



Is There an Answer?

Issue 38

Fall 1999

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Cover Photo:

Centennial Park Sunday Worship Celebration in Atlanta, Georgia, June 13, 1999.

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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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Is There an Answer?

Tom Ascol

In the last two years the United States has witnessed an epidemic of deadly school shootings across our land. Each one has shaken us. Images of blood-splattered classrooms and tear-stained faces are etched into our nation's collective memory. Unfortunately, such scenes have become tragically familiar to us.

The methodical savagery of the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado marked a new low in American mass murder. The events which took place on that fateful day of April 20, 1999, made us wonder how much worse things could get. The law of diminishing returns seems to be at work in these senseless killings: if the shock-effect of single shots in a school has been diminished, let's up the ante by laying siege to a campus with an array of weapons which includes booby-trapped explosives. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold took pop wickedness to a new level.

After Columbine, the nation seemed almost afraid to exhale, wondering where the next outbreak of mass violence would occur. It only took a month for news to come of another school shooting, this time at Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia. The close of the school year allowed for a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, it was short-lived. On August 10 Buford Furrow entered the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles and began shooting randomly, wounding three young boys, a teenage girl and a 68-year-old grandmother working as a receptionist.

Then, the late night news on September 15 reported yet another shooting, this time in a Southern Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas. Larry Ashbrook interrupted a youth rally at Wedgewood Baptist Church with a barrage of gunfire and homemade bombs. This latest devastation, which left seven dead, brings another fresh reminder that the culture of death which we have created in our land over the last thirty years has incubated a relentless army of conscienceless killers.

We are being forced to face once again the age-old question of why. Why Littleton? or Springfield, or Jonesboro, or Paducah, or Los Angeles, or Ft. Worth? Why not here? Why these kids? Why not my kids? Why not me?

When such brutal displays of violence were anomalies in our society, they were easier to cope with. It was easy, and quite comforting, to believe that something unique to the setting or to the one pulling the trigger could explain the tragedy. "Rural communities are inherently more violent." "The killer had a history of violence." We would love to believe that these kinds of explanations could account for the increasingly frequent outbreaks of brutality which we are witnessing.

The human psyche desperately wants to explain away evil in ways that leave us convinced that we are not at risk. But after nearly a dozen such shootings in two years, one thing that is no longer being said is, "It could never happen here."

So is there an answer? Can we ever hope to get a satisfactory response to our haunting questions of why? Since Columbine we have heard much about the accessibility of guns, parental involvement, discipline in schools and the culture of violence as experts try to help us sort out the many issues involved.

But as helpful as the insights from sociology, psychology and biology might be, none of them can probe the real

depths of the problem. The whole history of man's inhumanity to man forces us finally to admit that there is a fundamental flaw in human nature. And that flaw is so deeply rooted in humanity that neither the social sciences nor the physical sciences can sufficiently account for it.

The Bible calls this flaw, sin, which is rebellion against our Creator. One of the great problems of our day is that we have greatly depreciated sin. We do not take it as seriously as we should. We have lost sight of the sinfulness of sin. Consequently, when we are confronted with unusually wicked crimes, as we are in Ft. Worth and Littleton, we have difficulty thinking clearly about them. In addition, failure to appreciate the root problem of human nature prevents people from recognizing the only solution which is available.

Is there an answer? That question moves our thoughts in two directions: First, is there an answer that explains what happened in Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, and Littleton? Secondly, is there an answer which provides a solution to the problem of senseless violence in our society?

On both points, the Bible says, "Yes!" There is an answer. Everyone who is even remotely interested in the state of our world today should be willing to consider what the Bible has to say about the source of violent outbreaks and, more importantly, what can be done to prevent them. Romans 3:9-26 describes both the source of and the solution to human wickedness.

Why do people do wicked things?

Sin has left us in a desperate condition

People do wicked things because they are under the dominion of sin. Paul asserts in verse 9 that "all are under sin." By nature, sin dominates humanity. Since the introduction of sin into the race, people are born under the power of sin. Jesus said, "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). Sin makes slaves of us all. This is true not only of blatantly irreligious people, but of religious folks, as well ("both Jews and Greeks," v. 9).

To be under sin is to be separated from God. And the further an individual or a society goes in sin, the more marginalized God becomes until finally it is as if he does not exist at all.

As Dostoyevsky wrote, anything is permissible if there is no God. What we are witnessing in our society is life without God. The two boys who murdered their classmates in Littleton were acting out the logical consequences of such a life. The gunman at Wedgewood Baptist Church was not a demon (though he and others who commit such atrocities are, no doubt, demonically influenced). He was a man--a fallen, sinful man. They were sinners. Just like all of us are. The very same sinful nature which led them to commit their heinous crimes exists within every man, woman and child. It is a frightening but undeniable truth.

Universal unrighteousness

Paul strings together various Old Testament passages to describe the universality and deadliness of sin's impact. In verses 10-12 he shows how sin has left us in a desperate condition.

Because of sin, everyone lives in a state of unrighteousness. "There is none righteous, no not one" (10). To be righteous is to be upright in thought and conduct. It is to be blameless before God, perfectly obedient to God's law at

every point. Righteousness is more than morality. A man may be judged to be a good, dependable fellow because he is outwardly moral. But to be righteous, a man must be Godly in heart and conduct. Since sin entered the world, there is no one who is naturally like that.

Consequently, the whole human race has "become unprofitable" (12). Paul employs a word which frequently was used to refer to sour milk in his day. The idea is that people have been spoiled; ruined from their original purpose. Sinners are not the way they are supposed to be. We were, in Adam, originally created upright. We possessed original righteousness. Sin ruined that and radically transferred the whole race into a condition of unrighteousness.

Darkened understanding

Further, sin has darkened our understanding. "None understands" (11). This thought is a deep insult to the intellectual pride of moderns. Advances in so many fields of study have convinced many that not only is modern man wise, he has finally "come of age." Science and technology are hailed as our new saviors.

No one can deny that we are witnessing an amazing increase of knowledge and understanding in these two fields of study, and with this increase have come many blessings. But when it comes to spiritual issues we have no more natural understanding today than we had five thousand years ago.

By nature, people still do understand spiritual truth. They are spiritually blind--ignorant. They do not understand the truth God. As in Athens of old, so in America and the rest of the world today: He is an "unknown God." As Calvin points out in the beginning of his *Institutes*, without a knowledge of God, there can be no significant knowledge of man.

There is no real apprehension of the dignity of mankind--that we are creatures made in the image of God. On the contrary, today we have highly acclaimed ethicist, Peter Singer, of Princeton University, arguing that parents should have one month after the birth of their deformed child to decide whether or not to have the child put to death, since a baby has "no human consciousness" for its first thirty days outside the womb.

How can such a view be enthusiastically advocated from such a prestigious university? Because they have no understanding of the innate dignity of humans! are different from every other creature because we have not only been made by God and for God, but have been made in some profound sense, like God. It is this revealed truth which renders heinous the murder of any person, regardless of age, and regardless of whether she is newly delivered from the womb, or still growing in the womb.

Along with mankind's dignity there is also tremendous misunderstanding about depravity. Sin has spiritually polluted the human race and place all of us naturally under God's impending wrath.

No one understands mankind's true delight. Modern man thinks that he is an expert at happiness. Just consider all of the instruments of pleasure which have been placed at his disposal! Yet, man without God does not know what real pleasure is. The Lord has a "river of pleasures" from which He satisfies the desires of all those who trust in Him (Psalm 36:7,8). True joy is found in knowing God through His Son, Jesus Christ. But people do not naturally understand that.

