



Benefits of the Controversy

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The Founders Journal

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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*](#).

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Benefits of the Controversy

Tom Ascol

Every age of church history has seen controversy. Every Christian group that has survived very long has had to endure the trials of disagreements and internal contentions. It is inevitable. Jesus said, "In this world, you will have trouble," and "offenses must come." The inevitability of controversy, however, does not make it any less distasteful. No true Christian enjoys it. Yet, along with the perils, there is always some value to be extracted from religious disputes. This is certainly true in the struggle which attended Southern Baptist life over the last 14 years.

The October issue of the *Baptist History and Heritage*, the official publication of the Southern Baptist Convention Historical Commission, took a creative assessment of the recent SBC controversy. An editorial and two articles addressed the question, "The Southern Baptist Convention, 1979-1993: What Happened and Why?" One of the articles was written by Richard Land, as a representative of the conservative perspective. Stan Hastey, representing the moderate view, wrote the other article. Each was followed by a response from the other side.

The articles confirm a number of conclusions which many have already reached about the controversy. First and most obvious, the controversy has been driven, on the conservative side, by genuine theological concerns. For the first several years the conservatives' claim that they were contending for the inerrancy Scripture was regarded as dubious by many moderates. As the 1987 Peace Committee Report asserted, however, the main issue is theological.

Second, the controversy has been overtly political. The conservative strategy from the outset was to gain the presidency of the convention. Specific, open campaign efforts were begun to elect presidential candidates who would in turn make conservative appointments. The increased politicization of this process disillusioned many.

Third, zealous excesses on all sides have too often resulted in sins of speech and conduct. The sins that result from controversy are sometimes worse than the sins which made it necessary. As one old Puritan put it, "The temptations that come with controversy are more dangerous than those of wine and women." Sadly, this truth has been illustrated often over the last 14 years.

Regardless of how one assesses the controversy which has resulted in a conservative resurgence in leadership, there is one significant benefit which is not apparent on the surface. When all is said and done, however, it may ultimately prove to be the most valuable consequence of all. What I am referring to is the renewed interest in our Southern Baptist heritage. Both conservatives and moderates have appealed to our history in order to justify their positions.

Charges and counter charges of forsaking our heritage have been lodged by spokesmen from both sides. Now, this is a healthy development. Not that there is anything inherently good in swapping accusations. Rather, what is beneficial is that faithfulness to our Baptist heritage is judged important enough to use as an argument for one's convictions. Once this practice is accepted, the task of bringing that heritage to light becomes vitally important.

Until recently, the clearly reformed dimensions of our Southern Baptist past have been largely overlooked and ignored. This, however, is changing. Take, for example, the articles cited above from *Baptist History and Heritage*. Writing for the conservative perspective, Dr. Richard Land, Executive Director-Treasurer of the Christian Life Commission, quotes Sydney Ahlstrom when he notes, "This Southern Baptist tradition, pre-dating the convention by at least half a century, `was distinctly Reformed, a modified version of Westminster.'" [\[1\]](#) Furthermore, Land claims that the Abstract of Principles of Southern Seminary "testifies to an impressive body of theological consensus among Southern Baptists in the period from 1859 to 1874." [\[2\]](#)

Even more striking is Bill Leonard's response. He criticizes Land's use of Boyce, Broadus, Manly, Jr. et al as

representatives of a high view of biblical inerrancy. Acknowledging that the SBC has "nineteenth-century Calvinist-Reformed roots," Leonard writes,

The people he [Land] cites as paragons of inerrancy could not separate their doctrine of Scripture from their Reformed theology. That included such dogmas as limited atonement, unconditional election, and irresistible grace, doctrines which may create serious problems for consensus among the highly Arminianized (though inerrantist) segment of his "grass-roots" constituency. How can one tout the inerrantist quotes from the founders and ignore the rest of their Reformed theology? For them, it was surely a package deal."^[3]

Both Land and Leonard are right. The distinctively reformed heritage of the Southern Baptist Convention is easily observed in the writings of the founders. It was indeed their reformed theology which informed their view of scripture. That God sovereignly superintended (through inspiration) the writings of fully responsible men presents no difficulty to those who already recognize the absolute sovereignty of God and the absolute responsibility of man in salvation. In fact, the reformed perspective is best suited to maintain a consistent appreciation of the tension between the Bible's genuine divinity and humanness.

It is tremendously encouraging to see both conservatives and moderates acknowledging the theological rock whence we are hewn. The Southern Baptist Convention, with all of its great missionary endeavors, theological institutions, benevolent efforts and social concerns, traces its roots back to and finds them firmly planted in the doctrines of grace.

The celebration of our theological heritage is not at all a denigration of Scripture. Tradition, no matter how glorious, never takes precedence over the written Word of God. Our burden for theological renewal should not be misconstrued as a desire to return to the 19th century. Nor are we calling for a return to the views of our forefathers simply because they are our forefathers. Rather, we celebrate our heritage with the conviction that, on the key themes of our faith, the understanding of the founders was scripturally accurate. And, as we have often asserted, if it was true in the 19th century, it is true today, because truth does not change.

The rediscovery of historic Southern Baptist principles is a great benefit of the inerrancy controversy. May these principles once again become widely known, and may they stoke the fires of a reformation which is born directly out of the Spirit-illuminated teachings of God's Word. Anything less will be a denial of our heritage.



¹"The Southern Baptist Convention, 1979-1993: What Happened and Why?" *Baptist History and Heritage*, October 1993, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 4.



¹"The Southern Baptist Convention, 1979-1993: What Happened and Why?" *Baptist History and Heritage*, October 1993, p. 3.

²*Ibid.*, p. 4.

³"A Moderate Responds," *Baptist History and Heritage*, October 1993, p. 14.



Martin Luther on Preaching

"Cursed be every preacher who aims at lofty topics in the church, looking for his own glory and selfishly desiring to please one individual or another. When I preach I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people. I don't look at the doctors and masters . . . but at the young people and children. It is to them that I devote myself. Take pains to be simple and direct."



Lordship, Justification and Sanctification

Ernest Reisinger

We continue our studies on the theological differences involved in the Lordship controversy. In the last issue we considered some of the major differences in respect to the doctrine of repentance. In this, our 9th study, we will be considering some of the important differences in respect to the doctrine of sanctification and its inseparable relationship to justification. (Though justification and sanctification cannot be separated they must be distinguished.)

Justification and sanctification are the two most important doctrines of the Christian faith and a visit to any communion service should prove this point. Every time we observe the Lord's Supper we are brought face to face with justification and sanctification.

The New Covenant

In any communion service the minister always refers to one or more of the following passages of Scripture and they all speak of the new covenant.

And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:27, 28).

And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed on behalf of many" (Mark 14:24).

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20).

In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25).

What is the new covenant? If you do not know then these passages do not make sense to you--they have no meaning to you.

Thousands of preachers all over the world hold a little cup of grape juice or wine before a congregation and say, "this cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Many of those, to whom it is said, have no idea of what the new covenant is.

Someone may be saying, "Well, is that all so important? We know that the juice symbolizes the blood of Christ."

