



The Need for Definition

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The Founders Journal



Contributors:

Dr. Thomas K. Ascol is Pastor of the Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

Dr. Tom Nettles is Professor of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

Mr. Ernest Reisinger is an author and retired pastor living in Cape Coral, Florida.

Dr. Terry Chrisope is Associate Professor of History and Bible at Missouri College.

Book Reviewer:

Ken Puls is a PhD student in music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Editor:

Thomas K. Ascol, PhD

Associate Editor:

Ernest C. Reisinger

Contributing Editors:

Bill Ascol, MDiv

Fred A. Malone, PhD

Joe Nesom, PhD

Tom Nettles, PhD

Graphic Design Editor:

William D. Lollar

Webmaster:

Stan Reeves, PhD

The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [*The Abstract of Principles*](#).



The Need for Definition

Tom Ascol

Baptist Press recently reported the gathering of SBC "moderate-conservative leaders" in Nashville in which was issued "A Call to State Conventions for the Preservation of Historic Southern Baptist Work and Witness." This call, which was adopted by the 85 participants, is obviously intended to warn state conventions not to follow the same path which the Southern Baptist Convention has traveled the last few years during the inerrancy controversy.

Interestingly, the statement adopted in Nashville has five points. There is not much in the published report with which most Bible-believing Southern Baptists would quarrel. In fact, these "five points of moderatism" contain some things that the *Founders Journal* has long been saying. For instance, the preamble states, "Now is the time for renewal and revival." Amen! What half-awake Southern Baptist (or evangelical) could deny this?

Further, the first point of moderatism says, "Let each state convention renew its commitment to historic Baptist principles, the authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers," While there are obviously many different types of Baptists, it is reasonable to assume that the Southern Baptists who issued this call would have a particular concern for historic *Southern* Baptist principles. To this we again express a hearty "Amen!"

It is wonderful to hear others joining their voices to ours in calling the SBC to remember her heritage. Only the most naive, however, would assume that all those who are openly advocating a return to historic principles are in agreement as to the content of those principles. Denominational amnesia leads many to mistakenly assume that "historic" means "over the last 50-60 years." Consequently, the notion of "historic [Southern] Baptist principles" is erroneously conceived of as those ideas that have been popularized during that time frame.

Such historical reductionism has robbed the present generation of the help and guidance which our noble heritage has to offer. The biblical, theological, and spiritual convictions upon which this denomination was built have, at many points, been completely forgotten and forsaken.

We must not be satisfied simply to say to our fellow Southern Baptists, "Return to your historic principles." Rather, we must be willing to define, demonstrate, and articulate the content of those principles. Any description of our denominational heritage which fails to acknowledge the presence of Reformed views of salvation is at best woefully lacking and at worst dishonest. In the early years of our denomination widespread adherence to what James P. Boyce called "the fundamental doctrines of grace" is undeniable. As late as 1918, in a manual for Sunday School workers published by the Sunday School Board, we read that "nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the `doctrines of grace.'" One of the foremost historic Southern Baptist principles is the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation.

What did early SBC leaders believe? What did they understand the Bible to teach about the great issues of salvation, evangelism, missions, and church life? What principles motivated them and gave them vision for ministry?

These and related questions can and ought to be answered by examining original sources. Today there are many resources available to any pastor or layman who desires to make such an investigation. Books, (both old and new), tapes, journals and conferences can help anyone personally discover the rich spiritual heritage of the SBC. The upcoming Mission 150 will go a long way in helping to make this heritage known.

Thank the Lord that more and more people are becoming interested in the historic principles of the Southern Baptist Convention. We must not allow those principles to be ignored. Neither can we allow them to be misconstrued. For if what the founders believed and taught was true in their day, then it is still true in our day.



Spurgeon's Message of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

Part 1

Tom Nettles

I do believe that we slander Christ when we think that we are to draw the people by something else but the preaching of Christ crucified. We know that the greatest crowd in London has been held together these thirty years by nothing but the preaching of Christ crucified. Where is our music? Where is our oratory? Where is anything of attractive architecture, or beauty of ritual? "A bare service," they call it. Yes, but Christ makes up for all the deficiencies.[\[1\]](#)

The Lord Jesus Christ on His cross of redemption was the center, circumference, and summation of the preaching ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Its themes he repeated continuously and tirelessly but always with a freshness of power and passion that would startle his hearers and set them in the congregation at Galatia before whose eyes Christ was plainly portrayed as crucified. Spurgeon was a cataract, an avalanche, a flooding Mississippi in his unrelenting emphasis on the death by crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Redemption is the "heart of the gospel" and the "essence of redemption is the substitutionary atonement of Christ."[\[2\]](#) It is both the heart and "cornerstone of the gospel." When announcing it as his theme in some amazement he would often ask himself, "How many times will this make, I wonder? The doctrine of Christ crucified is always with me."[\[3\]](#)

Ironically, Spurgeon believed this truth to be so clearly delineated in Scripture that early in his ministry he doubted that it would ever be a point of controversy among Christians. "There are a few men who scoff at the statement and reject the thought of sacrifice," Spurgeon acknowledged in 1859, but these "never will be more than a few; they can never be many." The system which "denies the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Jesus . . . can never succeed [and] they will never convince the masses." Rather than arguing with such scoffers we should destroy their arguments "by our own personal determination to preach more earnestly and more consistently 'Jesus Christ, and Him crucified'."[\[4\]](#)

In 1886, however, Spurgeon was troubled by the novel interpretations and philosophies of those who "deny the doctrines they profess to teach" and said that some who know what they believe "should just put our foot down and maintain our standing."[\[5\]](#) By April of 1887 Spurgeon, in the first months of the Downgrade Controversy, upgraded the potency of his language; "Our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice."[\[6\]](#) By October, Spurgeon wrote, "If we do believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the Fall, and the great sacrifice of Christ for sin, it behooves us to see that we do not become accomplices with those who teach another gospel."[\[7\]](#) In December, after he had resigned from the Baptist Union, he showed he felt obliged to "argue" right earnestly, to "come out in earnest protest," against those who "treat the Bible as waste paper, and regard the death of Christ as no substitution."[\[8\]](#)

Spurgeon knew nothing of a Christianity without the blood of Christ because Holy Scripture itself establishes the doctrine of the death of Christ as "the very core of Christianity." He contended that "a mistake on this point will inevitably lead to a mistake through the entire system of our belief."[\[9\]](#) "Christ's death for men is the great doctrine of the church" and so necessary to be dwelt upon continually that Spurgeon would "not feel satisfied without breaking bread on every Lord's day"[\[10\]](#) and felt that it was impossible to think or preach on it too often.

A man is never blamed in heaven for preaching Christ too much. On earth the playing of that one string, a monotony to some, establishes such resonance and sympathetic vibrations among the people of God that they could hear no more astounding harmony in all other doctrines put together. "All good things lie within the compass of the cross," Spurgeon would say. It is in the cross that one can begin to grasp the whole of reality because, "it's outstretched arms overshadow the whole world of thought" and indeed the death of Christ is the "hinge of the world's history."[\[11\]](#) "Its foot is planted deep in

eternal mysteries and its top pierces all earth-born clouds, and rises to the throne of the most high."[\[12\]](#)

The Centrality of Redemption

For a number of reasons Spurgeon insists on this centrality of the cross. Indeed, that God himself intends it always to be fresh in our minds is seen in the establishment of two ordinances, both of which are pictures of the death of Christ and its effects.

Central to Scripture

One reason for its centrality is that the entire corpus of Scripture finds its coherence on the assumption of the cross. Spurgeon's sermons on the Old Testament priesthood, sacrificial system, prophecy, prophets, kings law, exodus, and many other themes all roll along on a majestic and clearly-lighted road to Calvary.

Spurgeon (for the most part) does not force the issue in such texts, but shows that he has clear warrant for such a procedure. Biblical theology, acknowledging that all of it is subdued to the glory of God, moves relentlessly from Fall to Redemption. The Bible cannot be understood apart from Christ and Him crucified. Nor can the ministry and preaching of Spurgeon.

