article one should be rewritten to eliminate any ambiguity concerning the inerrancy of scripture. These represent lamentable lapses into an ironical creedalism and give to the confession a place that should be reserved for Scripture.

## **Confessions and Scripture**

Changes should be considered in a confession only when an issue is deemed of sufficient importance to merit the attention. And then the change might be accompanied by an addendum instead of a textual alteration.

Since the entire purpose of a confession is to give as accurate a reflection as possible of full scriptural teaching on a subject, the doctrine of Scripture looms as an extremely important area for clear affirmation. It is self-contradictory for a confession's position on Scripture to allow a belief that the Bible corrects (and thus contradicts) itself, that current human gifts and scholarship are so advanced that we unerringly discern discrepancies in Scripture, or that humility of mind consists of conceding variant accounts in Scripture to be irreconcilable. For a confession to lead to those positions, either in purpose or result, is intolerable. Instead, a confession's statement on Scripture should be so strong and clear that no hint of freedom to modify, omit, or reject the clear teaching of any biblical text exists.

The phrase "without mixture of error" in the Baptist Faith and Message appears to fulfill the above expectations. The last phrase of the article on Scripture reads, "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ." Historically, this would mean that Christ is the fulfillment of all Old Testament types and ceremonies. He is the complete revelation.

Practically, some take this to mean that Christ in his word and work at times contradicts and corrects other portions of Holy Scripture. Is it possible for our perception of Christ's attitude to serve as an independent canon of criticism for the rest of Scripture? This author would say no, for we never find any words or actions of Jesus to justify it. Jesus set his interpretation and authority above that of the Pharisees and their traditions, but never in contradiction to his Scripture, our Old Testament.

If the wording of the Baptist Faith and Message permits agreement with the confession and a concurrent disagreement with the Scripture, then, just like the Athanasian correction of the Eusebian Creed, unequivocal clarification is needed. To do less exalts the confession above the Scripture and gives it independent and idolatrous authority.

Unswerving belief of Scripture does not remove God from the center of the church's worship; it exalts him by encouraging unreserved trust in his work as faithful, impeccable revealer as well as sure redeemer. The doctrine of inerrancy does not encourage an arrogant self-assuredness; it requires a humble submission of reason, affection, will, and conscience to the self-disclosure of God. Full acceptance of *pasa graphe* (each and every Scripture) does not open an escape from the rough road of careful interpretation; it obligates the interpreter to deal, not only with the easy, comforting parts of the Bible, but with the tough and heart-wrenching also. The Christian should never view acceptance of the full truthfulness of the biblical text as an unbearable yoke; it is, instead, the light that shines in a dark place until the Lord himself shows us his personal glory (2 Pet. 1:19).



If you believe what you like in the gospel, and reject what you like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.

*Augustine*

The doctrines of the Bible are not isolated but interlaced; and the view of one doctrine must necessarily affect the view taken of another.

*A. A. Hodge*

To say, 'Never mind doctrine, let's get on with evangelism' is as ridiculous as a football team saying, 'Never mind about a ball, let's get on with the game.'

*Peter Lewis*



<sup>2</sup>Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1972), 45.

<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Baker, ed., *A Baptist Source Book* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 78.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James P. Boyce* (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1893), 140.

<sup>6</sup>J. P. Boyce, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions* (Greenville, S.C.: C. J. Elford's Book and Job Press, 1856), 41.

<sup>7</sup>Barclay, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1948), 140, 147.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 140, 146, 147.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Furman, *Unity and Peace*. (Charleston: printed by Markland McIver & Co., 1794), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>*Minutes of the Philadelphia Association 1707-1807*, ed. A. D. Gillette (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 58.

<sup>13</sup>Boyce, *Three Changes*, 35.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>15</sup>J. B. Gambrell, *Ten Years in Texas* (Dallas: The Baptist Standard, 1910), 128, 129.

<sup>16</sup>*Annual of the SBC*, 1925, 71.