Let me underscore just how important that covenant really is. Spurgeon said, "The covenant is the marrow of divinity."

1. 2 Cor. 3:6 tells us that ministers are "able ministers of a new covenant."

2. Heb. 12:24 tells us that "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant."
3. Mt. 26:28 teaches us that forgiveness of sins is bound up with the new covenant: "for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness of sins is tied to the new covenant--that makes it very important.
4. Bound up in the covenant are these two most important doctrines in the Christian faith - justification and sanctification.

Therefore, we must conclude:

1. What ever Christ purchased were benefits and blessings of the new covenant. He was the mediator of the new covenant.
2. Whatever the apostles preached, as the gospel of Christ, was the gospel of the new covenant: "able ministers of the new covenant."
3. Whatever sinners received when they were savingly called by the Spirit, they were brought into the benefits and blessings of the new covenant.

If believers are brought into the benefits and blessings of the new covenant just what are these blessings? Well, they are the two greatest and most essential blessings of the gospel, in fact, all other blessings of Christianity, and there are many, flow from these two foundational blessings.

The Two Greatest Problems

But before we identify these two foundational blessings, let us address a prefatory question: What are man's two greatest problems?

Some might say, "My husband is my problem," or, "my wife," "my children," "my parents," "my school teacher," "my health," "my finances," or "my environment."

No! No! All of these miss the point. You have two greater problems. What are they?

1. A bad record in heaven because of your sins of thoughts, words and deeds.
2. A bad heart on earth which produced the sins which causes the bad record in heaven.

Jeremiah, in his prophesy of the new covenant, (Jer. 31:31-34) points out the answer to these two problems: "I will make a new covenant . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts." (a changed heart). Also, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (a new record). A New Testament passage that underscores these two things is Heb. 10:16, 17: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." (new record, new heart. See also Heb. 8:10-12.)

Well, then, what are man's two basic problems? He has many but they all have their beginning in these two: a bad record in heaven and a bad heart on earth.

Therefore, what are the two basic blessings of the new covenant?:

1. A changed record in heaven by the blood of Christ. That is justification.

2. A new heart on earth by the power of the Spirit. That is sanctification begun.

This new covenant is one covenant with two inseparable aspects.

The Relationship of Justification to Sanctification

Now, I want to make one of the most important statements that I will make in this study. The working of God's Spirit in the heart on earth and the cleansing of our sins by Christ's blood in heaven are inseparably joined together in the application of God's salvation. Justification and sanctification always go together in salvation.

Therefore, any attempt to place the basic act of submission to Christ subsequent to conversion is to cut the living and vital nerve of the new covenant and to pervert biblical Christianity.

To separate these blessings that God has joined together in one covenant is to bring dishonor on the blood that was shed to enact the entirety of the new covenant.

Oh, how I wish every one who heard these words, "This is My blood of the new covenant" would know, experience and understand the blessings and benefits of that covenant.

The non-lordship teaching would not agree with the fact that the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of sanctification are inseparably joined together in the application of God's salvation. They make sanctification optional and therefore a justified person may or may not be sanctified. This means that it is not necessarily a holy making gospel. The non-lordship teachers would not agree with Robert Murray M'Cheyne when he 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."

If God ever gives you salvation be sure holiness will be a part of it. If Christ does not wash you from the filth of sin, you have no part with Him. Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash you not you have no part with me." It is a strange kind of salvation that does not have a desire after holiness. Such a salvation was never purchased by the blood of Christ. "He shall save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21)." Not *in* their sins, but *from* their sins.

Thomas Adams, an old Puritan said, "They know not Christ who seek to divide His blood from His water, and they shall fail in justification in heaven that refuse sanctification on earth."

There are many reasons why this should concern every serious Christian. Why is it so important?

1. It involves true conversion.
2. It should concern us because of the many self-deceived church members, who have walked aisles, troubled our baptismal waters, signed the decision cards, have their names on our church rolls, yet give no biblical evidence of Holy Ghost regeneration. Can a serious person look at the present day church members and not be moved with holy concern and compassion?
3. It should concern us because it would put repentance back in the evangelistic message.
4. It would put a death blow to all these second work of grace teachings, such as, Higher Life, Crucified Life,

and Deeper Life. It is the wrong view of sanctification that teaches, "let go and let God."

5. It would end the Lordship controversy over view of the Savior that makes Jesus not much more than a hell insurance policy and makes obedience optional.

Dr. Ryrie, in his book, *So Great Salvation*, on page 150, writes, "But what of sanctification? No where does it appear in Paul's list in Romans 8:29,30 - only predestination, calling, justification and glorification - why is sanctification not included? Could it be that Paul did not want to base our guarantee, our ultimate glorification on our sanctification?"

This is a commentary on the non-lordship view of the relationship between justification and sanctification. I could use his reasoning with the passage in 1 Cor. 1:30 "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Notice that justification is not mentioned. Why? I suggest that if sanctification is mentioned justification is understood to be inseparably joined to sanctification, likewise, in Rom. 8:29,30 where justification is mentioned but not sanctification. Why? Because where justification is there sanctification will be also. It is the same with faith and repentance. Where there is true belief there will always be evangelical repentance and where true repentance is mentioned there will always be saving faith (see *FJ* 10, 11).

The serious error of the non-lordship teaching is that it does not see that justification and sanctification, like faith and repentance, are inseparably joined together in the application of God's salvation.

Justification and sanctification will always be found in a true Christian. The Bible knows nothing about a justified man who knows nothing about sanctification begun. Nor does the Bible know anything of a sanctified man who has not been justified.

The Bible says, without holiness (sanctification) no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). This is not referring to some sort of positional sanctification which every believer possesses. This passage (Heb. 12:14) is referring to personal holiness which every believer is duty bound to pursue.

Let me put it one more way: no one will attain to a right standing before God by pursuing holiness. Likewise, none who fails to pursue holiness will see God's face in peace. Please note, I said, pursue, only One has attained--He was perfect.

Conclusion

In closing this study let me emphasize again: though justification and sanctification cannot be separated in the application of God's salvation they must be distinguished. As faith is not hope, yet faith and hope are held together by a permanent bond, required to be joined rather than confused, so it is with justification and sanctification--they cannot be separated but must be distinguished and held together by a permanent bond.

The non-lordship teachers have a repentance and a sanctification that is not necessarily a part of God's salvation. The non-lordship teachers are not only out of step with historic Christianity, but out of step with the analogy of faith and the analogy of Scripture as rules of interpretation.

The answer to question 77 in the Larger Catechism should be very helpful at this point.

Q. 77. *Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?*

A. Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued; the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

Let me sum up this study with a statement of John Owen, the prince of the puritans:

"There is mention in the Scripture of a two-fold sanctification, and consequently in a two-fold holiness. The first is common unto persons and things, consisting of the peculiar dedication, consecration, or separation of them unto the service of God, by His own appointment, whereby they become holy. Thus the priests and Levites of old, the ark, the altar, the tabernacle, and the temple, were sanctified and made holy; and, indeed, in all holiness whatever, there is a peculiar dedication and separation unto God. But in the sense mentioned, this was solitary and alone. No more belonged unto it but this sacred separation, nor was there any other effect of this sanctification. But, secondly, there is another kind of sanctification and holiness, wherein this separation to God is not the first thing done or intended, but a consequent and effect thereof. This is real and eternal, by the communicating of a principle of holiness unto our natures, attended with its exercise in acts and duties of holy obedience to the holy law of God" (*Works -Vol. 3, p. 370*).