When Christ said, "It is finished," all the "types, promises, and prophecies were now fully accomplished in him." In fact, "the whole book, from the first to the last, in both the law and the prophets, was finished in him." From Eden to Malachi from the red heifer to the turtle-dove, from a branch of hyssop to Solomon's temple, whether great or small all types were fulfilled in him. All prophecies, all apparent contradictions, all mysteries, the offices of prophet, priest and king as well as all of Israel's deliverers, to be worshipped and despised, to reign forever yet die and be buried--taken together they appear as indecipherable hieroglyphics till one comes forward and exclaims, "The cross of Christ and the Son of God incarnate."[\[13\]](#)

Speaking of the rending of the veil at Christ's death, Spurgeon inquires, "Does it not mean that *the death of Christ is the revelation and explanation of all secrets?*" Vanished are all the types and shadows of the ceremonial law. They are done away with, Spurgeon elaborates, because they are "fulfilled and explained in the death of Christ."

But even beyond its essential relevance to biblical understanding, Christ's death is the "key to all true philosophy." "God made flesh, dying man--if that does not explain a mystery, it cannot be explained." And more, "If with this thread in your hand you cannot follow the labyrinth of human affairs, and learn the great purpose of God, then you cannot follow it at all."[\[14\]](#)

Central to Full Understanding of God and Man

Another reason for its centrality is that the cross is the epitomized display of the character of God and the depravity of man. God's wisdom, power, justice, holiness, and love all are shown most clearly in the cross--more clearly even than in the law. Even the cross shows the utter moral horror into which mankind has fallen. "You need not talk about the virtues of the world," Spurgeon would remind London; "It slew the Christ and that is enough to condemn it." And to make the point more pungently, he adds, "We want no other proof of its guilt; you cannot bring evidence more complete and overwhelming than this, they slew the Lord of life and glory."[\[15\]](#)

And in another place, Spurgeon points his congregation toward the struggle of Christ with our sins: "See dear Friends, what an evil thing is sin, since the Sin-bearer suffers so bitterly to make atonement for it." Consider also the sobering implications of man's flippant treatment of the Lord: "Beloved, the treatment of our Lord Jesus Christ by men is the clearest proof of total depravity which can possibly be required or discovered. Those must be stony hearts indeed which

can laugh at a dying Saviour, and mock even at his faith in God!"[\[16\]](#)

And one dare not pass over without great melancholy and dread the way that men today ignore such an infinite wonder as the cross. The devils themselves are incapable of a greater sin than this: "The incarnate God bleeds to death to save men, and men hate God so much that they will not even have him as he dies to save them." Though he stoops from his loftiness to their woe, they refuse to be reconciled to their Creator. "This is depravity indeed, and desperate rebellion."[\[17\]](#)

In an equally infallible and consummate way the character of God is displayed in the cross so that in contemplating it Spurgeon would say, "I have seen the foot of it go down deep as our helpless miseries are; and what a vision I have had of thy magnificence, O thou crucified One!" Truth, justice, holiness, wisdom, immutability, wrath, compassion, love, and grace all coalesce in the cross of Christ and dwell together without the slightest diminution of any attribute. "Learn ye my friends," Spurgeon called, "to look upon God as being as severe in his justice as if he were not loving, and yet as loving as if he were not severe. His love does not diminish his justice nor does justice, in the least degree, make warfare upon his love. The two are sweetly linked together in the atonement of Christ."[\[18\]](#)

Central to Evangelistic Power

A third reason for the centrality of the cross is that by it sinners are drawn to salvation. Certainly sinners are drawn effectually by the Spirit of God who changes the affections and subdues the will. But the content of this drawing is the enlightenment of the mind in the knowledge of Christ and its action is the embracing of Christ freely offered to us in the gospel. After an incomparable verbal barrage depicting the geographical and historical sweep of Christ's drawing power, Spurgeon said, "Christ's people shall be made willing in the day of his power; and the great attraction by which they will be drawn to him will be his death on the cross." In a discussion of the kingship of Jesus and how it applies to missionary endeavors he described the magnetic power of Christ's being set forth as a king at the lowest part of his humiliation. "This it is that touches men's hearts," he said. "Christ crucified is the conqueror."

Not in his robes of glory does he subdue the heart, but in his vestments of shame. Not as sitting upon the throne does he at first gain the faith and the affections of sinners, but as bleeding, suffering, and dying in their stead And though every theme that is connected with the Savior ought to play its part in our ministry, yet this is the master theme. The atoning work of Jesus is the great gun of our battery. The cross is the mighty battering-ram wherewith to break in pieces the brazen gates of human prejudices and the iron bars of obstinacy. Christ coming to be our judge alarms, but Christ the man of sorrows subdues. The crown of thorns has a royal power in it to compel a willing allegiance, the sceptre of reed breaks hearts better than a rod of iron, and the robe of mockery commands more love than Caesar's imperial purple. There is nothing like it under heaven.[\[19\]](#)

Central to Doctrine

The cross is central also because it is the coherent factor in biblical doctrine. Arguments abound that make a distinction between preaching designed to edify the saints and preaching that is strictly evangelistic. Such a neat division cannot be made between the two. Not even the sword of the Spirit, that sharp two-edged sword, could cut so fine. For example, is the book of Hebrews for edification of believers or is it evangelistic? What about the book of 1 John? Do those passages that edify believers not also show the way of salvation to unbelievers? Are not warnings designed at the same time to convict the ungodly and serve as a canon for examination for the saint? And do not passages of comfort give pleasure to the children of God and, by God's grace, draw those who are spiritually blinded by making them jealous for such pleasures as are at the right hand of God? Some sermons intentionally are designed to call the unbeliever to repentance and faith; but if they do so through an exposition of the gospel, believers will inevitably be edified.

Some may isolate passages from the whole biblical context so severely that they can preach a sermon complete with an outline, word studies, and fairly acceptable advice without having any energy from the cross electrify its delivery.

Spurgeon could not do this, and any attempt to do so is not a biblical message.

In a sermon on John 13:1. Spurgeon comes to the close by summarizing his intent. "I have been preaching what I trust will comfort God's people;" he immediately adds, "but I wish some poor soul would come to Christ through it." And, as if to establish the validity of his homiletical style and unity of exhortation and evangelism, states, "I believe that is the right way to preach the gospel." Referring briefly to the parable of the prodigal, he began then to apply the Father's words, "Let *us* eat." "So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us eat," Spurgeon encourages, "and then sinners will begin to feel their mouths watering, and they will also want to eat, and to have a share of the feast." Pressing this point further and continuing to demonstrate the theory which supported his preaching, Spurgeon adds, "So if you and I enjoy the sweetness of the love of Christ, there may be some in the gallery, and some downstairs who will say, 'We wish that we knew it, too' and they will be wanting it; that is the way to make them eat."[\[20\]](#)

The cross penetrates everything in Scripture, and if it does not penetrate our preaching then we are not fulfilling the calling of Christian ministers. It was everywhere with Spurgeon because he believed it to be the defining factor of every facet of God's ways with men.

This is particularly striking in the way Spurgeon developed the cross's centrality to the doctrines of grace. "Remember dear friends," Spurgeon tenderly reminds his hearers, "that redemption is that which gives effect to all the other great blessings of God." All these "great blessings" need redemption to complete their design. Election, "the well-head of grace, needs the conduit pipe of redemption to bring its streams down to sinners." Our being chosen of God makes sure our obedience and makes necessary the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. If the saints are chosen in Him of what use would election be without Him? Would calling be of any purpose without redemption? "Vain would it be to be called if there were no feast of dying love for us to be called to, and no fountain filled with blood to which we might come at the call." Christ's redeeming death "is the fullness of all the blessings of God," the "key of heaven, the channel of grace, the door of hope." It constitutes the substance of our worship, and thus the motivation for our perseverance, on this earthly journey "and will be the theme of our eternal music above."[\[21\]](#)

The Person Of The Redeemer

A key factor in Spurgeon's understanding of the atonement, and one to which he refers explicitly very often, and implicitly without fail, is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in the orthodoxy given shape by Nicea and Chalcedon. Adhering to the mystery of godliness has been seen as essential to biblical soteriology ever since the church first engaged in literary interaction with the world. Irenaeus, Tetullian, and Athanasius all argued for the full deity and humanity of Christ, two natures in one person, as particularly necessary "for us men and for our salvation."