Neither do they understand the destiny of mankind. Every human being will spend eternity somewhere. The grave is not the end. Rather, it is the threshold for an eternal future. The Bible is painfully clear, that those without Jesus

Christ face eternal damnation under the wrath of God. Only those trust Christ as Lord will escape this wrath and will experience the eternal bliss of heaven. The modern obsession with youth and fear of death discourage serious thinking about eternity. "There is none who understands."

Misdirected affections

Along with our understanding, our affections have also been ravaged by sin. "There is none who seeks after God" (11b). The natural devotion to and longing for God which Adam and Eve had was destroyed by their disobedience to Him. This does not mean that people do not desire for a god. The human heart, as Calvin said, is an incurable idol factory. This partially explains the faddish spiritualities which propose to guide people in their quest for spiritual connectedness.

There will always be a hot market for "god-as-you-want-him-to-be" (personalized in testimonies as "god-to-me"), but it is the God who actually *is* with whom we have to do in the Bible. Sin has rendered that God unattractive to fallen men and women. No one desires that God. No one naturally wants to be in His presence or to render Him worship. Not that He is not innately beautiful and worthy of worship! But like a blind man facing a masterpiece work of art, a sinner has no spiritual eyes to see, no spiritual life to respond to the great and glorious God.

Enslaved will

"They have all gone out of the way" (12a). Sin has led us on a detour from the path which God has marked for us in His law. Isaiah compares sinful mankind to sheep, and says all of us have gone astray. "We have turned, everyone, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). As our Creator, God has prescribed a good way, the best way, for us to be and live. But sin has turned us all into rebels. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). People by nature run away from God.

"There is none that does good" (12c). Certainly people can do relatively good things. There are still philanthropists in the world and Boy Scouts continue to put a premium on doing good deeds. But the text here is speaking of absolutely good deeds. Even our best works are stained with sin, so that "all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God's sight" (Isaiah 64:6). A sinner cannot do anything which perfectly conforms to God's law. Not anything which we do is free from sin. The only good works which are acceptable to God are those which are offered to Him in Christ-- those which come to God from a heart filled with faith. Even then, the works in and of themselves are not good in an absolute sense. But, because of Christ's absolute goodness and righteousness, they are rendered acceptable in God's sight.

Sin leads us into despicable conduct

Not only has sin left us in a desperate condition, it also leads us into despicable conduct. Verses 13-17 read like a report of the character and lifestyles medieval barbarians. But he is speaking of no one special group, but of the whole human race as it has been infected with sin.

Destructive speech

"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (13-14). This language tends to offend our modern sensibilities, not because we have never heard such graphic descriptions, but because Paul applies it to "us" and not to some safely

distant "them."

Yet, honesty demands that we own our guilt as charged. The wonderful gift of human speech is regularly perverted to communicate wicked and perverse ideas. Choose any area you like--politics, education, religion, sexuality, ethics, etc.--and you can immediately find examples destructive speech in each. In some cases, whole industries have been constructed on such sinful communication. An old proverb says that the tongue is an instrument only six inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet tall. Sinful speech has a long, sad history of spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical murder.

Deadly actions

Verses 15 and 16 continue the theme turning from speech to actions. "Their feet are swift to shed blood" (15). Human history is one long story of bloodshed: war, insurrection, murder, abortion. Man's inhumanity to man has become so routine that unless a killing is peculiarly macabre it stands no chance of making the front page of the local newspaper. "Destruction and misery" (16) could well be the motto for the history of humanity.

"The way of peace they have not known" (17). Despite peace talks, peace summits, peace treaties, etc. our world is no closer to peace today than ever before. People cannot know true peace because they have turned away from the God of peace. Though cease-fires may come for a season, they are only temporary.

Sinful conditions and actions have an underlying cause

Why do people go on living in sin? Why do they violate even their own sense of right and wrong and continue to live in the despicable and deadly ways that the Apostle Paul describes? The answer is given in verse 18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." This is the explanation for every sinful action, no matter how great or small it may be.

People do not fear God. They do not believe that He is worth fearing. "After all, if God exists, isn't He a kindly, gentle sort of fellow? He is not hard to get along with, is He? Doesn't God love everybody just the same, no matter what? Isn't that His job?" They do not believe that they are accountable to Him. The biblical vision of God as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) is completely foreign to modern American conceptions of deity and in fact has never been properly appreciated apart from the revelation of His character in Scripture.

Someone has said that God created man in His own image and man has been returning the favor ever since. Consequently, if god has been domesticated into an indulgent, old gentleman, there is certainly no need to live in such a way that anticipates a coming day of justice and wrath which will be meted out from the divine throne.

Implications for Ft. Worth, Columbine, etc.

Romans 3:9-18 presents a rather despairing view of humanity, does it not? These verse provide a collage of human life "under sin" (v. 9). Sin is universal and pervasive. It affects every person and permeates every aspect of human personality. Sin degrades character, speech and conduct. And this is true of every single person in the world!

If you believe this then you will be able to assess the heinous crimes which were committed at Wedgewood Baptist Church, Columbine High School, and everywhere else in a very revealing light. The actions of Larry Ashbrook, Buford Furrow, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, as horrific as they are, all fit a pattern. They all vividly illustrate that life under sin which Paul describes in this passage. The restraints were taken off, and they gave vent to their sinful

natures.

The really scary part is that the same sin that erupted in murder and mayhem in them lives within the heart of every man, woman and child. By nature, everyone is a sinner--the kind of sinner who is described in Romans 3:9-18. This is a hard truth and many people do not want to face it.

At the trial of Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's top angel of death, Yehiel Dinur, a survivor of the Holocaust was called to testify. When Dinur confronted Eichmann he began to shout and sob uncontrollably, finally collapsing on the Israeli courtroom floor. Everyone assumed that his reaction was caused by the memory of the horrible atrocities of the death camps of Nazi Germany.

As Dinur later explained, that was not the reason for his emotional display. Rather, he had expected to find in Eichmann the personification of evil itself, as some kind of moral monster. Instead, as he gazed into Eichmann's eyes, he realized for the first time that sin and evil are the natural human condition. Dinur said, "I saw that I am capable to do this...exactly like he."

Because of sin, that is true of everyone. By nature we come into the world as depraved rebels, opposed to God and bent on destruction. Given the truth of Romans 3, it is amazing that this world is not a field of blood every day!

The picture is rather bleak. It is dark. But it is not complete. The truth about human sinfulness is the backdrop against which the truth about God's grace in Jesus Christ is revealed. The explanation for what happened in Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, and Littleton, can be found in sin. But the solution for sin and its consequences is found in Christ.

Is there a solution to sin?

When a jeweler wants to display the brilliance of a diamond, he places it on the blackest of velvets in order to provide a stark contrast. In a similar way, all that the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 3:9-18 is designed to provide a contrast for the display of God's incredible salvation which has been provided in Christ Jesus.

God set forth His Son

In verses 21-26 Paul gives the most profound statement of the gospel to be found anywhere in the Bible. In a succinct argument he makes clear that the only hope for sinners is in Jesus Christ. The following comments only touch on the outline of Paul's thought. For an excellent exposition of the passage, see Martyn Lloyd-Jones' comments from his *Romans* series (note especially his sermon entitled, "The Vindication of God" on verses 25 and 26).