Truth's Enemies

"The arch-enemy of truth has invited us to level our walls and take away our fenced cities. He has cajoled some true-hearted but weak-headed believers to advocate this crafty policy . . . `Away with creeds and bodies of divinity!' This is the cry of the day. Ostensibly, it is reverence for the Bible, and attachment to charity which dictates the clamorous denunciation; but at the bottom it is hatred of definitive truth. . . . As Philip of Macedon hated the Grecian orators because they were watchdogs of the flock, so there are wolves who desire the destruction of our doctrinal formularies, that they may make havoc of the souls of men by their pestilent heresies."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Justification and Works

"While our works are naught as a ground of merit for justification, they are all-important as evidences that we are justified."

Robert L. Dabney



Spurgeon's Message of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

Pt 2: The Extent of the Atonement

[Tom Nettles](#)

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In 1854, Spurgeon's first full year as a pastor in London at the New Park Street Chapel, the commentator Albert Barnes published an article in the *Church Advocate* entitled "A Limited Atonement Not to be Preached." Barnes claimed that "there is nothing that more cramps the powers, fetters the hands, and chills the heart of the preacher, than such a doctrine." The characterization he gave of the preacher who would dare do such is singularly unflattering: "one so clearly and thoroughly tainted in such a form of systematic theology, so fettered and bound by authority, and by the manacles of a creed so wholly under the influence of a theology derived from a past age" who himself is frozen by the doctrine he preaches.

Barnes considered it so contradictory to every aspect of gospel ministry and so contrary to the purest feelings of a sanctified person and so cold and withering in its influence on the heart that "men will not preach it." Should it be found to be an essential part of the gospel message, warm hearted ministers "would abandon preaching altogether, and engage in farming, or teaching, or the mechanic arts--anything; rather than have their better feelings subjected to constant torture." Barnes, moreover, found the doctrine so objectionable that he said not only that it *should* not be preached, but it *could* not be preached.

It is found in ancient books on divinity, written in a sterner age, and when the principles of interpretation were less understood, and the large and liberal nature of the gospel was less appreciated. It is petrified in certain creeds maintained by the church--made firm, like fossil remains in a transition state, when ancient opinions were passing to a more liberal form. It is taught in a few seminaries, where men feel themselves constrained to repress the warm emotions of their own minds to reach conclusions which they can scarcely avoid. But the doctrine is not preached, except when the heart is cold and dead. It is not preached when the soul is on fire with the love of men, and when the cross, in its true grandeur rises to view. It is never preached in a revival of religion--a proof, not feeble, that the doctrine is not true.^[1]

Barnes could not have known that the warmest, most powerful preacher of the nineteenth century could and would preach the doctrine that Barnes found so unthinkable, and preach it without bringing a chill either to himself or his hearers. Spurgeon believed that the fountain of Christ's blood was open and would cleanse every sinner who came to it. He felt no more inhibition to invite sinners to this fountain than he did to call on all sinner's to repent and believe the gospel. Both effectual calling and effectual, or limited, atonement are doctrines of grace. Grace never serves as a barrier to anyone's coming to Christ nor to the freedom with which ministers may, indeed must, issue the gospel invitation.

Inability and Responsibility

Spurgeon labored to demonstrate the congruity between these two doctrines. The command to repent of sin and believe in Christ he preached as a universal obligation. He knew, however, that "there are some who will deny this, and deny it upon the ground that man has not the spiritual ability to believe in Jesus." His reply emphasize that "it is altogether an error to imagine that the measure of the sinner's moral ability is the measure of his duty."

Universal responsibility merely accentuates the divine prerogative in grace for no one would ever "believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so." "Faith is too celestial a grace," Spurgeon argued, "to

spring up in human nature till it is renewed." Christians must "rise above the babyhood" which truncates these doctrines and should "not find it difficult to believe faith to be at the same time the duty of man and the gift of God."[\[2\]](#)

Because of that, where belief exists, regeneration exists. "To believe in Jesus is a better indicator of regeneration than anything else, and in no case did it ever mislead." By the same token, to believe in Jesus is the sure indicator that Jesus has died for you. Faith does not consist in believing that Christ has died for me in particular. Rather, it is coming empty-handed but wholeheartedly to Christ himself who has died for sinners. In trusting in Him alone one discovers that Christ has died for him in particular and with effect. Spurgeon said,

"I do not believe in Jesus because I am persuaded that his blood was shed for me, but rather I discover that his blood was shed especially for me from the fact that I have been led to believe in him. I fear me there are thousands of people who believe that Jesus died for them, who are not born of God, but rather hardened in their sin by their groundless hopes of mercy. There is no particular efficacy in a man's assuming that Christ has died for him; for it is a mere truism, if it be true as some teach, that Jesus died for everybody. On such a theory every believer in a universal atonement would necessarily be born of God, which is very far from being the case. When the Holy Spirit leads us to rely upon the Lord Jesus, then the truth that God gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him might be saved, is opened up to our souls, and we see that for us who are believers, Jesus died with the special intent that we should be saved. . . . Merely to conclude that Jesus died for us on the notion that he died for everybody is as far as the east is from the west, from being real faith in Jesus Christ."[\[3\]](#)

The Open Fountain

Spurgeon pulls on this same cord of unity within the doctrines of grace in his sermon entitled, "The Open Fountain." One will never participate in this fountain which eradicates sin and uncleanness unless one knows himself to be a sinner; but if there "be here one really guilty, one who feels his sin to be deserving the wrath of God;" one who mourns his sin, confesses his guilt, and feels himself undeserving and unworthy--"then you are the man to whom the mercy of heaven is this day freely proclaimed."

In this context then it is no wonder that Spurgeon could proclaim the saving efficacy of the death of Christ with unbound enthusiasm and generosity. Because the fountain is open "there is no barrier on account of uncircumcision or natural descent." We learn also that it is "personally approachable by us" and dependent on no mediator or intercessor other than the Lord Jesus himself. Also "the fountain is not barred by any amount of sin which we have already committed." No effectual barrier is created by the consideration of our inward sinfulness nor are there any "demands in the gospel requiring you to prepare yourself for it before you come."