In his sermon, "Our Suffering Substitute," Spurgeon says, "The Substitute was *of complex nature* [a favorite phrase with Spurgeon]. He was truly man, and yet He was truly God." In his manhood Christ shares the substance of his mother and all the natural creaturely weaknesses of humanity but without original depravity or imputed sin. Though hell's quiver of temptations was emptied upon him he stood invincible and invulnerable; indeed, "he *could not* be wounded by temptation." If he were to redeem man by paying man's debt for sin, and give man eternal life by conquering death then he himself must be man.

But let us also bear in mind that he was, in the Nicene phrase quoted frequently by Spurgeon, "very God of very God." His perfect humanity did not lower his perfect deity. Spurgeon declares "We know nothing of a human atonement apart from the Deity of Christ Jesus. We dare not trust our souls upon a saviour who is but a man." Neither all the men that have ever lived, nor all the angels that exist, nor all together, had they striven throughout eternity, could have wrought a sacrifice that should be a propitiation for the sins of a single man. They must utterly have failed. "None but the shoulders of the Incarnate God could bear the stupendous burden. No hand but that which set fast the spheres could shake the mountains of our guilt, and bear them away. We must have a Divine Sacrifice, and it is our joy to know that we have this in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ."[\[22\]](#)

Deity was required in the atonement because of the infinite and eternal issues involved in sin against God. "It is not possible to hold a proper substitutionary propitiation for sin unless you hold that Christ was God." [23] One of the classic developments of this idea is Anselm's discussion of the proposition, "You have not yet considered what a great thing sin is," in *Why God Became Man*. On occasion, Spurgeon combined the impact of this moral condescension on the part of our Lord with a contemplation of the metaphysical condescension. Not only did the Holy One come to dwell among sinners and bear their curse but the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable One put himself within the sphere and frame of the temporal and mutable to rescue them, from corruption yes, but also from the mutability and declension of the temporal condition also.

Who stooped to pick thee up, O insect of a day? Who stooped to save thee? Who but he who bears earth's huge pillars up and spreads the heavens abroad? The Son of God omnipotent, eternal, and infinite, has fallen in love with the fallen sons of men, and for them has donned the garment of human flesh, and in that flesh has suffered to the death, and died a most shameful death upon the gibbet of calvary. Oh tell it everywhere that Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever, has redeemed us! and after that, who will say that we do not belong to him?[24]

And in the sermon "Majesty in Misery" Spurgeon marvels that "the God, who had reigned in glory over myriads of holy angels, should be mocked by miscreants" who, in an infinite irony of the relation of the eternal to the temporal, "could not even have lived an instant longer in his presence if he had not permitted them to do so." The incongruity is unfathomable that "he who made the heavens and the earth, stood there to be despised and rejected of men, and to be treated with the utmost contumely and scorn." [25]

Substitution and Propitiation

Absolutely essential for a proper biblical view of the atonement is Spurgeon's understanding that it is both substitutionary and propitiatory. He viewed these elements as inseparable and non-negotiable. In 1858 he preached, "Think how great must have been the substitution of Christ, when it satisfied God for all the sins of his people Think what must have been the greatness of the atonement which was the substitution for all this agony which God would have cast upon us, if he had not poured it upon Christ." [26] Thirty years later he unfalteringly affirmed, "There is no way of salvation under heaven but by faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ;" and, stirring in the ingredient of propitiation, he immediately continues: "and the way by which we are redeemed from eternal wrath is by Christ having stood as Substitute for us, and having died in our place." [27]

Because of Christ's propitiatory substitution justice and mercy peacefully embrace and confer double honour upon each other. These two elements combine inextricably into one point. Spurgeon explains it this way:

It was meet that the Substitute should bear a similar chastisement to that which should have fallen upon the sinner He bore the pain, the loss, the separation, the overwhelming which is intended by death. He was even forsaken of God The law demanded death, and death has fallen upon our great covenant head Let us rejoice that the Lord Jesus Christ has evidently by his substitutionary sacrifice put away, not a part and a portion of our sin, but the whole of it. By bearing death itself he has removed all our legal obligations, and has placed us beyond the reach of further demands. [28]

Spurgeon often emphasized that Christ's position as covenantal head of the new race necessarily involved substitution. Jesus was not slain as a private individual, but he was put to death as a representative man, and by that death he sealed all the blessing of the covenant--all provisions of the eternal covenant were ratified. Spurgeon desired "more and more of this covenant doctrine" to be spread throughout England. A person who understands the "two covenants has found the marrow of all theology," according to Spurgeon, "but he who does not know the covenants knows next to nothing of the gospel of Christ." [29]

The covenant of grace was well-ordered and made sure by the blood of Christ. "When the blood of Christ's heart bespattered the divine roll, then it could never be reversed, nor could one of its ordinances be broken, not one of its stipulations fail."^[30] Among these was the determination to give to the people for whom the surety of the covenant had died new hearts and right spirits. While as covenant head his death produces forgiveness and justification, it also becomes the dynamic by which his people are made holy. "He forgives our sins with the designs of curing our sinfulness. We are pardoned that we may become holy."^[31] Spurgeon often pointed to the water and the blood from Christ's side and, in the tradition of Toplady, spoke of cleansing from both the guilt and power of sin.^[32]

In a sermon on Zech. 13:1 Spurgeon emphasizes the double nature of the evil of sin. The fountain opened in the atonement removes "the offence rendered to God's honour and dignity." God has "punished that sin in the person of his own Son." The guilt, therefore, "of those for whom he was a substitute is put away consistently with the righteousness of the great Lawgiver." But, there is a second mischief, namely, "that our nature has become unclean" and "our mind is in itself biased towards evil and averse from good." God, therefore, does not grant a forgiveness that leaves "the sinner as he was in other respects." When forgiveness is granted "a renewal of the nature is wrought; the fountain opened for pardon is also opened for purification." Not only is the offense removed, the love of offending is mortified.

Herein is double joy, for does not every true penitent feel that mere pardon would be a poor boon to him if it is allowed him to continue in sin? My God, deliver me from sin itself, for this is the great burden of my soul. Oh could I have the past forgiven, and yet live an enemy to my enslaved by evil an a stranger to holiness--then were I still accursed! . . . To love the wrong is the beginning of hell.

[\[Go to Part 2\]](#)



¹Charles Spurgeon, "The Crisis of This World" in *The Passion and Death of Our Lord*, vol. 6 of *A Treasury of Spurgeon on the Life and Work of Our Lord*, 6 vv. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 8. Hereafter this reference will be cited as *P & D*. The reader may assume hereafter also that all notes will be "Charles Spurgeon" unless noted otherwise.

²"The Heart of the Gospel," in *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, 15 vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977) 8:91.

³"The Blood Shed for Many," in *P & D.*, p. 34.

⁴"Our Suffering Substitute" (Pensacola: Chapel Library, nd), pp. 2, 3 taken unabridged and unedited from the 1859 volume of *New Park Street Pulpit*.

⁵"The Heart" in *SEE* 8:97.

⁶*Sword and Trowel*, April 1887, p. 195.

⁷*Ibid.*, October 1887, p. 513.

⁸*Ibid.*, December 1887, p. 642.

⁹"Particular Redemption" in *New Park Street Pulpit*, 4:130.

¹⁰"The Blood Shed For Many" in *P&D*, p. 36.

¹¹"Crisis," *P & D*, p. 2.

¹²"The Blood Shed for Many," *P & D*, pp. 34-36.

¹³"It Is Finished," *P & D*, p. 581.

¹⁴"The Miracles of Our Lord's Death," in *P & D*, p. 646.

¹⁵"Crisis," *P & D*, p. 3.

¹⁶"Let Him Deliver Him Now" *P & D*, p. 511.

¹⁷"For Whom Did Christ Die?" *Metropolitan Tabernacle* 20:504.

¹⁸"Particular Redemption," *New Park Street* 4:132.

¹⁹"Ecce Rex," *P & D*, p. 365.

²⁰"Love Stronger Than Death," *P & D*, p. 19.

²¹*Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:159.

²²"Our Suffering Substitute" op. cit., pp. 3-7. See also "Majesty in Misery," *P & D*, p. 232.

²³"Jesus, The Substitute for His People," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 21:159.

²⁴"Redemption and Its Claim" *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:162.

²⁵"Majesty in Misery," *P & D*, p. 233.