<sup>17</sup>The time may soon come when the theological issues raised by Liberation Theology and Process Theology will call for special treatment in the Baptist Faith and Message.



- <sup>1</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols, 6th edition [1931, by David Schaff] (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.) 1:7.
- <sup>2</sup>Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1972), 45.
- <sup>3</sup>Robert A. Baker, ea., *A Baptist Source Book* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 78.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup>John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James P. Boyce* (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1893), 140.
- <sup>6</sup>J. P. Boyce, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions* (Greenville, S.C.: C. J. Elford's Book and Job Press, 1856), 41.
- <sup>7</sup>Barclay, p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup>B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1948), 140, 147.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 140,146, 147.
- <sup>10</sup>Richard Furman, *Unity and Peace*. (Charleston: printed by Markland McIver & Co., 1794), p. 13.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup>*Minutes of the Philadelphia Association 1707-1807*, ed. A. D. Gillette (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 58.
- <sup>13</sup>Boyce, *Three Changes*, 35.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>15</sup>J. B. Gambrell, *Ten Years in Texas* (Dallas: The Baptist Standard, 1910), 128, 129.
- <sup>16</sup>*Annual of the SBC*, 1925, 71.
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# Church Discipline: Lost, but Recoverable

*James Leo Garrett, Jr.*

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One of the most neglected and unpopular themes of our era is church discipline. To consider it one needs no crusading complex, but to do anything about it calls for a yearning to be a "prophet" rather than a "priest," the latter term being translated, "an ecclesiastic," or, being interpreted, a drifter with the strongest current of the "status flow."

## I.

The contemporary age is characterized by a lack of discipline. This begins with the individual and the paucity of true self-discipline. Most people like to be entertained, to be helped, to be passively taught, to be served. Only a few are willing to discipline themselves in work, in study, in unselfish service to others. Many are caught up in the grandiose delusion of "something for nothing."

The same absence of discipline is manifested in today's homes in America. Parents are often not willing to provide either the positive nurture for children which grows out of spiritually and emotionally mature family life or the negative correction which curbs disobedience and those attitudes which issue in juvenile delinquency. Young people, reared in and conditioned by domestic life without discipline, expect the school, society, and the state to provide a similar *laissez faire* environment. Thus, the school must necessarily inherit the problems of discipline unsolved by the home and is supposed to attempt the discipline which inheres in education itself.

The civil order is burdened with the problem of discipline, not only in its prosecution and punishment of those who commit crimes but also in the failure of so many of its citizenry to submit to the discipline of public service.

The lack of discipline in international relations is clearly indicated by the hot wars of aggression and the "cold war" of "peaceful coexistence."

Unfortunately, the churches for the most part are no exception to this contemporary trend toward the breakdown of all discipline. Church discipline, which was of so great concern to our forebears in the gathered church tradition of Protestant Christianity, and this includes Baptists, no longer affects the lives or even is registered on the lips of their spiritual descendants. To paraphrase MacArthur, church discipline has never officially died; it has just faded away!

## II.

Is church discipline Biblical? Without raising the question of internal discipline in the community of Israel, one may turn to the New Testament where an affirmative answer awaits the inquirer. Some discipline within the Christian congregations was wrought by direct divine agency as in the instance of the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who "lied to the Holy Spirit" by retaining part of the proceeds from the sale of a certain piece of property while pretending to give all to the Christian community (Acts 5:1-11). Some discipline was also accomplished by the voluntary withdrawal or departure of those who were not truly Christians. This seems to be the import of the statement in 1 John 2:19: "They (i.e., many anti-Christ) went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had

been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us." However, the discipline of the Christian churches of the New Testament era was, according to the Apostle Paul, also to be exercised by the specific action of the churches. Perhaps no passage makes this clearer than 1 Corinthians 5. Christians and churches of the twentieth century may neglect, abandon, or deny the validity of church discipline in its negative aspects, but they cannot claim the authority of the New Testament for doing so.