Spurgeon increases in boldness as he goes vowing to push any theologian into the fountain who would bar it from any sinner who is coming. "There cannot be anything in theology, nor in nature nor in heaven, nor earth, nor hell, which can shut what God declares to be open. If thou wilt to be saved, if thou comest to Christ, believing in him, there is nothing to shut up the fountain of life or prevent thee from being cleansed and healed. If there be any shutting and forbidding it is thy heart that is closed, and thy pride which forbids."[\[4\]](#)

It is clear that Spurgeon absorbed and implemented that line of thought developed and defended with such clarity and strength by Jonathan Edwards concerning the relation between natural abilities and moral abilities. The whole scheme of salvation springs from the holiness of God. Total depravity must be defined in terms of God's holiness and the sinner's antipathy toward that conglomerate attribute. "Your condition is not only your calamity, but your fault," Spurgeon insisted. The sinner must be not only pitied but blamed for he is without a *will* for what is good; "Your `cannot' means `will not,' your inability is not physical but moral, not that of the blind who cannot see for want of eyes, but of the willingly ignorant who refuse to look."[\[5\]](#)

Election determines that we should be holy and without blame; effectual calling and the new birth produce the new creature who reflects true righteousness and holiness; perseverance implies that God's seed remains in us and we cannot continue in the direction of sin but must be holy; the cross draws sinners to it, if they are drawn savingly, because of its just verdict on their sin and its crushing display of the holiness of God. It is, therefore, the holiness of the cross that is a barrier to a sinner's embracing it, not the fact that in God's secret purpose he has determined that it shall certainly be saving in its effects for the people he has given to the Son.

Spurgeon was overwhelmed with the lavishness of God's grace in the atonement, and though he spoke clearly of its limited nature, it was always in the context of the certainty with which God carried out his purposes of grace. It is infinite mercy that a holy God would condescend to save sinners! And it is amazing that He should do it in such a public, promiscuous fashion so that none can complain that it was done in a corner.

The certainty of the salvation that God accomplished gave endless material for Spurgeon's clear affirmations. "There is a fountain opened in the atonement, by which the offence rendered to God's honor and dignity is put away. What if we have sinned, yet the Lord has punished that sin in the person of his own Son, he has thus fulfilled his threatening, and proven the truth of his word. In Jesus Christ, therefore, the guilt of those for whom he was a substitute is put away consistently with the righteousness of the great Lawgiver."[\[6\]](#)

That "righteousness of the great lawgiver" in conjunction with the substitutionary and propitiatory aspects of the atonement were compelling to Spurgeon. They bore infinite comfort to Christ's people and Spurgeon would not have his listeners come short of any spiritual comfort legitimately theirs. Since Christ has suffered the penalty for sin and has made recompense to divine justice, if indeed the Lord Jesus has been condemned for us, then "While justice survives in heaven, and mercy reigns on earth, it is not possible that a soul condemned in Christ should also be condemned in itself. If the punishment has been meted out to its substitute, it is neither consistent with mercy nor justice that the penalty should a second time be executed."[\[7\]](#)

Clearly a favorite hymn of Spurgeon's was the Toplady number entitled, "Whence This Fear and Unbelief?" He quoted it at length or in part on several occasions and was particularly attached to this verse.

If Thou has my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine;
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.[\[8\]](#)

He wanted no one to lose the ineffable mystery of the fact that God himself had died for man the creature's sin. And that this rendered such a certainty to its efficaciousness, and a limitlessness to its possibilities, that it would be impossible that it could not atone for any sin anywhere.

Never could justice be more gloriously exalted in the presence of intelligent beings than by the Lord of all submitting himself to its requirements. There must be an infinite merit about his death: a desert unutterable, immeasurable. Methinks if there had been a million worlds to redeem, their redemption could not have needed more than this `sacrifice of himself.' If the whole universe, teeming with worlds as many as the sands on the seashore, had required to be ransomed, that one giving up of the ghost might have sufficed as a full price for them all. However gross the insults which sin may have rendered to the law, they must be all forgotten, since Jesus magnified the law so abundantly, and made it so honourable by his death. I believe in the special design of our Lord's atoning death, but I will yield to no one in my belief in the absolutely infinite value of the offering which our Lord Jesus has presented; the glory of his person renders the idea of limitation an insult.[\[9\]](#)

For this reason Spurgeon used the nomenclature of limitation sparingly and with positive explanation in his exposition of the atonement. He preferred to speak of effectuality and certainty. But just as strongly, his consideration of "limitation" as an insult led him to reject the concept of universal atonement. In fact he was glad to use the term "limited" if one set the idea of "general" opposite it, for such a limitation was really no limitation at all.

Now, beloved, when you hear any one laughing or jeering at a limited atonement, you may tell him this. General atonement is like a great wide bridge with only half an arch; it does not go across the stream: it only professes to go half way; it does not secure the salvation of anybody. Now, I had rather put my foot upon a bridge as narrow as Hungerford, which went all the way across, than on a bridge that was as wide as the world, if it did not go all the way across the stream.[\[10\]](#)

The Efficacy of the Atonement

The infinite dignity of Christ's person demanded the utter success of his aim in giving himself up for the sake of sinners. Spurgeon's refusal to admit any inadequacy to Christ's death meant especially that the efficacy of the atonement was not subject to man's will. The final arbiter of that infinite transaction which was ordained in the decrees of eternity cannot be the will of a mutable, temporal, fallen, rebellious creature.[\[11\]](#)

In addition to the dignity of the person who is substituted for us, two factors render this transaction certain and efficacious. First, it was the intent and purpose of God to save a people for himself by the sacrifice of his son. "We declare that the measure of the effect of Christ's love, is the measure of the design of it. We cannot so belie our reason as to think that the intention of Almighty God could be frustrated, or that the design of so great a thing as the atonement, can by any way whatever be missed of."[\[12\]](#)

Without blasphemy it is not possible to conceive that Christ has failed in his purpose. "It is quite certain, beloved," Spurgeon reasoned, "that the death of Christ must have been effectual for the removal of those sins which were laid upon him." We cannot conceive that Christ has died in vain. "He was appointed of God to bear the sin of many," and it is "not possible that he should be defeated or disappointed of his purpose. Not in one jot or tittle will the intent of Christ's death be frustrated. Jesus shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. That which he meant to do by dying shall be done, and he shall not pour his blood upon the ground in waste in any measure or sense."[\[13\]](#) If he has been condemned, those united to him in his death as indicated by their faith in him shall in no wise come into condemnation.

This statement of purpose leads to the consideration of the second point which contributes to the certain, unailing efficacy of Christ's death. That is, that in some sense Christ's sufferings were quantitative. Spurgeon paints a vivid mental picture of the intensity and exact justice of Christ's substitutionary sufferings for his people and suggests that they suppose a man who has passed into hell. Then they suppose that his eternal torment should all be brought into one hour and multiplied by the number of the saved, a number past all human enumeration. Is it possible now to imagine what "a vast aggregate of misery there would have been in the sufferings of all God's people, if they had been punished through all eternity?" Then we should remember that "Christ had to suffer an equivalent for all the hells of all his redeemed." Christ gave God "the satisfaction for all the sins of all his people, and consequently gave him an equivalent for all their punishment."[\[14\]](#)

In speaking on "The Determination of Christ to Suffer for His People" Spurgeon considers why Christ refused the cup of wine mingled with myrrh. One of the reasons was that such a refusal was "necessary to make the atonement complete." If Christ had drunk from the cup the atonement would not have been valid because he would not have suffered "to the extent that was absolutely necessary." Christ suffered "just enough, and not one particle more than was necessary for the redemption of his people." The ransom price would not have been paid had the wine cup taken away part of his sufferings. Had as much as a grain of his suffering been mitigated "the atonement would not have been sufficiently satisfactory." Insufficiency to any degree would have condemned his people to perpetual despair. The utmost farthing must be paid; inexorable justice cannot omit a fraction of its claim. Christ must go the whole length of suffering.[\[15\]](#)

Not only did Spurgeon see great comfort and assurance in the doctrine of limited atonement, he found the doctrine of universal atonement to be positively destructive of the moral attributes of God. In his *Autobiography* Spurgeon gives a "Defence of Calvinism" and includes a particularly striking defense of limited atonement.