²⁶"Particular Redemption," *New Park Street Pulpit*, 4:132.

²⁷"Blood Even on the Golden Altar," *SEE*, 1:366. In an 1874 message entitled, "For Whom Did Christ Die," Spurgeon said, "Our Lord's death was penal, inflicted upon him by divine justice: and rightly so, for on him lay our iniquities, and

therefore on him must lay the sufferings" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 20:495).

²⁸"Slaying the Sacrifice," *SEE* 1:346.

²⁹"The Blood of the Covenant," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:444.

³⁰"It Is Finished," *P & D*, p. 583.

³¹"The Blood of the Covenant," *P & D*, p. 41.

³²For example see "Ecce Rex" *P&D* 359. "When the soldier with a spear pierced his side he had no idea that he was bringing forth before all eyes that blood and water which are to the whole church the emblems of the double cleansing which we find in Jesus, cleansing by atoning blood and sanctifying grace."

³³"The Open Fountain," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 17:39.

Limit God's Sovereignty?

"If we limit in any direction the actual and complete sovereignty of God we encounter as many and as great difficulties as we think to escape. The safest and soundest position to take is to accept in all its fullness the great truth explaining as best we can its difficulties, and waiting humbly for more light."

-E. C. Dargan

Professor of Homiletics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1892-1907; Editorial Secretary of the SSB, 1917-1927



¹Charles Spurgeon, "The Crisis of This World" in *The Passion and Death of Our Lord*, vol. 6 of *A Treasury of Spurgeon on the Life and Work of Our Lord*, 6 vv. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 8. Hereafter this reference will be cited as *P & D*. The reader may assume hereafter also that all notes will be "Charles Spurgeon" unless noted otherwise.

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¹¹"Crisis," *P & D*, p. 2.

¹²"The Blood Shed for Many," *P & D*, pp. 34-36.

¹³"It Is Finished," *P & D*, p. 581.

¹⁴"The Miracles of Our Lord's Death," in *P & D*, p. 646.

¹⁵"Crisis," *P & D*, p. 3.

¹⁶"Let Him Deliver Him Now" *P & D*, p. 511.

¹⁷"For Whom Did Christ Die?" *Metropolitan Tabernacle* 20:504.

¹⁸"Particular Redemption," *New Park Street* 4:132.

¹⁹"Ecce Rex," *P & D*, p. 365.

²⁰"Love Stronger Than Death," *P & D*, p. 19.

²¹*Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:159.

²²"Our Suffering Substitute" op. cit., pp. 3-7. See also "Majesty in Misery," *P & D*, p. 232.

²³"Jesus, The Substitute for His People," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 21:159.

²⁴"Redemption and Its Claim" *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:162.

²⁵"Majesty in Misery," *P & D*, p. 233.

²⁶"Particular Redemption," *New Park Street Pulpit*, 4:132.

²⁷"Blood Even on the Golden Altar," *SEE*, 1:366. In an 1874 message entitled, "For Whom Did Christ Die," Spurgeon said, "Our Lord's death was penal, inflicted upon him by divine justice: and rightly so, for on him lay our iniquities, and therefore on him must lay the sufferings" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 20:495).

²⁸"Slaying the Sacrifice," *SEE* 1:346.

²⁹"The Blood of the Covenant," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 20:444.

³⁰"It Is Finished," *P & D*, p. 583.

³¹"The Blood of the Covenant," *P & D*, p. 41.

³²For example see "Ecce Rex" *P&D* 359. "When the soldier with a spear pierced his side he had no idea that he was bringing forth before all eyes that blood and water which are to the whole church the emblems of the double cleansing which we find in Jesus, cleansing by atoning blood and sanctifying grace."

³³"The Open Fountain," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 17:39.

Limit God's Sovereignty?

"If we limit in any direction the actual and complete sovereignty of God we encounter as many and as great difficulties as we think to escape. The safest and soundest position to take is to accept in all its fullness the great truth explaining as best we can its difficulties, and waiting humbly for more light."

-E. C. Dargan

Professor of Homiletics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1892-1907;

Editorial Secretary of the SSB, 1917-1927



True and False Repentance

John Calvin

[From III. iii. 25 of the *Institutes of Christian Religion*]

The question arises, however, inasmuch as the apostle denies that sham repentance appeases God, how Ahab obtained pardon and turned aside the punishment imposed upon him; since he appears, from the later conduct of his life, to have been stricken only by some sudden fear (1 Kings 21:28-29). He, indeed, put on sackcloth, cast ashes over himself, lay upon the ground (1 Kings 21:27), and as is testified concerning him, humbled himself before God; but it meant little to rend his garments while his heart remained obstinate and swollen with malice. Yet we see how God is turned to mercy.

I reply: Hypocrites are sometimes spared thus for a while, yet the wrath of God ever lies upon them, and this is done not so much for their own sake as for an example to all. For even though Ahab had his punishment mitigated, what profit was this to him, but that while alive upon earth he should not feel it? Therefore, God's curse, although secret, had a fixed seat in his house, and he went to eternal destruction.

The same is to be seen in Esau; for, even though he suffered a repulse, a temporal blessing was granted to his tears (Gen. 27:40). But, because the spiritual inheritance from the oracle of God could rest in the possession of only one of the brothers, when Esau was passed over and Jacob chosen, the disinheriting of Esau excluded God's mercy; yet this solace remained to him as an animal man: to become fat with the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven (Gen. 27:28).^[1]

And this which I have just said ought to be applied as an example for the others in order that we may learn more readily to apply our minds and our efforts to sincere repentance, because there must be no doubt that when we are truly and heartily converted, God who extends his mercy even to the unworthy when they show any dissatisfaction with self, will readily forgive us. By this means, also, we are taught what dread judgment is in store for all the obstinate, who with shameless forehead no less than iron heart now make it a sport to spurn and set at nought the threats of God. In this way he often stretched out his hand to the sons of Israel to relieve their calamity, even though their cries were feigned and their hearts were deceitful and false (cf. Ps. 78:36-37), as he complains in the psalm, that they forthwith reverted to their character (v. 57). And thus by such kindly gentleness he willed to bring them to earnest conversion or render them inexcusable. Yet in remitting punishments for a time, he does not bind himself by perpetual law, but rather sometimes rises up more severely against the hypocrites and doubles their punishment to show how much their pretense displeases him. But as I have said, he sets forth some examples of his readiness to give pardon, by which the godly may be encouraged to amend their lives, and the pride of those who stubbornly kick against the pricks may be more severely condemned.

¹Following LXX and Vg. here (as in his Comm. Gen. 27:38, 39), Calvin has interchanged the blessing of Esau with that of Jacob in Gen., ch. 27. Cf., However, Heb. 11:20.



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The Lordship Controversy and Repentance

Ernest Reisinger

One major point in the Lordship controversy is the role of repentance in salvation. Both the Lordship and the Non-Lordship teachers believe in repentance. Their disagreements, which are not a few, stem from what they believe the Bible teaches about repentance. The differences have some serious implications and consequences affecting the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.

When I first read Charles Ryrie's shocking statement in his book *Balancing the Christian Life*. I did not know how to react--coming as it does from a very respected theologian and a very able teacher. The statement that I am referring to is in connection with the Lordship controversy. Referring to the Lordship preachers, Ryrie said, "The importance of this question *cannot be overestimated* in relation to both Salvation and Sanctification. The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore one of them is false and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel," (p. 170).

This is a serious charge. I do not know one Lordship teacher or preacher who does not believe that sinners are justified through faith alone plus nothing; however, the Lordship teaching is that faith which is alone is not the kind of faith that justifies. Lordship preachers all believe that Bible--repentance and saving faith are inseparably joined together in the application of God's salvation (see *FJ* 10, 11).

Lordship teachers recognize that the Bible has much to say about spurious faith and spurious repentance. James P. Boyce, in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (pp. 384-93) names three kinds of faith: (1) temporary or delusive faith, (2) implicit faith, and (3) historic faith--all spurious.

I do not want to believe that Charles Ryrie meant such men as Charles H. Spurgeon, John Bunyan, John Gill, John A. Broadus, B. H. Carroll, all Baptists who embrace the 1689 Confession, all Presbyterians who hold to the Westminster Confession and all Christian Reformed men who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism come "under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel."