Once he convincingly demonstrates that sinners have no righteousness in themselves, Paul goes on to describe the revelation of righteousness from God which comes to all who have faith in Jesus Christ (21-22).

What we as sinners could not do for ourselves, God has done for us. The righteousness which He requires, He provides. He has done this through the redemptive life and work of Jesus.

Through His death on the cross, Jesus became a propitiation in behalf of sinners (25). That is, He took the wrath of God upon Himself, thereby averting it from His people, that is, from all who would believe in Him. This act of propitiation vindicated God's justice for all time, demonstrating how He can be both "just and the justifier of the one

who has faith in Jesus" (26).

The justification which God provides for believers includes the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness. Sin no longer separates the Christian from God. All of his sins have been completely forgiven--they have been paid for by the once-and-for-all death of Jesus Christ. Also, the perfectly righteous life which Jesus accomplished is credited to the account of every believer, so that all who trust in Christ are accounted as righteous before God.

With this change in our standing before God, our justification, comes also a change in our nature. Christ not only works for us He works in us to make us into "new creations" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Though sin remains within a believer, its power has been broken so that it no longer reigns. Sin no longer sits enthroned over the Christian's mind, affections and will.

A Christian is able to love God, to pursue righteousness in life and to love other people. Romans 3:9-18 is an accurate portrait of what every person is by nature, It describes what a Christian once was, but not what he has now become by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The wonder of the gospel is that people can change! Rather, they can be changed by Jesus Christ. Adulterers can become pure in heart and body. Haters can become lovers. Murderers can become martyrs.

This is the hope for every individual sinner and for the sinful world collectively. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). And whenever that salvation is applied to individual believers, they are changed forever.

What can be done?

In the aftermath of each new public outbreak of violence and evil, many voices begin calling for action to "do something." Federal officials have promised to direct enormous amounts of money to "address the problem" of violence in our schools. Congress has declared its willingness to pass new legislation dealing with the issue. Psychologists have volunteered their services.

But none of these efforts, as noble as they might be, can really help. If the real problem is sin, and if the only solution to the sin problem is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if the Christian church have been entrusted with this gospel, then local churches and individual Christians are the only ones who are equipped to respond to outbreak of violence in our society in a genuinely helpful way. Society will change when people change. And people will change by the power of the gospel. It is therefore incumbent on those of us who know this gospel, who have already been changed by its power, to declare it with boldness and compassion at every opportunity.

The actions of Larry Ashbrook in Ft. Worth and Eric Harris Dylan Klebold in Littleton are inexcusable. These were wicked, godless people. But they were not unreachable! They were not beyond the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were sinners in need of the Savior. Those of us who know it must declare it with conviction: Jesus came into the world to save sinners--great sinners.

Who knows how many more Larry Ashbrooks there are out there? What can be done for them? Will some government initiative save them? Who will tell them of God's great grace in Jesus Christ? We who know Christ must make Christ known with urgency.

Conclusion

At the heart of our culture of death, of senseless violence, and of human horror is sin. No metal detectors, gun control laws, government programs or on campus police force can keep kids from killing kids. And no brick wall or security guard can protect daycare centers or churches. The problem is far too serious. The only hope that we have is for human nature to be changed, one heart at a time.

The good news is that God genuinely does change people. Jesus Christ said that he came into the world to give life, and to give it more abundantly. When the reality of that new life is experienced by greater numbers of our society, then our society will change.



Where Is God?

Al Meredith

[The following is an edited summary of the sermon which Dr. Meredith preached to his congregation, Wedgewood Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas, the Sunday after the shooting.]

What can be said when kids gather in a church sanctuary to sing and pray and a gunman comes in firing and their friends are shot? Why, why us? Why me? How could this happen? Who could have done such a thing? But the question that I've been asked most as I walk down the street and microphones are shoved in my face is, "Can you tell us where God is in all of this?"

If God really loves us, if God is all-powerful, why in the world did He let this happen? Why does God allow evil to seemingly abound in this world? Why Columbine? Why Paducah? Why Pearl? Why do a million and a half unborn babies have their lives snuffed out before they ever have a chance to breathe a breath? Why do children die of hunger daily around the world? Why is there pain? Why is there suffering? Why is there mental illness?

Then there are the everyday trials that most of us have trouble dealing with. The car breaks down. Why is it rush hour, Lord? The surprise quiz in history class. All of the questions finally boil down to this: "Where is God when we hurt?"

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Richard Halverson, who for years was chaplain to the Senate, once said, "Even the best preachers really have only two or three sermons." The one sermon of my life is this: God is in control and God loves us.

The confidence believers have

Let me share with you from the verse just a few thoughts. First of all, did you notice the confidence that believers have? "And we know." Generation-Xers as a whole want to know where the truth is; what is reality. They know that the world is phony. They know that computer-enhanced imitation of truth--virtual reality--means seeing is not believing anymore. What is the truth? I understand that the most popular television show of Generation Xers is the "X Files." In the opening scene of each episode the slogan comes out: "The truth is out there somewhere." It's out there. What can we know?

Our world has no answers in the face of life's problems. The world doesn't know what to do about world hunger, or about violence in American society. The world doesn't have a clue about AIDS or ecological problems. The world simply does not have the answers.

I'm a child of the '60s. I love Simon and Garfunkel, the poet laureates of the my generation. One of their songs says,

A mirror on my wall casts an image dark and small and
I'm not sure at all it's my reflection.
I'm blinded by the light of God and truth and right so
I wander in the night without direction.

That's what the world has to say. But God says, "And we know."

Christians are an exclusive subculture of confidence and calm in a world of relativism and ensuing panic. I have been told that as the shooter was coming into the auditorium he was cursing God and Christians and particularly Baptists. Somebody quoted him as saying, "You Baptists think you know it all." No, we don't know it all. But we do know this:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.
All other ground is sinking sand."

We know that God's Word is absolutely true from cover to cover. It is unshakable; it is certain. Some folks say, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." I've got news for you, if God said it that settles it whether you believe it or not. A world falls apart when you have nothing to build upon. And when Christians have crises like this we run to the Word of God for the assurance, for the hope which is the foundation of our lives. "And we know." It is the confidence of believers.

The Covenant of God

Notice, secondly, the covenant of God. "We know that in all things God works for good." That's one of the most precious promises in God's Word. I think it is causative. God causes all things to work for good. Folks, the warp and woof of your life is not just blind luck or chance. You are not a cosmic accident. It's not karma, it's not fatalism, it is not blind chance.

Hear me today: God is sovereign over every molecule in the universe. He is in control of the birds of the air. Do you remember Elijah by the brook Cherith? He was hungry, and had no way to get food. God sent ravens to feed him. God is in control of the fish in the sea. Do you remember rebellious Jonah running from God? When he was cast in the sea the Lord send a big fish He had prepared to swallow him. God is in control of the worms of the ground. How do you think God feeds the sparrow? He directs the worms to the place where they feed.

God's control extends to every event in our lives, whether good or bad. The Word of God says that my DNA chain was fashioned and formed in my mother's womb before I was ever born. It says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delighteth in his ways." God is the one who is in control. God is the one who is working everything for good for those who love Him.

The Comprehensiveness of the Promise

Do you notice the comprehensiveness of the promise? says, "in all things." You might want to say to me, "Oh come on, Al, what good can possibly come from all this?" Your argument is no with me. Take it up with God. He's the one who said "all things." I have lived long enough to see things which I thought were bad get worked for good.