### III.

The early Baptists--indeed most all Baptists through the nineteenth century--were greatly concerned about and definitely engaged in the practice of church discipline. They found in the New Testament not only Acts 2:47 RSV, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved," but also Matt. 18:17 RSV, "If he (your brother) refuses to listen to them (witnesses), tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

One of the clearest statements about church discipline in Baptist history is the "Summary of Church-Discipline" adopted in 1773 and published in 1774 by the Charleston (S. C.) Baptist Association. As a well-orbed presentation of church discipline the "Summary" deals with both positive and negative aspects. Present-day Christians should realize that all Christian nurture, whether through the educational organizations of the church or in the direct spiritual and moral confrontation of a member with members in the fellowship of the church, is Christian and church discipline. Such church discipline, according to the "Summary," has as its negative side the censures of the church, namely, rebuke or admonition, suspension, and finally excommunication. Basic principles and specific procedures for the application of these censures are described. Furthermore, it is the duty of every church member to submit repentantly to the church's discipline "so far as it is consistent with the Word of God." It is the duty of the church to administer the discipline with prayer and solemnity. It is the duty of the minister, says the Charleston "Summary," to see that the discipline determined by the congregation is duly executed, and he himself as a member of the congregation is subject to its discipline.

Present-day Baptist churches, whether they claim an historical succession to the apostles or affirm a qualitative likeness to New Testament churches, do not for the most part stand in the apostolic and/or Baptist tradition of church discipline. The factors making this so may be legion: The breakdown of the distinction between "church" and "world," the stressing of numerical gains in church membership, abuses in the former practices of church discipline, a gradual substitution of professional efficiency for genuine ministerial piety, the popularization of church membership, the admission of the unregenerate to the churches, the blurring of essential lines or moral and ethical distinction! The question may aptly be raised, "Are we today the *neo*-Baptists?"

What is to be done about the present abandonment of church discipline, especially in its negative aspects? Can the trend be reversed? Can discipline be rightly restored without the abuses that often accompanied its abandonment? Can its restorative, reclamatory purposes be kept in view while it is being administered? These are major questions that call for clear and dedicated answers.

Church discipline is a corollary of the doctrine of the Christian life, wherein Christians must, as Paul said, keep on "putting off the old man" and "putting on the new man." "Discipline" and "discipleship" come from the same Latin word, meaning "to learn."

Church discipline is implicit likewise in our Baptist ecclesiology, which has in its best expressions always held forth the necessity of a disciplined as well as a regenerated and baptized membership.

Church discipline is needed as a deterrent to the moral decline of our time. It used to be said of Baptists because of their congregational polity and tendency to air disputes publicly, "The Baptists wash their dirty linen in public." One wonders whether the time may fast be approaching when Baptists just "hang their soiled linen out to dry." Church discipline, because of its New Testament basis, should have its rightful place in Baptist life and practice. The New Testament has more clear statements on church discipline than on the millennial reign, but there seem to be no pro-, anti-, or a-parties shaping up. Dr. J. B. Gambrell said that "we Baptists are many but not much," but church discipline of both positive and negative variety can help Baptists to be both "many" and "much."

Church discipline will depend to a large extent on those who have the responsibility not only to proclaim the gospel of Christ but to instruct, exhort, and admonish Christians as to the well ordering of their lives in the fellowship of the body of Christ. Yet it should be the concern of all church members. The tide cannot be turned overnight, as readily as one would obtain money to get a ping-pong table or volleyball court for the church's young people or get the Brotherhood to have a supper. Christians can bear witness to and practice the truth of Christian discipline both in their individual lives and in the fellowship of the people of God. What do you say? Are you willing? May God help us so to do!