As I reflect on this extravagant statement I think he may be right--it is another gospel, a different gospel! If there two different gospels in this debate, the question that needs to be asked is: "Which one is the biblical gospel?" Dr. Ryrie's statement about Lordship teaching does set one thing straight, namely, that this is not some non-essential doctrine or some secondary matter. It does concern the purity of the gospel.

With these preliminary remarks behind us let us begin our study on the Biblical doctrine of repentance.

The Importance of Repentance

The subject is important because Jesus said, if we do not repent we will perish (Luke 13:3). "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." This is enough to make it of paramount importance.

This is why our Lord made repentance the opening message of His ministry: "Repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This is why He closed His ministry with a clear command to include repentance in our message to the world: "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations . . . and you are witnesses of

these things" (Luke 24:47, 48). He began His ministry with the message of repentance and He closed His ministry on the subject of repentance.

Thomas Watson, an old Puritan, said, "Two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven." Repentance is never out of season. If anyone misses repentance he will miss salvation, he is not in possession of eternal life, he does not have forgiveness of sin, he is a lost soul and without God and without hope in this world and the world to come. Jesus tied remission of sins to repentance. This makes it very important (Luke 24:47).

Jesus made repentance His keynote address: "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17).

The twelve that he called to preach followed His example: "and they went out and preached that men should repent," (Mark 6:12).

Peter obeyed our Lord's command to preach repentance and remission of sins. In his first sermon (Acts 2:38) after our Lord returned to heaven Peter said, "repent and be baptized." Hear Peter again: "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," (3:19). In Acts 5:30-32, preaching to the persecutors he said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Our Lord's chiefest apostle, in his famous sermon on Mars Hill, to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers preached repentance (Acts 17) "God . . . now commands all men to repent," (v. 30). The great apostle, in summarizing a three year ministry, recounts to the elders of Ephesus just what he had taught and preached: "I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," (Acts 20:20, 21).

Another apostolic example in the life of this great apostle is found in Acts 26:18-20. The apostle is giving his personal testimony before King Agrippa, and he tells the king what Jesus told him to do, that is, the purpose for which our Lord had appeared to him. Jesus said, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness . . ." (v. 16). In verses 18-20, our Lord tells Paul what his ministry was meant to be: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin"

In verse 20, Paul tells King Agrippa the content of the message: "that they should repent and turn to God" Not just trust, but turn to God and do works befitting repentance.

Now, this message of repentance almost got Paul killed. "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me" (v. 21). And one reason men avoid preaching repentance today is this very point. It will cause some waves and some antagonism from this generation of poor, lost, self-deceived church members who are products of an evangelism that has left repentance out of its message. Therefore, the supposed converts have missed Bible repentance, and their lives and their dedication to Christ and His church testify that they do not perform deeds appropriate to repentance.

Before giving a definition of repentance let me name some major errors of the Non-Lordship position:

1. Non-Lordship teaching has a repentance that is not an essential part of salvation.
2. Non-Lordship teaching has a forgiveness of sin that is not necessarily joined with repentance.
3. Non-Lordship preachers teach that repentance is a call to fellowship with God and has nothing to do with eternal life.
4. Non-Lordship teaching removes repentance from any concept of turning from sin initially in coming to faith in Christ.
5. Zane Hodges, one of the front runners for the Non-Lordship position, argues for his position by noting that the word "repentance" is not mentioned in the Gospel of John (I will address this objection below).
6. Non-Lordship teaching is redefining repentance in such a way as to remove it from any concept of turning from sin. (For information of these assertions see Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, p. 27 and chapters 9 and 12.)
7. The Non-Lordship position argues that regeneration does not necessarily produce faith and repentance. The best writer for the Non-Lordship position is Robert Lightner. He is like a good lawyer with a bad case. He says, "repentance is *almost* a synonym for faith" (*Sin the Savior and Salvation*, p. 167). Statements like this clearly show that Lightner does not see that regeneration always precedes faith and repentance, and if it does not precede both it does not produce either. A statement like this also shows that the Non-Lordship teaching does not see that the Bible teaches that there is an *inseparable* connection between faith and repentance. It is because of this inseparable relationship that I will spend a little more time on this aspect of the differences in the two positions. What God has joined together let no man put asunder.

One Non-Lordship teacher goes so far as to make the following assertions:

- "Any teaching that demands a change of conduct toward either God or man for salvation is to add works or human effort to faith, and this contradicts all Scripture and is an accursed message."
- "Lordship salvation contradicts Scripture."
- "This message is accursed of God."
- "The person who preaches such a message [Lordship] is also accursed of God."

These are all quotes from the book, *Handbook of Personal Evangelism*, by Dr. Ray Stamford, then president of a large Non-Lordship Bible College. (They reflect antinomianism at its worst.)

Hodges also separates faith and repentance. He says, "Faith alone (not repentance and faith) is the sole condition for justification and eternal life" (*Absolutely Free*, p. 144).

Hodges uses Acts 16:31 and quotes Paul and Silas' answer to the Philippian jailor's question, "What must I do to be saved?"

He says, "There is not a word here--not a syllable--about repentance. Lordship salvation teachers are in dire straits with a text like this" (p. 144).

Hodges quotes Calvin's Institutes, Book III, Chapter 3. However, he apparently did not read Calvin carefully because the Reformer's words destroy his arguments.

Calvin, in this chapter, says: "With good reason, the sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31)" (p. 592); and, "surely no one can embrace the grace of the gospel without betaking himself from the errors of past life into the right way, applying his whole effort to the practice of repentance" (Book III, p. 593). Further, he says, "Repentance has its foundation in the gospel, which faith embraces"

(Book III, p. 593).

Calvin asks the question, "What then? Can true repentance stand apart from faith? Not at all. But even though they cannot be separated, they ought to be distinguished. As faith is not without hope, yet faith and hope are different things, so repentance and faith, although they are held together by a permanent bond, required to be joined rather than confused" (p. 597).

Faith and Repentance Are Inseparable

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" Mark 1:15. Note that this is a two-fold command. *In God's salvation faith and repentance are inseparable.*

If repentance is only a change of mind. How do I know if I have changed my mind? Do I just say I have changed my mind? One can only be sure that he has changed his mind if that changed mind leads one to change his direction.

Regeneration can only be known in its effects on the life, likewise, a changed mind can only be known by a changed direction.

Repentance is always consistent with faith. Spurious repentance is to dwell on the consequences of sin, rather than on sin itself. I have known some sinners so disturbed with the fears of hell and the thoughts of death, and eternal judgment that, to use the words of one old preacher, "they have been shaking over the mouth of hell by their collar, and have almost felt the torments of the pit before they went there." This may come with true repentance but this is not the essential part of repentance.

John Bunyan, in his *Holy War*, illustrates this as follows: "Diabolus often beats the great hell-drum in the ears of Mansoul, to prevent their hearing the trumpet of the gospel which proclaims mercy and pardon."

Let me emphasize that any repentance that keeps a sinner from believing in Christ is a repentance that needs to be repented of. Any repentance that makes a sinner think Christ will not save him goes beyond the truth of the Bible, yes, it goes against the truth.

Any repentance that leads to despair and remorse but does not embrace mercy is a repentance of the devil and not of God. A person may feel that he did wrong, yet go on in his sin all the same, feeling there is no hope and that he may as well continue to live as he will, and get the pleasures of sin since he cannot, as he thinks, have the pleasures of grace and forgiveness. This is spurious repentance. It is the fire of the devil which hardens, and not the Lord's fire of mercy which melts the heart, as seen in Peter's repentance. Peter wept bitterly, yet embraced the mercy of God in Christ. One old Puritan, on his sick bed, expressed, "Lord, sink me low as hell in repentance; but lift me high as heaven in faith."

Let me express it yet another way. True repentance is to repent as bitterly for sin as if you know it should damn you, but to rejoice so much in Christ as if sin were nothing at all.

These two things are made clear in the definition of repentance I wish to use.

What is true evangelical repentance? Why do I say "evangelical"? Because there is a legal repentance. What is the difference? Legal repentance does not embrace the mercy of Christ. Consider Judas (Mt. 27:3). He repented--he was

remorseful, but his was not an evangelical repentance. We will see this in our definition of repentance, taken from Question 87 in the Shorter Catechism.