As I walked from the car to the building, one of our church members, Shonda New, showed me a card which someone left by our sign. Here is what it said:

"I'm not sure exactly who I'm sending this to. I just felt like someone would receive it. I've never believed in God or any sort of higher being. I wasn't raised in a church. My fiancée and I agreed once that we should start going to church. It was something we were both interested in. One visit, now I can't get him to go back. He always has something to do Sunday mornings. Since Thursday night, I want to be a part of it. More than ever. Something like this happens to you in church and all you say is God has something bigger and better in store. It's all part of (God's) plan to draw American neighborhoods and families back together. Wow. How much confidence in your faith you have. I want that confidence. I want to trust my life to God. I want to believe there's a bigger picture. I'm so sorry for all the families. I'm so sorry for all of us that we don't all have the confidence you have. But I am now looking for it."

It was signed with a heart. Dear lady, if you are hearing this today and you signed this card, come and let us show you how you can give your life to Christ.

This tragedy that the devil wanted to use to stop the people of God has ended up strengthening us. Our church has never been more united. We've never been more praying. We have never been more singing. We have never been more in love with one another. There has been such an outpouring of love and support from all over the world, we can't say enough about it.

That's why we had to meet today. We will be stronger, we will be closer, we will be more united. We will have opportunities to share the love and grace of Christ to millions of people. Two days ago, we had more than 30,000 hits on our website. We put the plan of salvation there. It has been translated into Swahili, Chinese, Spanish and Russian and we hope to have it translated into all the languages of the world so that they can know why we have this hope.

The Conclusion of the Promise

God's covenant is that all things work together, and the conclusion of the promise is "for good." First of all, let me make clear what this does not mean. God's promise in this verse does not mean that all things are good. That's idiocy. That's foolish, that's naive, that's blind. Cancer is an evil thing. Famine is an awful thing. Crime and violence and divorce and death, they are horrible. They are obscene. They are bad, evil things.

But God says, "I can work them together for good." This does not mean that only good things happen to believers. Sometimes even Christian people, will mistakenly tell you if you are right with God you will be protected from all harm.

One of the promises that Jesus gave to His followers was this, "While you're in the world, you will have tribulation." Why are we surprised? Jesus said, "Don't be surprised, they persecuted me before they persecuted you. Do you think you are any greater than your Master?" Abel was murdered, Jeremiah was imprisoned and thrown in a well, Elijah was depressed. Saints were martyred. Even Jesus, the founder of our faith, was crucified. Bad things do happen to good people. But God works all these things together for good.

The most obscene, despicable, evil crime in all the world happened 2,000 years ago where they took the spotless Son of God, stripped Him naked, beat Him beyond description, nailed His hands and His feet to a cross, and put that cross on a hill for everybody to see. That is the most evil, awful thing that has ever happened. But out of that cosmic evil came my salvation and yours. And the cross of Jesus Christ gathers together believers from all over the world,

because God took that evil thing and through the power of the resurrection worked it for the salvation of all who will repent and place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And we rally around the cross.

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the prince of glory died,
My richest gain, I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

People have asked me, Can you forgive? I say, "Forgiveness is not easy." It was not my child who was shot. They were my precious friends and my church members. But no matter how hard it is, we must forgive. I hold no rancor in my heart for the family of Larry Ashbrook. I hope God will move in every heart in every member of this church and give the same attitude to us all. The poor man was deranged. His mind had been twisted by heaven knows what. He was in the power of the Prince of Darkness. But when I think of what God had to forgive in my life, that it was my sins that nailed the Son of God to the cross, if God can forgive me that, how can I not forgive anyone, anything?

The Condition of the Promise

I've got to point to one last truth, and that's the condition of the promise. Romans 8:28 is a verse that divides humanity. You see the promise is given to those who are the called, those who love the Lord. Let me ask you today, do you love the Lord? Is He your all in all? Jesus said that the evidence would be this: "If you love me, keep my commandments."

Are you numbered among the called ones? Who are the called ones? In Greek, the word is *ekklesia*, the called out ones. How does that word translate into English? "Church" There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity. I learned that this week. I need you. I need my fellow pastors. I need the family of God around the world to pray. We need each other. We desperately need each other. And the world will never believe that Christ is the Messiah until we are one.

I know that there are churches that abuse. If I were the devil, that is where I would concentrate my work. But there are also churches which, though imperfect, will love you and will welcome you. God is calling you to be part of a church that preaches the Word, somewhere, somehow, someday.

Are you part of the called out ones who love the Lord? Or are you part of the uncalled ones who love themselves? "Well, I don't hate God, preacher. I just want Him to leave me alone. I want to do my own thing." For you there is a promise. Nothing that ever happens in your life, no matter how good it is, is ever going to work out for good. The Word of God is clear: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." What death means in the Bible is not that you cease to exist. It means separation. Separation from good. Separation from God. Separation from one another. There will be plenty of people in hell, but if company is good, you will not have company. You will be absolutely alone. You once and for all will get your way: "God leave me alone!" And He will, forever.

Are you part of the called out ones who love the Lord or the uncalled who love themselves? If you are among the latter and you want to be part of the former, I am calling for you today. Jesus is calling for you today. He is saying, "Come to Me."

Are you a troubled saint? Is your heart broken so that you don't know how you are going to get through it? Listen to this story about Luther Bridges. He was a seminary graduate nearly 100 years ago. Just out of seminary, he was called to a new church. Like most seminary grads, this brother had five kids. He was spending a weekend with his

parents in Kentucky and that night the house caught on fire, burned to the ground. His parents escaped and he escaped, but his wife and five kids perished in the flames. In his desperation and depression he cried out to God, "O God, give me a song. Somehow give me a song to know that You are there." And God did. And Bridges wrote it down:

There's within my heart, a melody.
Jesus whispers sweet and low,
"Fear not I am with thee, peace be still,"
In all of life's ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go.

The world doesn't understand it, but those who know Him do. He is real. He is there. He's not asleep at the switch, and He loves us. I don't understand sometimes what God is doing. I said yesterday at one of the funerals, give up your right to the position of general manager of the universe. That position belongs to God alone. So let God be God. He is in control. And He loves us.



Spurgeon on Sorrow

Tacitus tells us that an amber ring was thought to be of no value among the Romans till the emperor took to wearing one, and then immediately an amber ring was held in high esteem. Bereavements might be looked on as very sad things, but when we recollect that Jesus wept over his friend Lazarus, they are choice jewels and special favors from God. Christ wore this ring. Then I must not blush to wear it.



Death

[Charles H. Spurgeon](#)

That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death.
Hebrews 2:14

[This is the morning reading for April 20 from Spurgeon's Morning and Evening devotional book. April 20th is the date of the Columbine High School shooting.]

O child of God, death hath lost its sting, because the devil's power over it is destroyed. Then cease to fear dying. Ask grace from God the Holy Ghost, that by an intimate knowledge and a firm belief of thy Redeemer's death, thou mayst be strengthened for that dread hour. Living near the cross of Calvary thou mayst think of death with pleasure, and welcome it when it comes with intense delight. It is sweet to die in the Lord: it is a covenant-blessing to sleep in Jesus. Death is no longer banishment, it is a return from exile, a going home to the many mansions where the loved ones already dwell. The distance between glorified spirits in heaven and militant saints on earth seems great; but it is not so. We are not far from home--a moment will bring us there. The sail is spread; the soul is launched up on the deep. How long will be its voyage? How many wearying winds must beat upon the sail ere it shall be reefed in the port of peace? How long shall that soul be tossed upon the waves before it comes to that sea which knows no storm? Listen to the answer, "absent from the body, present with the Lord." Yon ship has just departed, but it is already at its have. It did but spread its sail and it was there. Like that ship of old, upon the Lake of Galilee, a storm had tossed it, but Jesus said, "Peace, be still," and *immediately* it came to land. Think not that a long period intervenes between the instant of death and the eternity of glory. When the eyes close on earth they open in heaven. The horses of fire are not an instant on the road. Then, O child of God, what is there for thee to fear in death, seeing that through the death of thy Lord its curse and sting are destroyed? and now it is but a Jacob's ladder whose foot is in the dark grave, but its top reaches to glory everlasting.