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say, "It is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men; it commends itself," they say, "to the instincts of humanity; there is something in it full of joy and beauty." I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with falsehood. There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were lost before he died. If the doctrine be true, that He died for all men, then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world, for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins. Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed, for we have His own testimony that there is a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very person who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with His blood. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption. To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain. To imagine for a moment that He was the substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of Divine justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever be imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good![\[16\]](#)

This concept of a definite atonement encouraged Spurgeon in his evangelism also. When Jesus used the word "Many" he indicated a certainty in the efficacy of his death. But just as surely he meant "many." Not just a few, but "many." "Let us expect to see large numbers brought within the sacred enclosure," Spurgeon encouraged his congregation. Because the blood is shed for many, the masses must be compelled to come in. While a group of half a dozen converts gives us joy why should we not expect half a dozen thousand at once! "Cast the great net into the sea," Spurgeon challenged and to his young men he urged, "Preach the gospel in the streets of this crowded city, for it is meant for many." And to personal workers he said, "You who go from door to door, do not think you can be too hopeful, since your Saviour's blood is shed for many, and Christ's `many' is a very great many." No one shall ever trust Christ in vain or find the atonement insufficient for him. "O for a large hearted faith," he cried, "so that by holy effort we may lengthen our cords, and strengthen our stakes, expecting to see the household of our Lord become exceeding numerous." Isaiah 53, a crucial passage in Spurgeon's exposition of limited atonement, rivets fast the reality of "many." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his righteousness shall he justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." "Dwell on that word `many,'" Spurgeon argued in his recapitulation, "and let it nerve you for far-reaching labours."[\[17\]](#)

Conclusion

Spurgeon's gift of oratory was exclusively his and one would be foolish to feel either capable or obliged to duplicate it. His commitment to the centrality of the cross and all of its connections, however, is property common to the Christian ministry. We are under commission to emulate that as far as is warranted by Scripture.

First, we should cultivate his passion for the cross. Even in reading his sermons one can feel his intensity for the passion of Christ, it swallowed him up. He exhausted himself verbally, emotionally, and physically seeking to transfer the mental and spiritual power which emanated to him from the cross and energized his ministry.

Second, we must not be intimidated by the modern discipline of biblical theology so that we fail to see the centrality of the cross in all of Scripture. Spurgeon is right in seeing it permeate the entire corpus of divine revelation and in treating it as the cohesive factor. Even if occasionally he takes disjointed verbal cues to engage in applicatory allegory, his overall vision is true and will do much to infuse biblical evangelistic intensity into our study and our communication.

Third, we should learn to explore the doctrine of assurance from the ground of the cross as Spurgeon did. The death of the Word incarnate and the purpose of God to save sinners by that death should be immense encouragement to any person whose distress comes from a true picture of the lethal nature of his sin. Spurgeon would remonstrate endlessly and exhaust his creative and applicatory powers to show a "coming sinner" how firm and infallible his assurance might be once he grasps the reality that he who spared not his own son will certainly give us all things.

Fourth, we should learn to see in the cross the historic tangible presentation of the eternal purposes of God in the eternal covenant. Predestination, election, effectual calling--these are hidden from our view and are mysterious in their operation. The cross, though its power, wisdom, and dimensions are mysterious and unsoundable, is nevertheless the place that all the metaphysical aspects of redemption become immanent. It is there that we can say, "These things were not done in a corner."

Fifth, we can learn from Spurgeon the evangelistic power of definite atonement. His sermons surge and vibrate with the positive and optimistic application of the wondrous doctrine. Many who believe the doctrine seem secretly to believe that one should be forbidden to give public display of it. Spurgeon obviously meditated strongly on that biblical truth and found it to be a power with saints and sinners alike. It arms the evangelist with certainty and every sinner with hope. God saves sinners and will not bring this world to a close until the efficacy of Messiah's death has been fully satisfied.

Sixth, we can learn to apply the cross to sanctification. Because by the cross we are bought with a price and are no longer our own, we may be sure that God will be glorified in the bodies of his people. He will transform their minds, recreate them in true righteousness and holiness, and mortify their flesh just as surely as he has rescued them from its dominance.

"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).



¹Albert Barnes, *The Church Advocate*, 8.10.1854, p. 119.

²"Faith and Regeneration," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 17:133-144.

³*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴"The Open Fountain," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 17:45. If one examines the language of Spurgeon carefully and sets it in the context of the hyper-Calvinist conflict of the 18th and 19th centuries, from which he himself received an abundance of criticism, Spurgeon's threat to push a theologian into the fountain makes perfect sense. Spurgeon appears to have in mind the kind of representation of the doctrines espoused by Lewis Wayman in 1738:

And last of all, only suppose the thing to be, that all who hear the Gospel should believe in Christ for life and salvation, according to what this author [Matthias Maurice] tells us is their duty; would there not, probably, be millions in the world believing in Christ for life and salvation, to whom God hath not given eternal life in Christ, and who shall never obtain salvation by him? (*A Further Enquiry After Truth*, p. 19).

In this context both the freeness of salvation and the unity of all aspects of the doctrines of grace become most relevant.

⁵"For Whom Did Christ Die?" *Metropolitan Tabernacle* 20:493.

⁶"The Open Fountain," *Metropolitan Tabernacle* 17:39.

⁷"Jesus, the Substitute for His People," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 21:159.

⁸"The Living Care of the Dying Christ," and "Christ's Plea for Ignorant Sinners," *P & D* pp. 170, 477; Also "Particular Redemption," *New Park Street*, 4:136.

⁹*Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, 1:348.

¹⁰"Particular Redemption," *New Park Street*, 4:135, 136.

¹¹Spurgeon describes the Arminian position this way:

"The Arminian holds that Christ, when he died, did not die with an intent to save any particular person; and they teach that Christ's death does not in itself secure, beyond doubt, the salvation of any one man living. They believe that Christ died to make the salvation of all men possible, or that by the doing of something else, any man who pleases may attain unto eternal life; consequently, they are obliged to hold that if man's will would not give way and voluntarily surrender to grace, then Christ's atonement would be unavailing. They hold that there was no particularity and speciality in the death of Christ." "Particular Redemption," *New Park Street Pulpit*, 4:130.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Jesus the Substitute for his People," *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 21:160.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁵"The Determination of Christ to Suffer for his People," *P & D.*, p. 467.

¹⁶*Autobiography*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962) 1:172.

¹⁷"The Blood Shed For Many," *P & D*, p. 43.