Question: What is repentance unto life?

Answer: Repentance unto life is a saving grace; whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after, new obedience.

Notice the phrase, "and the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ" One might think it strange to find the necessity of grasping "the mercy of God in Christ" in a definition of repentance. Ah, but it only underscores the point that where **saving faith** is found, there evangelical repentance will be found also, and where evangelical repentance is found, there true saving faith will be found. They are Siamese twins--inseparable in their application.

Two lines that meet are the stripping of repentance and the clothing of faith: a repentance that purges the soul of dead works, and a faith that fills the soul with living works; repentance which pulls down, and faith which builds up; a repentance which orders a time to weep, and a faith that gives a time to dance. These two things together make up the work of grace within whereby men's souls are saved.

The repentance we ought to preach is one connected with faith. Thus we may preach repentance and faith together without any difficulty whatsoever.

True repentance is born at the same time with faith. They are twins. To say which is first is past my knowledge. They come to the soul together and we must preach them together.

Spurgeon said, "So then, dear friends, those people who have faith which allows them to think lightly of past sin, have the faith of devils and not the faith of God's elect."

Repentance and belief are ongoing. We must repent and believe the gospel until our dying day. Rowland Hill, when he was near death said he had one regret and that was that a dear friend who lived with him for sixty years would have to leave him at the gate of heaven. "That dear friend, said he, is repentance; repentance has been with me all my life, and I think I shall drop a tear, said the good man, as I go through the gates to think that I can repent no more."

Repentance in the Gospel of John

Zane C. Hodges makes much of the fact that the Gospel of John does not use the word repent. What Hodges fails to recognize is that the word *repent* does not need to appear for us to see the principle of repentance as part of the message of God-centered evangelism.

Let me illustrate it from our Lord's evangelism. In His personal evangelism to the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22), the rich young ruler wanted to know what to do to have eternal life (Mark 10:17). The Master Evangelist addresses Himself to the young ruler's question, but He did not use the words, "believe" or "repent." However, He got to the heart of true repentance and saving faith by showing the rich young ruler that he could not have two Gods, and therefore, he must turn from his *green god*. "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said to him, `one thing you lack: go your way, sell whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasures in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.'" This is preaching repentance, and it was necessary for the rich young ruler to turn

from, as well as to turn to, in order to have eternal life.

Jesus taught repentance to the harlot woman in John 8 when He told her to sin no more, that is "turn." It is not necessary to use the word "repent" to teach repentance. The word repent was not used with the prodigal son in Luke 15 but he did repent--he turned from his sin and embraced his father's mercy. However, the word "repent" is not in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). True evangelical repentance is inseparably joined to faith.

Let me just give you one verse that sets forth three things that happens in some degree in every true conversion. 1 Thess. 1:9: "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

1. Turned to God--that is faith.
2. Turned from idols (sin)--that is repentance.
3. To serve--that is evidence of repentance; "do works meet for repentance."

Summary

We believe that repentance and faith are (1) sacred duties, and also (2) inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God, whereby being deeply convicted of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Saviour.

From these facts, it will be seen that:

1. The seat of true repentance is in the soul. It is not of itself a mere intellectual knowledge of sin, nor the sorrow that accompanies it, nor the changed life that flows from it, but it is the soul's apprehension of its heinous character, which produces the horror and self-loathing which accompany it, and the determination to forsake sin which flows from it.
2. That true repentance is inconsistent with the continuance in sin because of abounding grace.
3. That true repentance consists of mental and spiritual emotion, and not of outward self-imposed chastisements. Even the pious life and devotion to God which follow are described not as repentance, but as fruits meet for repentance.

The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 contains an excellent summary explanation of repentance in chapter 15. This chapter is reproduced in its entirety below.

Of Repentance Unto Life And Salvation

1. Such of the elect as are converted at riper years, having sometime lived in the state of nature, and therein served divers lusts and pleasures, God in their effectual calling giveth them repentance unto life. Titus 3:2-5.
2. Whereas there is none that doth good and sinneth not, and the best of men may, through the power and deceitfulness of the corruption dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, fall into great sin and provocations; God hath, in the covenant of grace, mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be renewed through repentance unto salvation. Ecc. 7:20; Luke 22:31, 32.
3. This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of

the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-aborrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavor, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all wellpleasing in all things. Zech. 12:10; Acts 11:18; Ezek. 36:31; 2 Cor. 7:11; Ps. 119:6, 128.

4. As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof, so it is every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly. Luke 19:8; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15.
5. Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers unto salvation, that although there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent, which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary. Rom. 6:23; Isa. 1:16-18; 55:7.



Why Pastors Need Church History

Terry Chrisope

One of my favorite cartoons shows a customer at the counter of a Christian book and trinket store, apparently inquiring about a particular item. The clerk behind the counter is saying, "Let's see, Calvin's *Institutes*--is that a new title?" The cartoon humorously illustrates the all too true and sad fact that modern American Christians are ignorant of their own spiritual heritage.

We might expect that the situation would be otherwise for those in the pastoral ministry, but such a conclusion is too hastily drawn. I suppose that for many pastors (and seminarians) the study of the history of Christianity (commonly known as "church history") is considered to be dull, dry, and dreary. Not only that, but history is also thought by some to be quite irrelevant to the concerns of ministering in the present. Furthermore, for a discipline paying such apparently low dividends, its study would be terribly time-consuming in a day when the demands made on a pastor seem boundless. It is an unusual pastor who gives any significant attention to the history of Christianity after the completion of his college or seminary church history course.

Such a state of affairs ought not to be. The regular study of the history of Christianity--when undertaken in the proper way--can be one of the most informative, stimulating, and encouraging endeavors a pastor can pursue. What follows proceeds on three assumptions. First, the study of the history of Christianity should be conceived as broadly as possible: it involves Christianity not only in its internal and institutional development, but also in its relationships to the surrounding culture, institutions, movements, philosophies, and religions. This broadens the parameters considerably, to the point of touching upon all the major facets of Western civilization--which, incidentally, provides the context for contemporary ministry. Second, the study of Christian history is necessarily a lifelong activity, not just a single course that is taken and forgotten. Nothing less will prove so adequate and profitable. Third, church history involves an acquaintance with primary sources, not just modern history books. Exposure to the texts and documents of a historical era brings life and immediacy to one's examination of the Christian heritage and promotes genuine knowledge of and empathy with those who have gone before. Undertaken in light of these three considerations, the study of church history becomes a living, vital activity.

Having granted all this, the question remains, What specific benefits can the study of Christian history provide us? Some of the benefits of church history mentioned below are enjoyed in common with all historical study generally; some are specific benefits of church history; and some have particular application to pastors, preachers, and other Christian workers.

How We Got Here

In the first place, historical study helps us to understand how we reached the point where we are today. The present has its roots in the past, and a knowledge of that past is necessary for understanding the present. For example, how does one explain the present theological shallowness of American Christianity? This condition is arguably traceable in large part to the decline of Calvinism in the nineteenth century and its replacement with a line of religious thought more in keeping with prevailing American cultural values and democratic *mores*. Awareness of this development alerts a pastor to the fact that American ideals do not always conform to the theology of the Bible and that it may take considerable pastoral courage to press genuine biblical teaching on twentieth-century Americans--both unbelievers and believers.

This is the particular use of history which Earl E. Cairns labels "an aid to understanding the present," and it applies to more mundane matters as well, as Cairns points out: Why are there so many different Christian denominations? Why do their theologies, church order, and worship practices differ so? The answers must invariably be found in the historical personages and circumstances which lie at the foundation of the various Christian groups and denominations. Clearly, we cannot escape history; we are all caught up in its effects. But we can minister with greater understanding (and thus, perhaps, with greater effectiveness) if we know something of the history that has produced the present moment.[\[1\]](#)

Enlarged Perspective

Second, the study of church history helps us to see things as a whole. It connects our present moment with the long past of Christianity and sets the stage for the future. We are thus allowed to see something of the pattern of God's working in history. For example, one element that has been fairly constant in the great spiritual awakenings of the past has been God's use of the powerful preaching of His Word.