The Global Priority of Our Glorious God: A Report from the 1999 Southern Baptist Founders Conference

Russell D. Moore

A record crowd listened intently as speaker after speaker recruited them for the most enviable place of ministry in the Convention: an unmarked foreign grave. Focusing on missions as "the global priority of our glorious God," pastors and church leaders were urged during the 17th annual Southern Baptist Founders Conference to make Christ known to the nations, even if that means being torched alive by an angry mob or imprisoned by a hostile government.

The Founders Conference is a national meeting of Southern Baptists who embrace the doctrinal heritage historically known as "Calvinism" or "the doctrines of grace" which was held by those who founded the Southern Baptist Convention in the mid-19th century. Conference organizers were said to be "shocked" by a record registration of nearly 600 for the July 20-23 sessions at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

John Piper, author and pastor of Minneapolis' Bethlehem Baptist Church, told the conference that he was on "a recruitment mission for martyrs" in light of the teaching in Revelation 6:9 that the triumphant Christ will return only after the full number of martyrs for the faith have been killed for His name. A passion for missions is inherently a part of Reformed self-identity, Piper contended, because Calvinists believe that God's glory as displayed in His sovereign mercy is the chief value in the universe. Piper promised unspeakable persecution for those whose passion for the supremacy of God's name propels them to lands where Christ is not named.

"In my call to missions and to completing the Great Commission, I have no rosy picture whatsoever to paint," Piper said. "Not because the devil is on a rampage, but because God designs that we deliver the sufferings of Jesus in and through our own sufferings."

Piper said that the Great Commission task is sidelined by pampered, persecution-free American Christians whose affections are indistinguishable from those of their unregenerate neighbors.

"One of the reasons we aren't given the time of day in America is because people look at us and they see that we have exactly the same fears, anxieties, and values they have and it isn't the embrace of danger and risk and AIDS and mockery and shame," he said.

Recalling Jesus' promise that His followers would be persecuted for godliness, Piper charged that American evangelicals have "domesticated" the word godliness. Christians will not be persecuted for not committing adultery or refraining from stealing while living out comfortable middle-class American lives, he noted, but they will face peril if they carry the gospel of grace overseas. Believers must cultivate an openness to martyrdom on the mission field by finding their heart's satisfaction in God.

"If you do not find satisfaction in God and God alone, you will count Him as an enemy when He hands you over to the sword," Piper said. "Get ready now not to get mad at God, but rather to say 'I'm being counted worthy to share in the sufferings of Jesus!'"

"May it happen soon that there are going to be tens of thousands who think totally differently about dying," Piper thundered. "Because they say 'To live is Christ and to die is gain. Let's go. Why should we live to age thirty when Jesus is on the other side of the sword!'"

A strategy coordinator for the SBC International Mission Board pleaded for pastors to consider whether the reason they may be unable to fan missions fervor in their churches is because they personally "haven't dealt with why they fulfill the Great Commission by not going." He argued that those questioning whether God is leading them to missions should realize that God's will for the lives of individual believers is not disconnected from His will for human history. That should spur Southern Baptists to set out for sectors of the world where the gospel is unknown, he said, with the confidence that God has published in Scripture His purpose for a worldwide harvest.

"Literally from Genesis to Revelation, God's intention is nothing less than to entirely reclaim this planet for His glory," he said.

Phil Roberts, vice-president for strategic cities at the SBC North American Mission Board, described the missions situation at home in terms of American infatuation with religious pluralism and trendy paganism. The "American pantheon" now includes skyrocketing numbers of Mormons, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Wiccans, Roberts said. The antidote to this increased American spirituality is not timidity, he counseled, but the establishment of "Baptist churches, New Testament churches, built on biblical principles, genuine spiritual discipline, and church discipline and encouragement and to trust God to lead us in doing all that we can in sharing the gospel with as many as we can."

Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, pointed to Baptist missionary heroes such as William Carey and Adoniram Judson as models for a Baptist vision for world evangelization for the 21st century. Baptist missionary zeal at its best has been committed to a sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ, the complete authority of Scripture, the contextualization of the gospel message, and holistic missions which refuses to jettison the evangel for social ministries.

Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, contended that missions-minded evangelicals should recognize that what is known about spiritual reality, including the fate of the unevangelized, is derived not from intuition or cultural spin-doctoring, but from God's revelation in Scripture. Therefore evangelicals cannot embrace the ideas of inclusivists such as Clark Pinnock and John Sanders who assert that those who have never heard the gospel may be saved apart from it. Dever took issue most specifically with Pinnock's 1992 book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, in which Pinnock denies the historic Christian belief that salvation is impossible apart from explicit faith in Jesus.

Evangelicals must respond to those who ask whether there might be another way of salvation besides explicit faith in Christ, Dever said. He asserted that general revelation is revealed in Scripture never to be sufficient for salvation. He argued that those who have never heard the gospel are without hope apart from the gospel.

"There does not seem to be for normally matured people in the Bible any saving excuse of ignorance," he said. "Indeed, God's general revelation of Himself as talked about in the beginning chapters of Romans would seem to have eliminated exactly that category."

Those who object to the necessity of self-conscious faith in Christ as "unfair" must reconsider the seriousness of the sinner's cosmic rebellion against his Creator, Dever said, citing numerous biblical texts which paint a dire picture of

the guilt of every human being.

"We can perhaps understand this a bit better if we stop thinking of sin as discreet transgressions against some list of 'dos and don'ts' at school," he asserted. "And think of our sins in more biblical terms as a rejection of God's authority, indeed of God Himself."

"Friend, do not reason with God to show how He must save you because He's made you," Dever counseled. "The only fairness we sinners can demand is hell."

Speakers warned that a church which caps off a year of biblically-anemic preaching and scandalous internal sin by mailing an envelope to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering can hardly consider itself a truly missions-oriented church. Instead, speakers pointed to a "vital connection" between the gospel vitality churches at home and the effectiveness of the Great Commission endeavor overseas.

"Passion for missions demands a commitment to reformation," said Tom Ascol, executive director of Founders Ministries and pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida. "What we must do is increase our passion to see the gospel carried to all peoples of the earth and out of that passion we must fully embrace the call of reformation at home."

Preaching from Romans 2:17-24, Ascol contended that the morally scandalous lives of so many American churchgoers has caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the nations as the world population equates Christianity with American moral chaos. Because the United States is so visible to the rest of the world, he concluded, those who love the unconverted abroad will seek to cultivate a biblical understanding of evangelism and church discipline in the congregations at home.

"How can we explain that our trinitarian God is Himself love when we can't even get along with one another?" Ascol asked. "Why believe that our Lord spiritually and morally transforms people if we who make that claim are no different from the world?"