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When this article was first published in 1959, the issue of church discipline was being discussed among Southern Baptists almost solely in reference to the problem of nonresident church members. In 1962 Broadman Press published within its "Broadman Historical Monograph" series the present author's *Baptist Church Discipline: A Historical Introduction to the Practices of Baptist Churches, with Particular Attention to the Summary of Church Discipline Adopted in 1773 by the Charleston Association*, which contained the text of the *Charleston Summary*. The modest interest in church discipline aroused in the 1950's and in the early 1960's soon was displaced by issues of racial justice, war, poverty, and sexual revolution. *Baptist Church Discipline* went out of print after the first edition and has not been reprinted. In 1988 a British Baptist pastor, Michael John Collis, submitted a Th.M. thesis to the University of London on "The Theology and Practice of Church Discipline amongst Baptists with Particular Reference to Baptists in the United Kingdom," and it remains to be seen whether such a study is indicative of a new interest in and concern about church discipline among British Baptists.

JLG, Jr.



# Speaking the Truth in Love

*Timothy George*

In recent years much has been said about who is "right" and who is "wrong" in the SBC controversy, but little attention has been given to *how* Christians should deal with conflict and dissent in the church. How should believers relate to one another in the face of tension, stress, and even schism within the Body of Christ?

Because Baptists are committed to the process of democracy within the church, we will never be completely free of controversy this side of heaven! However, we can learn how to "speak the truth in love." Indeed, we have a spiritual mandate to do so.

The following guidelines may serve as a helpful check on our own attitudes and responses. They are relevant, I believe, to every level of Baptist polity where conflicts arise--from the local congregation to the national Convention.

1. *It is sometimes necessary to be polemical for the sake of the gospel, but it is seldom wise to be partisan in the fight for faith.* There is nothing worse for the health of the church than theological indifferentism and doctrinal apathy. The New Testament admonishes us to "contend for the faith," and Paul places a curse on even angels who pervert the gospel (Gal. 1:8; Jude 3). When we take such a stand, however, let us be sure that what is at stake is really the gospel and not our own petty idiosyncrasies or party loyalties. When the disciples rejected the ministry of another follower of Jesus because he was "not one of us," the Master rebuked their cliquish attitude (Luke 9:49-50).

2. *It is appropriate to challenge spurious ideas in the light of Scripture, but it is presumptuous to question the motives of our adversaries.* There is such a thing as error held in sincerity as well as a blindness which is willful. Only God can read the mind and judge the heart. Our job is to examine ourselves so as to keep a clear conscience before God, even as we set before others the reason for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

3. *We can stand unflinchingly for the fundamentals of the faith without succumbing to personal arrogance and pride.* For example, we can affirm the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture without assuming that we ourselves are infallible or inerrant! Indeed, we must never confuse the perfection of God's revelation with our own feeble efforts to understand and explain it. The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* means that we must ever subject ourselves, reverently, humbly, and obediently, to the unchanging truth of God's inspired Word.

4. *In the family of faith, how we say something is sometimes as important as what we say.* Words are weighty. They can hurt and harm as well as edify and uplift. Who among us has not been misquoted or misunderstood because someone else misheard what we intended to say? Every Christian should begin each day, and every church should start every business meeting, by praying the words of Psalm 141:3: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."

5. *It is our responsibility to love and pray for those with whom we disagree.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: "I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner." Only as we take this word to heart can we uncover the true spiritual roots of conflict, and so open ourselves to the power of God's transforming work.

6. *We can be thankful for the triumph of the gospel without delighting in the defeat of our opponents.* Proverbs 24:17 admonishes us not even to rejoice when our enemy falls. Certainly, then, the "fall of a brother" is no occasion for gloating.

7. *When others, because they have ignored these guidelines, hurt us, it is our duty not to respond in kind.* We are called to defend the gospel, not ourselves. Peter urges us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus "who, although reviled, did not revile in return and although made to suffer, did not respond with threats" (1 Pet. 2:21-23).



If we do not make clear by word and by practice our position *for* truth and *against* false doctrine we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel.

*Francis Schaeffer*



# We Need Men of God Again

*A. W. Tozer*

The Church at this moment needs men, the right kind of men, bold men. The talk is that we need revival, that we need a new [movement] of the Spirit--and God knows we must have both; but God will not revive mice. He will not fill rabbits with the Holy Ghost.