This point was recently driven home for me with great emphasis when I acquired and began reading Calvin's *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, reprinted by the Banner of Truth. Historians commonly recognize that Calvinism was the most dynamic element of the Reformation movement and have sought for reasons why. I suspect that a good part of the answer may be found in Calvin's preaching, which has been a neglected aspect of that reformer's life and ministry. A perusal of his sermons shows them to be straightforward Biblical exposition of great spiritual intensity and power, with searching and encouraging application (they are probably the most edifying reading I have yet encountered).

When it is considered that Calvin preached ten times every two weeks to a congregation that included many foreign exiles in Switzerland, delivering material of tremendous spiritual potency, then the dynamism of international Calvinism is no longer a mystery: the movement absorbed Calvin's own approach to the Bible and drew its nourishment from that source, often ministered by Calvin himself, either in person or in print (Calvin's sermons were being translated into English and printed in England by the 1570s).

From this scriptural source sprang Puritanism and the early Baptists, movements which also were furthered by biblical preaching and exposition. May we not conclude that the instrument which God so powerfully used at that time He may see fit to use again? And may not this insight encourage some pastor, whether in a lonely outpost or a prominent pulpit, to persevere in a faithful ministry of Biblical exposition, realizing that it is through His Word that God works?

Continuity and Identity

A third benefit of church history is that it fosters a sense of continuity and identity with earlier generations of Christians. As we become familiar with the lives and beliefs of Christians of previous eras we are struck not only by how they differ from us but also by how much we have in common with them; we are granted a sense of identity with them and of our own continuity in the historical stream of Christianity.

This is especially important in our own rootless and amnesiac age: modern Christians and pastors who are aware of church history can see that they stand in a long line of Christian believers who have held to the same truths, adhered to similar principles, and attempted to live out a consistent Christian lifestyle in their own generation.

The Baptist pastor who wonders about his own sanity or doctrinal moorings because he doesn't follow after every current practical gimmick or theological fad can find little better tonic than to read a few pages of John Dagg's *Manual of Theology*, realizing that what was believed and taught by Dagg was adhered to and preached by the mainstream of Baptists before him, by the Puritans from whom the Baptists sprang, and in the main by Calvin and the other reformers. In other words, he will recognize that he stands in a long line of sound Christian believers who placed truth (and certain specific truths) at the center of their own identity. Church history thus serves the same function as the recital of the roll of the faithful in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: it shows us that we do not stand alone but with a great cloud of witnesses, in a stream of continuity with them, believing the same truth, acknowledging the same Lord.

Illumination of Theology

In the fourth place, the consideration of church history helps to illuminate and clarify Christian theology. The doctrines we teach and the theological systems to which we adhere did not drop down from heaven borne on the wings of angels. They

are the result rather (we hope) of Spirit-guided reflection on the contents of the Bible and on human experience in light of the Bible.

An acquaintance with the historic theological discussions shows us how Christian orthodoxy developed as earlier Christians intellectually engaged the Biblical materials and came to a consensus concerning their major teachings. The theological thinking and argumentation of those Christians can inform and guide us in dealing with those doctrines with which they struggled first. One's appreciation of the doctrine of grace, for example, will be enhanced by a familiarity with the controversies in which Augustine, Luther, and Calvin were involved in their own day. One's conception of the church can be sharpened by an acquaintance with the views of the early Baptists or of Jonathan Edwards. And one's grasp of the essentials of Christology will be heightened through an awareness of the controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Another service performed by this theological function of church history is to instruct us regarding doctrinal errors. Martin Lloyd-Jones warns us how easy it is to become unbalanced and to fall into doctrinal aberrations if one is not aware of the theological past. How many Baptist pastors would be surprised to learn that what they believe about the Trinity is known as modalism or Sabellianism and was condemned by the early church as heresy? "Church history is one of the essential studies for the preacher," Lloyd-Jones asserts, "were it merely to show him this terrible danger of slipping into heresy, or into error, without realizing that anything has happened to him."[\[2\]](#)

Motivation

A fifth function of church history is to serve as a motivating force in our Christian walk and service. When we realize that Calvin was wracked by disease and pain for many of the last years of his life and that John Bunyan spent twelve years in prison as a result of his preaching activities, we are inspired to press on in spite of our trials. When we are called upon to take an unpopular but biblical stance in our own day, we can be encouraged by the example (and instructed by the principles) of C. H. Spurgeon in the "Downgrade Controversy" or of J. Gresham Machen in the Presbyterian Church conflict of the 1920s and 1930s.

We can also be motivated and encouraged by a familiarity with the great revivals in the history of Christianity such as the Reformation, the Great Awakening, and many others. Lloyd-Jones testifies, "I know of nothing, in my own experience, that has been, more exhilarating and helpful, and that has acted more frequently as a tonic to me, than the history of Revivals." And the same history, he reminds us, can also serve to humble us as well (which, along with encouragement, will ordinarily tend to make us more useful) as it keeps us from being filled with pride.[\[3\]](#)

A sixth benefit--and the last to be considered here--is that church history illustrates spiritual principles, providing examples for us to emulate or avoid. My recent reading of the letters of Francis Schaeffer revealed, as Schaeffer recognized, the lack of love in the separatist Presbyterian movement of the 1940s and 1950s. While rightly emphasizing the need for correct doctrine and a pure church, some in this movement lost sight of the need for the demonstration of God's love in relationships with other Christians. This provides a worthy caveat for anyone involved in a movement of theological or ecclesiastical reform.

The wisdom of divine providence, as well as humble submission to that providence, is illustrated by Spurgeon's attempt as a young man to enter a college--only to have that attempt foiled by circumstances he could not control. Spurgeon came to believe that it was God's will that he not attend college--and he seems to have suffered not a whit for it. There are many such lessons to be learned from history.

The point will not be lost on pastors, of course, that any labor expended in uncovering examples of spiritual principles at work in history will be amply rewarded with abundant material for sermon illustrations.

Conclusion

"Okay, okay. You've convinced me that I should get into church history. But how should I go about it?" Perhaps the most painless way to approach church history is through the reading of biographies. When I was in the pastorate, I set aside time every Sunday afternoon for reading a chapter or two in the biography of some important figure in the history of Christianity. This or some other scheme for the reading of biographies might be a good place to begin, then one could move to more systematic works that survey the whole course of Christian history, or treat a major period such as the Reformation, or deal with a particular aspect of the history of Christianity, or answer a particular question you might have.

Whatever approach you decide to take, remember that the benefits flow not from good intentions but from your own personal exposure to the history of God's working in, through, and (sometimes) in spite of His people and His church. The rewards are there. What are you waiting for?



¹ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) p. 17.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) p. 117.

³ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, pp. 117-18.



¹ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) p. 17.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) p. 117.

³ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, pp. 117-18.



News

Association Repents

The Yavapai Baptist Association in Arizona recently adopted a resolution repenting of sin against the Miller Valley Baptist Church of Prescott and Pastor Bob Selph. Seven years ago the association charged Pastor Selph with heresy for his agreement with the historic Southern Baptist view of unconditional election. He was subjected to formal proceedings that stopped short of disfellowshipping him and his church from the association. Now wiser, more spiritually and biblically minded pastors are in the association, and, though most of them were not involved in the fiasco seven years ago, they have led in the reconciliation effort.

Miller Valley has accepted the overtures of the association and has already expressed their forgiveness by sending a volunteer team of men to help remodel the building of the church which seven years ago led the charge against them.

New Journal

A new journal, *Revival: The Need of the Times*, has been launched by editor Mack Tomlinson. It is scheduled to be published 6 times a year. More information may be attained by writing to the above at P. O. Box 458, Azle, Texas, 76098-0458.



Book Reviews

Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World by John MacArthur, Jr.; 1993, 253 pp. Crossway Books, \$17.95

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

No one has ever accused John MacArthur of skirting around important issues. His *Gospel According to Jesus* exposed the easy-believism and cheap grace that has permeated much of modern evangelicalism. In it he warns against huckstering the gospel as if it were a bargain-basement sale item, and he calls us back to a more biblically based, Christ-honoring, historically orthodox doctrine of salvation.

A reformation in soteriology will not last, however, if there is not also a commensurate reformation in ecclesiology. For the same humanism that putrefies the former equally spoils the latter. Good seed will not grow in rocky soil.