Noting that millions of people languish on church rolls despite not having "enough spiritual impulse even to show up among the people of God" once a year, Ascol argued that the chief need for reformation is the recovery of the doctrine of the new birth. Such a recovery will necessitate bold preaching on the necessity of genuine repentance and faith for salvation both in the United States and around the globe.

"If we are wrong regarding what it means to be right with God and on what is required to get right with God, then we are poised not only to propagate spiritual confusion and disease at home, but abroad as we send people from our confused churches," he said.

Greg Wills, assistant professor of church history at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued that the practice of church discipline, though largely non-existent in contemporary church life, is a crucial part of the Southern Baptist evangelistic heritage. Recounting historical data from Southern Baptist churches in the nineteenth century, Wills contended that early Southern Baptists saw the purity of a regenerate church as necessary to the Great Commission task. Contemporary Southern Baptists who accept the doctrine of biblical inerrancy have no choice but to submit to its authority as they seek to evangelize the world, Wills said.

"Some will object that discipline will harm missions and evangelism, but since when was obedience to God an

obstacle to conversion?" Wills said. "How can we expect God's blessing on churches in deliberate and indifferent disobedience to his plain command?"

Bill Ascol, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, argued for the biblical necessity of church discipline in an exposition of Matthew 18. Recalling his early struggles with the issue in his first pastorate, Ascol warned church leaders of pitfalls while exhorting them to be obedient in pursuing the purity of the church. Noting that discipline is always exercised in grave concern for the spiritual well-being of the erring member, Ascol warned against those who would enact church discipline with a "gleam in their eye" of vengeance against another. Instead, Ascol asserted, church discipline should be lovingly administered by the congregation as a means of bringing the offender to restoration and recovering harmony within the fellowship of the church.

Ascol cited an article by theologian James Leo Garrett on the loss of discipline in Southern Baptist churches which appeared in the Kentucky *Western Recorder* forty years ago. Ascol noted that the article appeared just as a 13 year old William Jefferson Blythe IV was entering the sphere of influence of an Arkansas Baptist church. Blythe, who later took his stepfather's name Clinton, is now as President of the United States arguably the most famous Southern Baptist in the world. Ascol pointed to Clinton's public policies and scandalous personal behavior as one fruit of the loss of church discipline in the SBC.

"President Clinton is not the problem. He's a product of the problem," Ascol said. "Who is growing up in the congregation you pastor? What will you unleash on the world if Jesus tarries?"

Founders Conference organizers were said to be "shocked" by the record-breaking attendance at a conference which first met in a Texas hotel room nearly twenty years ago. Tom Ascol said that the conference leadership had heard from two or three dozen attendees who sense God may be calling them to evangelize unreached people groups in what missiologists call "World A," those places where the gospel has not yet taken root. Individuals and churches were urged to keep in contact with the SBC International Mission Board and North American Mission Board to explore possible avenues of missions service and to support missionaries with prayer and increased financial giving.



Suffering

God whispers to us in health and prosperity, but, being hard of hearing, we fail to hear God's voice in both. Whereupon God turns up the amplifier by means of suffering. Then his voice booms.

C. S. Lewis





The Work of the Gospel in Israel

[Baruch Maoz](#)

If their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the gentiles, how much more their fullness!... For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? Romans 11:12,15

The Past

The State of Israel's 50th anniversary is a testimony to God's faithfulness, who has kept his covenant not to "*cast away the descendants of Jacob and David*" (Jeremiah 33:25-26). Since the rebirth of the nation in 1948, thousands of Jews in Israel and around the world have come into the New Covenant established by their Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Isaiah 29:22-24).

A vibrant, thriving Israeli church is now in its second generation. However, the growth of the church in Israel has not been without problems. Congregations in the land are often isolated, lacking in mature spiritual leadership. Numerical advances have not always been matched by spiritual growth; a strategy is needed to help nurture the growing Jewish Christian community in Israel beyond the year 2000. Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) has such a strategy and, God permitting, is determined to work for its implementation.

At the heart of God's covenants with Israel is his self-giving commitment to them in grace apart from any merit of their own (Ezekiel 26:32). As his people, the church must reflect something of this covenant faithfulness (Matthew 5:48). CWI has pledged itself to the long-term welfare of the Body of Messiah in Israel. CWI intends to labor so that the next generation will be able to witness with a confidence and an authority born out of a deep acquaintance with the Scriptures (Colossians 2:2). Their greatest need is, indeed, to understand the Bible better and to be able to apply its message to every area of life (Psalm 1). However, there is a great dearth of solid Christian literature, no commentary on the whole Bible, few books on essential doctrines and literally nothing in terms of historic Christian biography.

CWI's work in Israel over the last 25 years hardly scratched the surface of opportunities available. There is a need to ensure that the new generation of believers in Israel is strong, vigorously biblical and evangelistically vibrant, as was the early church in Jerusalem whose wisdom and spirit could not be resisted. To those ends, CWI remains committed to a sensitive, bold, grass roots evangelism conducted by local believers in the country. The Mission praises God for the growing number of Israelis who have put their trust in Messiah Jesus and who now serve him and their people in the fellowship of local congregations. But CWI is greatly concerned over the growth of the Messianic Movement and its divisive influence in the church.

CWI has been working in Israel since 1925. From its very inception the Society was committed to a well-rounded and biblically orientated outreach to the Jewish people that includes evangelism, the encouragement of local congregations, biblical and theological education, and an active practical concern for people. CWI's work is doctrinally based, biblically informed and soundly committed to the historic Reformed confessions of the church.

CWI was active in the physical salvation of many Jewish children during the Nazi occupation of Europe. Following the establishment of the State of Israel, the Mission undertook to provide medical services to a fledgling State in

which there was great need. All along, staff spoke up for the gospel and worked in closely with the local congregation in Haifa, where the work was originally based. Dr. James Churcher, long time leader of the work in Israel, was so highly valued by the city in which he lived that he was granted the keys of the city.

In the past, CWI managed a Christian bookshop in Haifa, which has now been handed over to a local congregation. The Mission also spearheads the support of a number of schools for retarded children. This is done through the co-ordination of work groups that come from various parts of the world to help these needy children and by the purchase of selected equipment for the schools. That important task has also been handed over to a local congregation. CWI believes that it should support the growth of churches, not supplant them. That assumption lies at the heart of the organization's theology of mission.

The Present

The CWI offices are in Rishon LeTzion, close to the center of the country. Its work is conducted and led by a wholly indigenous body of believers who are active in their local churches. One of these churches works in close association with the Mission in a partnership role. Its staff shares the CWI office and some of its equipment, and the Mission shares the church's.

The backbone of CWI's work in Israel, executed under HaGefen Publishing, is the production of solid spiritual literature geared to help equip the Israeli church for its important task of glorifying God by the lives of the believers and by their active evangelization of their own people. Due to high production costs and the impossibility of importing books in Hebrew, all productions are heavily subsidized. Among these are: *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges, *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis, *Discovering God's Will* by Sinclair Ferguson and various evangelistic books, tracts and booklets. Other publications include a modern Hebrew hymnbook, the only full Sabbath School curriculum in Hebrew, an illustrated Children's Story Bible and two quarterly magazines. An important project now under way is a limited vocabulary, modern Hebrew version of the complete Bible for children with contemporary Israeli illustrations. The writing of a Bible commentary in Hebrew is also envisaged.