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Authoritarianism in The Church

Steve Martin

The Problem

A tragic and dangerous trend can be observed in some contemporary evangelical churches. While standing against the lawlessness and anti-authority mood of this generation, some conservative, Bible-believing churches have drifted into deadly authoritarian tendencies. This sad phenomenon is increasingly becoming publicized and well-documented (see suggested reading list at the end of this article).

Why is this happening? What kind of attitudes engender authoritarianism in a church? Whose fault is it? What can be done about it?

Before proceeding any farther, some definition is in order. For the purposes of this article, "authoritarianism" is defined as an abuse of the authority given by Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit and revealed in God's Word which the office holders of the local churches are to exercise. It has been my observation that this abuse of authority usually takes on one or both of the following forms.

First, the sin of authoritarianism exists when pastors and other office holders speak with binding authority where God Himself has not spoken in His written Word. If God has not pronounced on the subject, it is a usurpation of the Creator. A pastor may rightly proclaim "Thus saith the Lord" when preaching against idolatry, adultery, greed, marrying an unbeliever or any other violation of the express commands of God. That is his duty and God help the man who "cuts and trims" texts to speak smooth words to his flock. But the pastor has no warrant from Christ to speak with the binding authority of God's *imprimatur* to issues upon which the written word of God is silent.

Second, the sin of authoritarianism exists when pastors and other office holders usurp the Lordship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people by deciding the will of God for them where Scripture is silent. Church officers may not declare the will of God for God's people on such choices as one's career, choice of Christian mate, choice of lawful employment, place of living, schooling they attend, etc. without becoming surrogate deities. Flocks of sheep with paralyzed decision-making faculties reveal exposure to shepherds who played God with them. Thus the sinful tendency revealed in John Milton's wry observation ("New presbyter is but old priest writ large") returns to haunt churches. And even more sadly, some idol-worshipping sheep love it to be so.

Causes of the Problem

Surely the cause of authoritarianism and idol-worship is sin. But what sins in particular need to be recognized, repented of and mortified by the Holy Spirit's help? Five sins of the shepherds and three sins of the sheep come to mind. Taken together they produce churches with a powerfully sinful pathology which dishonors Christ, smothers the sheep, inflates the shepherds and hinders the work of God.

Sins of the Shepherds

Today's authoritarian shepherds seem to fall prey to one or more of the following sins as they exercise their ministry.

1. *Idolatry*: the sinful desires of some men to always be in control, especially the control of the lives of God's sheep. Such sin is but a thinly veiled attempt to play God. And make no mistake, such men become as God to their flock. It is hardly surprising that pastors with such a sinful proclivity will eventually attain near papal infallibility in their churches. Paul's command to Titus in 2:15 ("rebuke with all authority . . . do not let anyone despise you") is their key verse in practice if not by precept. Usually the idolatrous sin of control is accompanied by a wrathful, berating, anxiety-producing spirit as the authoritarian leader will tolerate no loose atoms in their personal universe of control (cf. Ezek. 34:4c; Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:3). Such self-deified pastors produce congregations which are more afraid of displeasing the pastors than they are of displeasing their Lord and Savior. Men who must be "God" to their people ironically lose the authority of God's Holy Spirit by their sin and God-given authority is replaced by fleshly control maintained by manipulation, intimidation, verbal coercion and ecclesiastical pulling of rank (e.g. "Now, I'm your elder and you had better be . . . or else . . . "). The Apostle John's description of Diotrephes seems to fall under such a category of sin (3 John 9-10).

2. *Prayerlessness*: authoritarian pastors do not rely upon prayer for their people as a primary instrument ordained by God for the edification of His people. As a result, they verbally coerce and bully their people to conform. They seek to rely only on the "arm of flesh" of their own strong-arm tactics. Such fleshly shepherds expend far more labor scolding, threatening, manipulating, confronting and "exercising discipline" to get their people to conform to their wishes than they do laboring before the throne of grace for the Spirit's supernatural work of conforming saints to Christ's image (2 Cor. 3:18). The Word of God makes plain that every shepherd's arsenal does include the rod and the staff. But it also emphasizes the importance of intercessory prayer for the growth of the people of God (cf. the recorded prayers of our Lord's and the Apostle Paul on behalf of their people). Sadly, many pastors beat their sheep because the weapons of the flesh are more comfortable in their own hands than the weapons of the Spirit. The Apostle James warns about men whose lives are strewn with the wreckage of their carnal leadership and links it to their prayerlessness (James 3:13-4:3).

3. *Unbelief*: many office holders do not believe the declarative statements and promises of God in the Scripture. They do not believe that Christ is Lord of His true church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. They do not believe that God the Holy Spirit is also Lord of the church, conforming God's people into His image. They do not believe God the Father will exercise His Fatherly love and discipline over the lives of His adopted children. In their unbelief, following hard on the heels of their own prayerlessness, authoritarian shepherds develop the mind-set, "If I don't make them do this, they won't!" or "If I don't make them do this, who will?" They really do not believe that the Holy Spirit will superintend His people and convict them of sin when away from the shepherd. Even as Christian parents must entrust their Christian teens unto the Lord as they drive the car down the driveway or leave for the university, so pastors must learn to trust God the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of His people when they are out from under the watchful gaze of their local under-shepherd. Sadly, such pastors create a "police state mentality" in their congregations where everyone's life is carefully monitored and scrutinized for any deviation, and "sins" are to be reported to the church leadership immediately.

4. *Lack of love for the sheep*: shepherds in ancient Palestine walked ahead of their sheep, leading them on and calling them by name to follow them to green pastures and cool waters. The sheep followed because they had come to know the shepherd's faithful care and loving concern for their own well-being. It was the shepherd who slept in the doorway of the sheepfold to guard the flock at night. It was the shepherd who fought the bear, the lion and other predators. It was the shepherd who protected the flock from the thief. It was the shepherd who left the 99 to go looking for the lost sheep. It was the shepherd who gently led the nursing ewes and their young.

Such imagery surely depicts a sacrificial love for the sheep on the part of the shepherd. But times have changed for many shepherds in the West. "Sheep ranchers" now employ barking dogs and shepherds in helicopters to drive the frightened, harassed and bewildered sheep ahead of them. The sheep in such contemporary operations are motivated

out of fear of the snarling bite of the shepherds' seemingly omnipresent dogs and the incessant bellowing of the shepherd himself over the loud-speaker in his helicopter overhead.

Sadly, in too many congregations today, sheep are driven by a man more like a callous meat packer than a loving shepherd. Many modern shepherds don't even like sheep; it's just their business. In fact, men are encouraged not to get too close to the sheep or emotionally involved in their lives and problems. So many pastors don't actually like (let alone love) their people. They promote witnessing and world evangelization, they just don't like to be around individual sinners. One need only read of our Lord's loving compassion for the sheep-like sinners of His earthly ministry (Matt. 9:36, 14:14; Mark 1:40-41, 10:21) and recognize how far removed that is from many pastoral examples today. Sacrificial shepherd-love which lays down its life for the sheep has been replaced by loveless sheep management by uncaring sheep ranchers.