So it is with great delight to see the publication of this new volume which addresses evangelical church life. MacArthur's basic impulse is the conviction that "the church has imbibed the worldly philosophy of pragmatism, and we're just beginning to taste the bitter results" (xii). "What works?" has replaced "What is true?" in the church's priorities and the results are a loss of confidence in the gospel.

This book pulls no punches in exposing the harmful excesses of the church growth movement. With careful documentation, clear reasoning, and firm yet kind rebuke, MacArthur demonstrates how many church growth "experts," despite claims to the contrary, have made truth negotiable in the quest for numerical success. George Barna's church marketing philosophy is scrutinized in the light of biblical instructions on church life and ministry.

In the chapter entitled, "The Sovereignty of God in Salvation," MacArthur writes, "What does God's sovereignty have to do with the subject of this book? Everything. The very reason many contemporary churches embrace pragmatic methodology is that they lack any understanding of God's sovereignty in the salvation of the elect. They lose confidence in the power of God to use the preached gospel to reach hardened unbelievers. That's why they approach evangelism as a marketing problem" (157).

MacArthur uses Spurgeon's "Downgrade" controversy as the backdrop for his argument. Just as modernism began to infiltrate evangelical churches in the late 19th century, so pragmatism has taken root a century later. Both are an attack on Scripture—the former on its authority, the latter on its sufficiency.

This book should be placed into the hands of every Bible-believing pastor and church leader in our nation. It promises to be one of the most controversial books of the decade. May God, by His grace, also make it one of the most heeded.

Linguist's Software Language Bible Study Programs, Prices vary.

Reviewed by [Ken Puls](#)

Since the advent of computers the ability to study, search, and even translate the Scriptures has enormously advanced. From finding verses to doing word studies, what once took hours of searching through concordances now

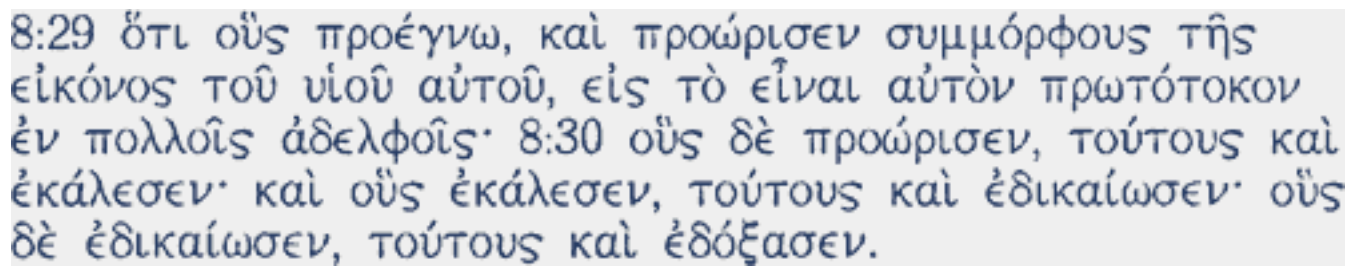
can be done in a matter of seconds with the aid of a computer.

Many software companies have appeared in the past several years offering programs that help in the study of Scripture. One such company which is of special interest to Bible translators and students who work with the Greek and Hebrew texts is Linguist's Software of Edmonds, Washington.

Linguist's Software is best known for their fonts. They offer the ability to write in Hebrew, Greek, Chinese, Cyrillic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and a host of other languages including even Egyptian hieroglyphics. The letters are well organized phonetically on the keyboard to corresponding English letters and are easy to learn.

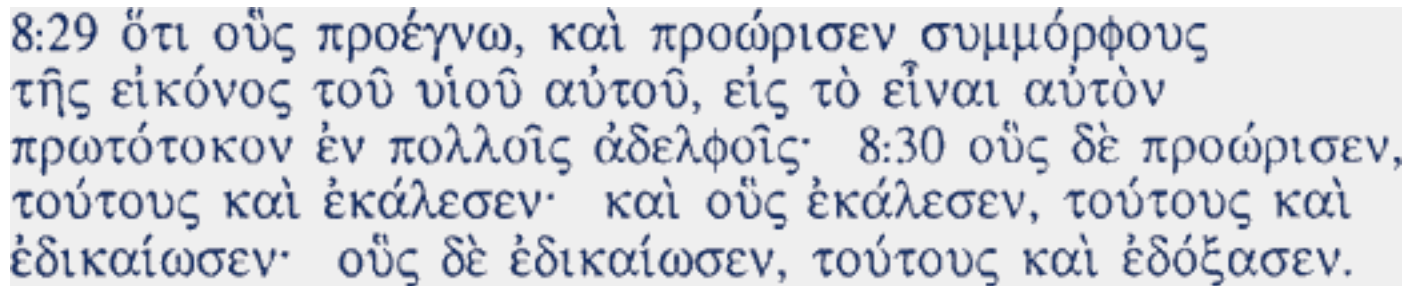
Linguist's Software offers two Greek fonts:

GRAECA which has a type style like the United Bible Society edition of the Greek New Testament:



8:29 ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· 8:30 οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὓς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὓς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

SSUPERGREEK which has a typestyle like the Trinitarian Bible Society edition of the Textus Receptus:



8:29 ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· 8:30 οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὓς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὓς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

[Romans 8:29-30]

Two Hebrew fonts are also available. The one of interest to Bible students is HEBRAICA, which has the type style of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*:



יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָמָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָמָה לְהַגְדִּילִי 57:11

[Psalm 57:11]

Both Hebrew fonts come together with a "bidirectional Hebrew Resources Installer for English Systems." This program reverses the direction of the cursor so you can type right to left. Without this program installed cutting and pasting Hebrew texts is quite frustrating.

Linguist's Software also offers the Old Testament in Hebrew (the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* - \$59.95) and the New Testament in Greek (the *U.B.S. Greek New Testament* - \$59.95) on disks. Both come with text only. (No textual

apparatus is included.) Other versions of the Scripture offered are the KJV, RSV, NIV, the Latin Vulgate and the Greek Septuagint (each \$59.95). The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures come in three possible formats:

1. As the Greek or Hebrew text only. Each book is formatted as a document in your word processor. (You specify what word processor you use when ordering.) Because you can remain in your word processor, this format is useful for cutting and pasting portions of Scripture into papers or articles.
2. As an Interlinear text (\$79.95). This format is useful for those less familiar with the Greek and Hebrew language.
3. As a machine readable text with each word grammatically tagged (\$99.95). The machine readable text can be used with a program developed by Linguist's called the **Any Text Bible Search Engine**. This program can perform word searches in the Greek and Hebrew texts by textual form or root, and can also create concordances. On Macintosh computers the search engine is a Hyper-Card based program.

Also offered by Linguist's Software are Greek and Hebrew dictionaries (\$49.95 each) containing all the textual forms found in the Scriptures. These are intended to prevent the spell checker in your word processor from stopping at each Greek or Hebrew term it does not recognize. Greek and Hebrew Grammar books are also available on disk for those who wish to learn the languages.

Linguist's Software's programs and fonts are available for both IBM (including Windows) and Macintosh computers. For the Macintosh most fonts are available in True Type or Post Script formats.

For more information on these programs and fonts write to:

LINGUIST'S SOFTWARE
P.O. Box 580
Edmonds, WA 98020-0580
(206) 775-1130



Mission 150 *and You*

What is Mission 150?

Mission 150 is a cooperative effort among churches and individuals to send a special issue of the *Founders Journal* to every Pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1995.

Why do this now?

1995 is the 150th anniversary of the SBC. Much attention will be given to our origins in denominational promotions. This special issue of the journal will take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity by clearly demonstrating that our Southern Baptist heritage is firmly rooted in the doctrines of grace.

How much will this cost?

To send a free copy of the journal to each of the 38,000 pastors in the convention will cost \$50,000.

Why not include seminary professors, missionaries and others?

We definitely will, if the financial resources are available.

How much money has already been given?

Over \$35,000 in gifts and pledges has come in.

How can I help?

In 3 ways: 1) Pray-for those who will be writing and editing the articles; for the provision of financial resources; for those who will receive the journal; and for those who are administrating the project. Above all, pray that God will own this effort to the praise of His glory and grace. 2) Give-any amount that you can. Every \$12.50 will send the journal to 10 pastors. 3) Encourage other concerned individuals and churches to join you in praying and giving.



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