CWI is also engaged in evangelism, in promoting unity among local Jewish believers and in providing the churches with opportunities for co-operation in evangelism. The Mission's staff initiated the founding of Mishkan, the quarterly International Forum on Jewish Evangelism; Keren Tkuma, the national social aid fund; the National Intercongregational Fellowship, and the National Evangelistic Committee. We also played an active part in the founding of the Theological Education by Extension program in Israel and are active in various aspects of the local and national life of the congregations in the country. Its offices and some of its staff initiated the founding of and then, for an extended time, served the Messianic Action Committee which led the struggle against proposed legislation to restrict freedom of religion in Israel.

The Future

The work in Israel is now faced with new and exciting opportunities. The children's Bible should be completed within the next few years and many other valuable books await publication. CWI would also like to take a more active role in evangelism, accelerate the production of its magazines, produce a magazine for the younger age group and respond to repeated requests for help in various areas of need and opportunity around the country.

Doctrinal Basis

In its ministry to the Jewish people, Christian Witness to Israel maintains its unreserved allegiance to God's Holy and inerrant Word, the Bible. The Mission also affirms the historic Reformed confessions of the church, including the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Among other things, CWI's Basis of Faith requires that its missionary staff believe and teach faithfully the following:

That God is one God in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That God created man in his own image. By wilfully sinning against God, Adam fell into the sin and misery into which all children of Adam have been born, their natures have been corrupted and every aspect of their being is in bondage to sin. Therefore, Jews and gentiles alike are under the condemnation of God, prone to do evil and liable to eternal death from which they cannot be delivered except through the unmerited grace of God our Savior and by his own act of redemption.

That God has not left the world to perish in its sin but, out of his great love from all eternity, has graciously chosen an innumerable multitude of Jews and gentiles to be delivered from their sin and misery, and--of them--to restore his covenant kingdom of righteousness in the world.

That God, in fulfilment of his promises to Israel, has redeemed his people through the promised Messiah, Jesus our Lord, who, though he was and ever continues to be the eternal Son of God, was born under the law and of the lineage of David. We believe that he bore the penalty for our sins, fulfilled the obedience owed to the righteousness of God, and that he now represents the redeemed before his Father to the praise of the glory of his grace.

That Jesus the Messiah, our Redeemer, died, was raised for our justification, and ascended into the heavens, where he sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty.

That the full and final redemption accomplished by the Messiah is applied to all his people by the Holy Spirit through regeneration and sanctification. That the Spirit is granted to the redeemed so that they may do those good works which God has prepared beforehand for them to do.

That God has one people in the world--his Church--which is made up of believing Jews and gentiles. That he has endowed the church with the ministry of the Word and of his holy ordinances in order that the gospel may be made known in all the world and that its effects be continuously experienced by the redeemed.

That Jesus the Messiah is to come a second time, in glory, to judge the world. That all who die in Messiah shall then be made perfect in holiness and go home to the Lord, and that all who do not die in Messiah shall consciously abide under the just and eternal wrath of God.

Financial Policy

As of the year 2000, all branches of CWI, including HaGefen in Israel, are to be funded from designated contributions. Contributions sent to the General Fund will be used to support the headquarters' operations, to meet general needs in the Mission's various branches around the world, and for emergencies as and when they arise. Contributions may be sent directly to each field or via the International Offices in Britain. Savings due to the

difference in exchange rates are possible when contributions are sent directly to the designated fields. All monies received are used in strict accordance with the donor's wishes. Contributions are receipted and audited. Ongoing inflation and a relative freeze of the exchange rate has created an enormous gap in the support base of the Society's work in Israel while the Society's new financial policy has placed the larger part of the burden of finding support on the staff in Israel.

Members of the CWI staff in Israel regularly visit the United States and are available to interested churches for speaking engagements. All inquiries should be sent to the CWI Israel office:

HaGefen Publishing, P.O. Box 75, Rishon LeTzion, 75100, ISRAEL.
Tel. 972 (0)8 869 2542, Fax. 972 (0)8 869 2531, E-mail: bmaoz@ibm.net



Come, Lord Jesus

Surely it cannot be long till day. Nay, hear Him say, Behold I come, my dear Bride; think it not long. I shall be at you at once. I hear you, and am coming. Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, for the prisoners of hope are looking out at the prison windows, to see if they can behold the King's ambassador coming with the King's warrant and the keys.

Samuel Rutherford
1600-1661



News

Want to reach the Editor?

The editor's email address has changed to editor@founders.org.

Founders Friends Online List

Founders Online (www.founders.org) now has two lists of [individuals](#) and [churches](#) who are "Founders friendly." You may sign up on these lists by following the [instructions](#) which are posted on the web site. Individuals searching for churches in specific cities are asked to review these lists before contacting Founders Ministries directly.

Contra-reformation

"Lutherans and Roman Catholics are putting a centuries-old dispute behind them. The Lutheran World Federation has approved a joint declaration with the Catholic Church saying that people become justified before God by faith alone, not by good works. The federation, which represents most of the world's 61 million Lutherans, announced its approval of the document June 16 in Geneva, Switzerland.

'Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works,' the 45-paragraph statement says in a key passage.

The doctrine, known as justification or 'faith vs. works,' has been the key point separating the two traditions since Martin Luther broke with Rome in the 16th century. Luther, a Catholic monk, and his followers said that what the church taught them, that people could earn their salvation through good works, was unbiblical. Salvation could only be the gift of a gracious God, Luther said. At the time, the church was selling indulgences as a means of attaining salvation, and using the money to construct cathedrals.

The dispute caused Luther to challenge Catholic teachings and practices by posting 95 theses on the door of a church in Wittenburg, Germany. That led to the division of Europe into Catholic and Protestant camps, which condemned each other's theology.

The Vatican has indicated that it will affirm the Roman Catholic-Lutheran 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' in the near future. A joint signing ceremony was held October 31 in Augsburg.

In addition to substantially agreeing on the doctrine of justification by faith, the joint declaration declares that condemnations the churches have leveled against each other since the 16th century no longer apply. Some differences regarding the understanding of justification remain, but they are not substantial enough to warrant the condemnations, the document says." (RNS)

Where is Luther when we need him?

Theological education is stranger than it used to be

One of the saddest results of the conservative resurgence in the SBC the last 20 years has been the unmasking of many of the "old guard" who are now pursuing their careers in other arenas. With denominational restraints thrown off, new lows continue to be reached by those who formerly received their salaries from Southern Baptist churches. If there is still any doubt about whether or not there were doctrinal problems in the SBC which needed to be corrected when the inerrancy movement began in 1979, the following statements from a former professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary should resolve them. They are excerpted from "Not Instruction, but Provocation: Doing Theology at a New Divinity School," the Inaugural Convocation Address by Bill J. Leonard, Dean of the Wake Forest University Divinity School, delivered October 12, 1999.

Half the literary preachers in this town are A.B.'s, Ph.D.'s, D.D.'s, LL.D.'s and A.S.S.'s. Baptists remain suspicious. As an old Baptist once told me: "We don't care much for an educated ministry, we saw what it did to the Presbyterians."

Aware of, but (mostly) undaunted by such concerns, Wake Forest University began plans for a new divinity school over a decade ago. Its mission is as follows. First, this is a school of the university; a community of scholars inside a broader community of scholars, providing perspectives which theological education can bring to scholarship, spirituality, and ethics for and with the university at large. Second, this divinity school prepares ministers for churches. The students in this first class speak of their desire to serve churches as Christian ministers. The forms of that ministry will vary, but most know they will be involved in preaching, teaching, counseling, praying with, and guiding congregations or their extended ministries in the church and the world. Third, the divinity school prepares ministers to respond to basic issues of life and death, pain and struggle, joy and celebration in faith communities where many of the old structures, resources, and identities are in "permanent transition." Fourth, a diverse full-time and adjunct faculty facilitates formation for ministry.