We languish for men who feel themselves expendable in the warfare of the soul, who cannot be frightened by threats of death because they have already died to the allurements of this world. Such men will be free from the compulsions that control weaker men. They will not be forced to do things by the squeeze of circumstances; their only compulsion will come from within--or from above.

This kind of freedom is necessary if we are to have [powerful preachers] in our pulpits again instead of mascots. These free men will serve God and mankind from motives too high to be understood by the rank and file of religious retainers who today shuttle in and out of the sanctuary. They will make no decisions out of fear, take no course out of a desire to please, accept no service for financial considerations, perform no religious act out of mere custom; nor will they allow themselves to be influenced by the love of publicity or the desire for reputation.

Much that the church--even the evangelical church--is doing these days she is doing because she is afraid not to. Ministerial associations take up projects for no higher reason than that they are being scared into it. Whatever their ear-to-the-ground, fear-inspired reconnoitering leads them to believe the world expects them to do they will be doing come next Monday morning with all kinds of trumped-up zeal and show of godliness. The pressure of public opinion calls these prophets, not the voice of Jehovah.

The true church has never sounded out public expectations before launching her crusades. Her leaders heard from God and went ahead wholly independent of popular support or the lack of it. They knew their Lord's will and did it, and their people followed them--sometimes to triumph, oftener to insults and public persecution--and their sufficient reward was the satisfaction of being right in a wrong world.

Another characteristic of the true [man of God] has been love. The free man who has learned to hear God's voice and dared to obey it has felt the moral burden that broke the hearts of the Old Testament prophets, crushed the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ and wrung streams of tears from the eyes of the apostles.

The free man has never been a religious tyrant, nor has he sought to lord it over God's heritage. It is fear and lack of self-assurance that has led men to try to crush others under their feet. These have had some interest to protect, some position to secure, so they have demanded subjection from their followers as a guarantee of their own safety. But the free man--never; he has nothing to protect, no ambition to pursue and no enemy to fear. For that reason he is completely careless of his standing among men. If they follow him, well and good; if not, he loses nothing that he holds dear; but whether he is accepted or rejected he will go on loving his people with sincere devotion. And only death can silence his tender intercession for them.

Yes, if evangelical Christianity is to stay alive she must have men again, the right kind of men. She must repudiate the weaklings who dare not speak out, and she must seek in prayer and much humility the coming again of men of the stuff prophets and martyrs are made of. God will hear the cries of His people as He heard the cries of Israel in Egypt. And He will send deliverance by sending deliverers. It is His way among men.

And when the deliverers come . . . they will be men of God and men of courage. They will have God on their side because they will be careful to stay on God's side. They will be co-workers with Christ and instruments in the hand of the Holy Ghost. . . .



### **Puritans on Preaching**

I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel. . . . Indeed I have been as one sent unto them from the dead. I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains; and carried that fire in my own conscience that I persuaded them to beware of.

*John Bunyan*

I preached, as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men.

*Richard Baxter*

Preaching, therefore, ought not to be dead, but alive and effective so that an unbeliever coming into the congregation of believers should be affected and, as it were, transfixed by the very hearing of the word so that he might give glory to God.

*William Ames*



# News

## Founders Conference to Convene in Birmingham

The 1991 Founders Conference is scheduled to move from Memphis to Birmingham. It plans to convene July 23-26 on the campus of Samford University. Mr. Geoff Thomas from Wales is the main speaker and will address the theme, "A Savior Who Is Christ the Lord." For more information write The Southern Baptist Founders Conference, P. O. Box 150931, Cape Coral, FL 33915.

## Martins Relocate in Jakarta

Dr. and Mrs. George (Donna) Martin, along with their two children, have recently left Bandung and settled in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he is scheduled to assume new teaching assignments as a seminary professor. Their new address is:

Tromolpos 1077  
Jakarta 10010  
Indonesia

## Steve & Marilyn Haines Looking Forward to Kiev

Dr. and Mrs. Steve Haines are presently awaiting final clearance to leave for the Soviet Union as missionaries. Dr. Haines, who has spent the last several years teaching at our seminary in Colombia, has been asked to establish a theological institute for Ukrainian Baptists. A further report on this new venture will appear in a future issue.