5. *Pride*: at root, all the above mentioned sins of office bearers stem from an inflated sense of their own importance. John Calvin once shrewdly observed that from the king on his throne to the scullery maid in the kitchen, each of us harbors a kingdom in our hearts. Such is the sinful pride of the human heart. Creatures saved by the sovereign grace of their Creator and put into service of their fellow creatures may all too quickly forget that they are but clay pots made out of "proud dust" (to use Thomas Watson's apt expression). We must be reminded that we hold our office by our Master's pleasure, to do His bidding, and to further His Kingdom. Humble shepherds never forget from whence they have come nor to whom they must give an account.

Humble shepherds look to God's sheep with compassion; prideful shepherds look down upon the sheep with scornful contempt for their weaknesses and failings. Humble shepherds remember that even the Great Shepherd of the sheep patiently endured the misunderstanding, scolding and fleshly rebukes of His sheep (cf. Matt. 16:22; Mark 4:38; 1 Peter 2:21-23). Prideful shepherds however react to every real and perceived slight to their "august personage." How unlike their Master! Shepherds must learn that they cannot be conformed to the image of Christ as longsuffering and forgiving unless they are "long bothered" and wronged. Pride, however, responds to the irritations of sinners with anger. An angry leader is a prideful leader.

The Sins of the Sheep

Sad to say, but the sheep themselves contribute their own sins to the creation of authoritarian ministries. Having talked with several wounded sheep, it has struck me how seldom they have seen their own culpability. They are quick to foist all blame upon their harsh taskmasters. But petty dictators cannot reign without the consent of their craven lackeys and servile subjects. There are at least three sins which they contribute to the sinful pathology of authoritarian churches.

1. *Idol-worship*: sinful flesh is not content with the reality of the one true God. It wants to fashion an idol in place of the invisible God who is spirit. There is always the temptation to act like the Jews of Saul's time who wanted a human leader they could see, rather than the unseen God (cf. 1 Kings 8:1-18). But God shares His glory with no man, not even "called men" who are promoted to demi-god status by their adoring flock. Such flocks too often find for themselves a man who likes to lord it over the flock. Thus a sinfully symbiotic relationship is complete with an abusive authority figure coupled to his idol-worshipping minions (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

2. *Fear of man*: too many sheep are more gripped by the desire to please a man or more fearful of displeasing a man than they are of pleasing or displeasing Almighty God (cf. Prov. 29:25; John 5:41-44). They spend their time dancing around their idol, expending their energies catering to his every whim and seeking to avoid his wrath. Men pleasers have little stomach for potential conflict. They would never dare ask their exalted leader a question, no matter how

respectfully. They would never ask for the biblical basis for a decision made by the leadership, even when that decision seems to fly in the face of clear Scriptural teaching. Such men-pleasers crave the smile of a man's countenance more than the smile of God and they will not speak the truth in love (Eph. 5:15).

3. *Unbelief*: too many sheep do not believe that God still guides His people today through the means of prayerful meditation upon the Word of God and the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is easier for the flesh to suspend the use of spiritual faculties and scriptural means of guidance for the short-cut of asking the leader to determine God's will and make the decisions all the time. It is not surprising that sheep who put men on pedestals, who cravenly serve men and who do not believe that God still guides will fall prey to abusive shepherds. It is only by the grace of God that it doesn't happen more than it does (Even good men know the temptation to become surrogate "gods" for their people and must stoutly resist the temptation to always answer questions of guidance and decision making.). Perhaps, some of the time, authoritarian shepherds are God's chastening rods on the backs of idol-worshipping, men-pleasing, unbelieving sheep who will not have God to be their God but who substitute a mere creature in His place (cf. Is. 2:22; Ps. 33:13-19).

The Cure for Authoritarian Shepherds and Idol-Worshipping Sheep

The call of the Word of God to sinners is always "repent and believe." So it is to the office holder who has exercised his office in sinful ways. So it is to the member of a local church who has sinfully preferred looking to puny men rather than Almighty God.

Shepherds convicted of the sins of authoritarianism should humbly come to the Word of God and prayerfully meditate upon those great passages which delineate the work of the man of God and warn against abuse (Gen. 18, Ex. 32-33; Lev. 10, Ez. 34; Matt. 23; the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Pet. 5, *et al*). Repentance involves confession. Public sins must be publicly confessed; private sins must be privately confessed.

Pastors guilty of authoritarianism would do well to preach to themselves and their flocks an extended series on 1 Corinthians 13, Philippians 2, the Sermon on the Mount, or John 10. They should not be afraid to humble themselves to the dust before God and their people, for our God does not despise a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). He comes close to the lowly and meek and raises them up. The true people of God will not despise "a good man who is good enough to recognize that he is not good enough." Pastors must seek to cultivate the habit of intercessory prayer on behalf of their people. They must pray for great grace to resist the persistent temptation to play God for people. They must learn to redirect potential idol-worshippers to the living God who delights in His Bride but who will not share her with another. They must also pray for the sheep that they would not become embittered but would be forgiving of the pastor's sins. Shepherds who have been guilty of not loving their flocks sacrificially must pray for God the Holy Spirit to produce the loving fruit of the Spirit in their hearts, and with a compassion bred of selflessness, they must cultivate works of loving concern even when the initial "feeling" of love is not present. God will not long withhold His Spirit from that man who pleads for grace to love the flock as Christ does and who begins regularly giving himself to them in sacrificial acts of service. Men who humble themselves before the Lord will be shown what they need to see and shown afresh how the blood of Christ cleanses even the stains of pastoral sins.

Sheep convicted of worshipping idols, pleasing men and disbelieving God must also face their sins and repent. Such repentance would include study and meditation upon God's Word on idolatry, men-pleasing, and the sin of unbelief. Sheep must learn to look to the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Weak faith grows best upon a diet of regular study and a believing hearing of the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Sheep must also learn from God's Word that enduring real or imagined conflict is not the worse thing in the world and that the worst that a man can do to you is nothing compared

with what Almighty God can do. Sheep must be encouraged to learn in more depth that they are believer-priests with equal access to God and the same merit of Christ as their title deed for prayer. Sheep who walk with God, who know His Word and believe it and obey it are not likely to fall prey to tin gods, clay idols and fleshly shepherds.

May God give His people grace to see their sins and repent of them. We dare not glory in our current condition and slothfully ignore the deplorable state of much of Christ's Church. We must first judge ourselves that we may not be judged. And we must plead the purposes and promises of our Father in begging Him for the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Additional Resources to Help You See the Problem and Turn From It

Portions of the Word of God speaking directly to shepherds should be memorized and regularly meditated upon. A pastor or elder would do well to commit to memory Ezekiel 34:1-16; John 10:1-18; 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 2 (whole chapter); 1 Peter 5:1-11.

1. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Three Treatises*, Concordia; a clarion call of the Reformation against the abuses of the authoritarian Church of Rome.
2. Jerram Barrs, *Shepherds and Sheep*, Intervarsity Press; evaluation of the Pentecostal shepherding groups of the late 70's but sadly still applicable to abuses of authority today.
3. Roger O. Beardmore, ed. *Shepherding God's Flock*, Sprinkle Publications; a treasury of good counsel and teaching on biblical oversight, Should be read and reread by every office holder. Roger Beardmore's chapter is especially pertinent to the question at hand.
4. Harold L. Bussell, *Unholy Devotion*, Zondervan; sub-titled "Why Cults Lure Christians", it examines the problem of manipulative leadership in church groups and gets at some of the thorny issues faced not only by heretical cults but also orthodox but authoritarian churches.
5. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, Banner of Truth; an invaluable and unique contribution on the authority which the Holy Spirit gives to the churches and to His servants. Cites the attempts of evangelicals the past 200 years to recapture their lost authority without recourse to the Holy Spirit. The Puritans would take note of their loss of church and pastoral power: "The Holy Spirit has a controversy with us. We must stop and see what we have done to grieve or quench Him." Today we prefer to look to conferences, special speakers and events, jazzed-up entertainment, and the exercise of raw ecclesiastical power. Readers who know their church history will wince in recognition.
6. Clifford Pond, *Only Servants*, Grace Publications Trust; shows the leader as servant of Christ and His people. Refreshing reminders.
7. Ron Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*, Intervarsity Press; sadly chronicles the abuses of power that are wielded in the name of our Lord Jesus.
8. Erroll Hulse, ed. *Our Baptist Heritage*, Reformation Today Trust; wise and biblical counsel on facing and dealing with problems affecting Reformed Baptist and indeed the whole body of Christ. Should be pondered

and discussed among church leadership groups.

9. Donald A. Carson, *A Call To Spiritual Reformation*, Baker; moving and enlightening examination of Paul's priorities through the lens of his prayers for the churches. By a master exegete and teacher who has a heart for His Lord and His Church. Would make an excellent focus for a church leadership and a sermon series.
10. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, Banner of Truth; masterful exposition of I Corinthians 13 with powerful application to us today. Pastors who need to learn more about love should long dwell here.
11. A. W. Tozer, *The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches Today*, Christian Publications; just what it says! Tozer believed that Christ's servants often try to wield more authority in local churches than Christ Himself did through His Word. Hits painfully close to home for too many churches.



News

Founders Fellowship Breakfast at Orlando Convention

During the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Florida a special breakfast has been planned to provide an opportunity for fellowship among all who are interested in the theological and spiritual renewal of our denomination. On Wednesday morning, June 15, a full breakfast will be served at the Peabody Hotel across the street from the convention center. We will hear from some special speakers and get an update on encouraging happenings in the SBC. Cost for the breakfast is \$11.50. Reservations should be made by contacting Pastor Greg Elmquist, Orlando Grace Church, P. O. Box 940305, Maitland, FL 32794, (407) 660-1984. Early reservations are encouraged. Space is limited.

New Member Added to SBFC Planning Committee

Hal Wynn, pastor of the Northside Baptist Church in North Fort Myers, Florida, has recently become a part of the Founders Conference Planning Committee. Hal is the founding pastor of Northside where he has served for more than 13 years. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity at Luther Rice seminary. He is very active in the Royal Palm Baptist Association of churches and has served both as Moderator and President of the Pastors' Conference. Hal and his wife, Mamie, have one daughter, Lisa.

Foreign Mission Board Assesses Converts

The October/November issue of *The Commission* magazine reports that as many as half of those who have been baptized on foreign mission fields drop out of church membership within two years. In response to this, "FMB researchers and field personnel are tailoring discipleship programs to help preserve church membership in areas where the drop-out rate is high." The FMB is to be commended for addressing this problem. Researchers should not overlook the possibility that part of the problem may lie in some of the evangelistic methods which have been employed in such areas.

1994 Founders Conference Set New Record

Over 270 registered for the 1994 Southern Baptist Founders Conference which met in Birmingham, Alabama last July. Many of those who traveled from all over the United States and several foreign countries were first-time attenders. Dr. John MacArthur, the keynote speaker, preached three heart-stirring messages which were drawn largely from the theme of his latest book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*. These evening sessions were opened to the public and drew large crowds from the surrounding communities.

The other messages were of a high caliber, as well, and wonderfully addressed the theme, "The Minister and the Ministry." Cassette tapes of the sermons are available through Dick Cook of Sound Word Associates, P. O. Box 2035 Michigan City, IN 46360.

Mission 150 Update

At the beginning of 1994 Mission 150 is experiencing the evident blessing of God as demonstrated in prayerful and

financial support. Boosted by \$6000 in gifts and pledges that were received at the Founders Conference in Birmingham, the goal of \$50,000 is already within reach. Many have petitioned us to consider sending the special sesquicentennial issue of the journal not only to pastors, but also to seminary and college professors as well as denominational employees and missionaries. If additional gifts are received which will allow for the expense of this enlarged vision, then it most certainly will be attempted. Earnest prayers for this undertaking are urgently solicited. Pray for the writers and editors. Pray for those who will receive the journal. Pray that the financial pledges which have been made will be fulfilled. Pray for the resources to send the journal to SBC educators, employees, and missionaries.

Founders YOUTH Conference

The Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference is scheduled for June 27-July 1 at Panama City Beach, Florida. Dr. Don Whitney, pastor Glenfield Baptist Church of Glen Ellyn, IL and Mr. Jim Elliff, Director of Christian Communicators Worldwide, will be speaking on the theme "Real Discipleship: Who Are You Following?" Cost is \$175.00 per person. A \$60.00 registration deposit is due by April 1. Mail registrations to: Conference Secretary, P. O. Box 5321, Shreveport, LA 71135-5321; 318/798-7088 or FAX 318/798-7086.



Book Review

The Supremacy of God in Preaching by John Piper; 1990, 119 pp. Baker Book House, \$6.95

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

John Piper, senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, has a well-deserved reputation of being an excellent writer who is able to treat weighty theological subjects in practical, devotional way. His *Desiring God* and *The Pleasures of God* demonstrate not only the relevance but also the absolute necessity of good theology for vibrant, spiritual discipleship. Christians need to think rightly in order to believe and live rightly and one great reason for the modern plague of shallow Christianity is the failure to think deeply about biblical truth.

Searching out the sources of this atheological *Zeitgeist* will inevitably, at some point, expose the superficiality of much modern preaching. It is this crisis in the pulpit that *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* addresses. This book, however, is not a critique. Rather, it is a positive effort to demonstrate that the one great burden of biblical preaching is to declare God in all of His glory and greatness.

To preach the supremacy of God means "that the dominant note of preaching be the freedom of God's sovereign grace, the unifying theme be the zeal that God has for His own glory, the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God and the pervasive atmosphere of preaching be the holiness of God" (20).

After establishing his main thesis (with special consideration given to the place of the cross and the role of the Spirit), Piper spends the second half of the book using the life, theology and preaching of Jonathan Edwards as paradigms from which to draw many specific, practical guidelines for modern preachers.

This book, which grew out of the 1988 Harold J. Ockenga Lectures on Preaching at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and the 1984 Billy Graham Center Lectures on Preaching at Wheaton College, was voted "Book of the Year" by *Preaching Magazine*. Piper has done a great service to evangelicals with this small book. It ought to be read by everyone whose responsibility it is to preach.