## Louisiana Baptists for Life

The 1990 summer session of the Louisiana Legislature was a "near miss" for pro-life forces. A bill outlawing abortion passed both the House and the Senate, only to be vetoed by the Governor. An attempted override of the veto fell short by only a few votes. Had the bill become law it would have seriously challenged Roe v. Wade, America's official instrument for the torture and execution of children in their mother's womb. Pro-life forces came away from the session disappointed but not utterly dejected. Evangelicals felt betrayed by a governor who had run for office under the guise of being solidly pro-life. There was a new depth of righteous indignation emerging from the Christian community in Louisiana.

For years the pro-life movement in Louisiana has been led and supported by Charismatics and Roman Catholics. While Southern Baptists were concerned, we were by and large sinfully silent. That all began to change, however, at the annual meeting of the Louisiana Baptist convention in November. In the marvelous providence of God a series of events were set in motion which resulted in the adoption of a strong resolution opposing abortion. The resolution states in part, "abortion for reasons other than to save the life of the mother is a destruction of human life contrary to the law of God and leads to a contempt for all human life. . . ." In addition to this, the convention's Committee on Moral and Social Concerns was instructed to make the opposition of abortion the top priority on its agenda, and the top state government officials were notified concerning our action. In the final analysis, the convention had spoken decisively against abortion at every session.

In January a group of Louisiana Baptist pastors met to discover how we might mobilize the members of the 1518 Southern Baptist churches in our state. The result of the meeting was the formation of Louisiana Baptists For Life. Two State-Wide Coordinators were selected to give leadership to this effort. They are Mr. Cary Kimbrell, Pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, and Mr. Bill Ascol, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Clinton. Joining forces with the existing pro-life coalition in the state, Louisiana Baptists For Life hopes to establish a loosely-knit state-wide network comprising pro-life coordinators in each of the 48 local associations. The associational coordinators will encourage local pastors and their congregations to get involved in the legislative process and bring responsible pressure to bear upon their legislators. Our goal is to come to the legislative session (which convenes on April 15th) with the necessary commitments from legislators not only to pass a "no exceptions" abortion bill, but also to override a veto from the Governor. We solicit the prayers of everyone who longs to see a halt come to the slaughter of children in the womb. By God's grace we will be able to report at a later date that the dismantling of Roe v. Wade is underway.

-Cary Kimbrell and Bill Ascol

## Reformation in Brazil

Editora Fiel is a Brazilian Mission effort which translates and publishes quality Christian literature in Portuguese. Under the leadership of Mr. Richard Denham, books by Lloyd-Jones, Jay Adams, Spurgeon and Ryle are among those which have been translated. Southern Baptists have a strong missionary presence in the country. The convention work there began over 100 years ago. In recognition of this fact, Editora Fiel has translated two important Southern Baptist books over the last two years. The first to come off the press is John Dagg's *Manual of Theology*. The other book is Bob Selph's *Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election*. Both books have been making a positive impact on Brazilian Baptists--especially on those who are connected with the SBC mission work.

This fact was confirmed last September at the 6th annual national Brazilian Pastors' conference sponsored by Editora Fiel. Pastor Selph, along with Pastor Tom Ascol preached a total of 16 messages to the more than 200 participants during the week-long gathering. Through the challenge of good books and the study of the Scriptures, many have begun to embrace the doctrines of grace and are seeking to apply them in personal and church life.

One theological professor attended the conference with four of his colleagues and the president of his convention-sponsored seminary. He repeated the question which has been asked hundreds (maybe thousands) of times over the last 15 years by Southern Baptists in the United States: "If these doctrines are true, and if they are part of my heritage, why has no one told me before now?"



# Book Reviews

*Letters of Samuel Rutherford* edited by Andrew Bonar; 1984, 768 pp, Banner of Truth \$24.95.

Reviewed by [Mack Tomlinson](#)

This collection of letters, first printed in 1664, is as deep a well of devotional literature as one could hope to find. It consists of 365 letters written from 1627 to 1661, as well as a brief sketch of Rutherford's life. The letters were written to various friends, colleagues, and saints under Rutherford's pastoral ministry. The letters are permeated with a depth of intimacy and communion with Christ which has rarely been paralleled. Rutherford exhibits a longing for Christ, heaven, and the eternal glory which, upon reading, makes the things of earth begin to grow dim.

These letters are almost an experiential theology in themselves. Anyone longing for devotional reading drawn deep from the wells of 17th-century Calvinism will not be disappointed in the collection. Reading one or two letters daily would prove profitable.

A good friend once said to me concerning the writings of the puritan John Flavel: "Sell your shoes if you must in order to buy Flavel". This is my sentiment exactly about Rutherford's *Letters*. Said Richard Baxter of this volume, "[with the exception of the Bible], such a book the world never saw." To this commendation C. H. Spurgeon added, "When we are dead and gone let the world know that Spurgeon held Rutherford's *Letters* to be the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men."

*Pray with Your Eyes Open: Looking at God, Ourselves, and Our Prayers* by Richard L. Pratt, Jr. 1987, 193 pp, Presbyterian and Reformed, \$6.95.

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

Richard Pratt is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. In this book he outlines some very simple principles which ought to be incorporated into every believer's prayer life. As the subtitle suggests, the book is organized into three sections.

The most helpful section is that which deals with God as the object of prayer. Without employing theological jargon, Pratt convincingly shows the need for a God-centered perspective in prayer.

He considers the various occasions which call believers to pray in the second section. Prayer is a vital part of our living between the "already" and the "not yet" of Christian experience. Three specific occasions of prayer which the book treats are times of trouble, joy, and need. Pratt does not neglect the issue of God's sovereign will in prayer. He argues that "God has a comprehensive and unchangeable plan for His creation" (p. 108), and that "trying to alter the eternal decrees of God through prayer is like trying to reach the moon on a trampoline; it is impossible" (p. 109). Nevertheless, he argues just as strongly that prayer is an essential means whereby God executes His decree. Thereby the importance and necessity of prayer is not lessened in the slightest degree but is set forth in its proper, biblical framework.

The final section of the book is not as satisfying as the first two. While considering the weighty issues of form and content in prayer more questions are raised than are answered. This is certainly understandable and does not significantly detract from the overall value of the book. To address adequately the many issues which this section raised would have necessitated a far more detailed and expanded treatment which would have been out of balance with the other sections.

Included are two valuable appendices on God's names and His attributes. A 13-week Leader's Guide is available to be used in conjunction with the questions and exercises at the end of each chapter.

Pratt has produced a very useful tool for teaching God's people how to pray. This book can be heartily recommended to believers at various stages in the Christian pilgrimage.



**Announcing:**  
*The Fifth Annual*  
**Southern Baptist**  
**Founders Youth Conference**

*Miracle Mile Resort*  
*(on the Beach)*  
*Panama City Beach, Florida*  
*June 24-28, 1991*

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*Mr. Bill Ascol, Conference Pastor*

*Mr. Paul Stith, Conference Associate Pastor*

*Mr. Tom Hayman, Conference Assistant*

*Mr. Jamie Howell, Conference Recreation Director*

*Miss Cindy Kemp, Conference Secretary*

*Camp Preachers:*

*Dr. Fred Malone, Pastor of Heritage Baptist Church,  
Crowley, TX*

*Dr. Tom Ascol, Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Cape  
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*Dr. Joe Nesom*

*Pastor David Vaughan*

*Pastor Paul Stith*

*Pastor Thomas Winn*

Cost per person: \$150.00 (includes room, 14 meals, and all materials)

For information contact:

Miss Cindy Kemp, Secretary  
Southern Baptist Founders Youth Conference  
P. O. Box 552  
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