The Divinity School is a strange mix, you must admit. One observer described our faculty as composed of "two feminists, a monk, a controversial expert on religious liberty and two battle-scarred Baptists."

Pluralism means to many unexpected and "non-traditional" practices. I know Pentecostals who wear clerical collars and elect their own bishops. I also know some people who refer to themselves as Pentecostal Presbyterians, two words no one ever expected to go together. I know one Alabama pastor who preaches in Reeboks every Sunday. He says he tried Nike but he just couldn't feel the Holy Spirit in the same way.

Three years ago an African-American woman who grew up in Winston-Salem asked me if accepted, would she be welcomed for what she would bring to this divinity school. Tonight she sits here as a part of our entering class. Three years ago a lesbian woman asked me if accepted would she be welcomed for what she would bring to this school. Tonight she sits here as part of our entering class. Last week at a gathering of students another woman expressed thanks for the acceptance and welcome she has received at this new school. She was not sure it would be so since she is different from the other students. She is 74 years old. These three women and their other sister and brother

students are welcomed. They are here because of their sense of call, a non-discrimination policy extraordinaire, excellent references, and fine grade point averages. Every one of them is a provocateur extraordinaire. They are shaping this school toward the future through the pluralism of their "voices."

Baptist-Jewish Forum applauds inclusivism

A Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leader rejected the exclusive nature of the gospel during a Baptist/Jewish relations forum October 21 in Louisville, Ky. The forum, sponsored by the Kentuckiana Interfaith Community, featured Ron Sisk, pastor of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville and former CBF Coordinating Council member. He was joined by panelists Carey Newman, former professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Seminary, and Rabbi Joe Rapport, who serves The Temple in Louisville.

"I certainly don't believe that any one tradition has an exclusive corner on God," said Sisk. "I would never limit God's salvation to those who share my own perspective or my own understanding. I would respect the traditions of others, both Christian and non-Christian, for the truth which they reveal. I would say Christ's spirit operates in places where Christ is not named or known."

The Jewish prayer guide which was issued by the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board provoked the gathering of the forum. About 150 people attended the forum at Broadway Baptist Church, which is dually aligned with the SBC and CBF.

Sisk repeatedly objected to the biblical standard of an exclusive gospel, which means that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. He espoused a belief in "the cosmic Christ" who he said "goes beyond any name or any theology or any community and is found at work in the same way" that the universal God of Judaism is at work.

"To the degree that a person's life puts them into touch with that spirit of Christ, they have a relationship with God as genuine as my own," Sisk said. (BP)



Letters

Dear Founders:

After recently leaving my position at an SBC church for a position in non-denominational Bible church, I told my wife that I was going to write my 95 theses against the SBC, and even if I never showed them to anyone else, I would at least have them as a reminder to myself. So many things were wrong. It had gotten so bad that I had moved from being the change agent that I initially thought I could be, to becoming a part of the problem. I was perpetuating it by my own contributions and lack of resistance. I had once stood up for the doctrines of grace, and had argued against the invitationalism. I had pleaded for a biblical church government with elders, and argued against the focus on quantitative growth. I had taught expositionally and pleaded that the senior pastor do likewise. But I left frustrated and hurt. In doing so, I hurt others because so many could not understand why I would leave ... including the senior pastor. I did not want to spread dissension among the ranks.

Upon arriving at my new church, the senior pastor laid a stack of books on my desk. You see, he's mentoring me as a young pastor; something I've longed for, but never received. Along with a John Piper book was his encouragement to find a conference that he was speaking at this summer and go hear him.

I discovered the Founder's engagement, but was hesitant because it was affiliated with the SBC, and I was still feeling a bit resistant. I decided to attend along with my wife, and I am so thankful today. Here I was ready to tack up my own 95 theses to the door of the SBC, and I come and discover that the Founders have already done so. How refreshed I was to meet men who were grounded in the Word. These guys were not just standing up for its inerrancy, but were actually studying it and applying the doctrines to their personal lives and ministries. I heard nothing of church growth tactics or number comparison. You see, every gathering that I had attended with other pastors when I was in the SBC was saturated with comparisons and questions of numbers and size. I heard men with passion and men who actually think. I met men who lived out their convictions. There is so much more I could say, but I will leave it at this.

Thank you for your work and time. May you stay ever faithful to the doctrines of Scripture and may you never be pulled under by the mainstream movements within "pop evangelicalism." You are in my prayers.

Your fellow servant,
J. S. W., via e-mail

Hello,

I am a student. I am a Christian, a Baptist, and a 5-point Calvinist. Where I attend school I am in the definite minority, but I must say that some of my teachers, while not in agreement with me, are most kind.... I thought you might want to know that, while some are very obnoxious, some recognize that we are brothers in Christ.

I also wanted to thank you for your publications, and that you have really given me a solid, Baptist look at

Calvinism.

Thank you so much,
J. W., via. e-mail

Dear *Founders Journal*,

I am deeply interested in subscribing to *Founders Journal*. It has been about 3 years since I have come to "Reformed Faith" (about 6 years since coming to Christ) and I am finding it very difficult to find someone who is a Calvinist in my immediate circle of friends and family. I am a member of a Southern Baptist Church, and I am starving for discipleship from a Calvinistic perspective. Every Sunday I have to sit through church listening to my pastor . . . tell the congregation that we have a "free will" to come to Christ. He says that the decision is all ours. He has told me in a respectful way that the doctrines I hold to are "dead wrong." *Founders Journal* is exactly what I have been looking for to give me practical advice from a true biblical perspective. I have a heavy burden on my heart for the way that the church has lost its grip on the true doctrines of the faith. May God have mercy on the church for preaching such watered-down truth.

Please send me subscription information ASAP. I would prefer to do this transaction via the internet, but if this is not possible, I understand. Thank you for your help in this matter.

In Christ,
M. G., via e-mail

Dear Dr. Ascol,

I enjoyed reading your article, "The Pope, Indulgences, and Jesus Christ" which appeared in the spring issue [#36] of the *Founders Journal*. I am a convert to Protestant Christianity from the Roman Catholic Church. I made the change about 24 years ago after being born again. I have been a member of the Southern Baptist Convention for 22 years. My early education included ten years of Catholic primary and secondary schools.

You are among a very small number of Protestant writers who accurately describe how indulgences work in the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant writers turn what is already an un-Biblical doctrine into something much worse, which opens them to counterclaims that they have distorted Catholic doctrine. However, you demonstrate an understanding of this doctrine which is most likely better than the average American Roman Catholic today.

In my experience, there has been a subtle change lately in teaching on this doctrine by the Roman Catholic Church, at least here in the US. Indulgences and Purgatory are described as breaking the attachments to worldly things which sin brings on. This is described in #1472 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This doctrine is strongly emphasized by the former Reformed Presbyterian, Dr. Scott Hahn. Dr. Hahn fails to even mention the traditional doctrine which is familiar to all Catholics who received their training prior the Vatican II changes and is described in your article. Ironically, traces of this same new teaching can be found in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* and *Letters to Malcolm*.

Keep up the good work with the *Founders Journal*. Reformed doctrine is gradually making a comeback within the Southern Baptist Convention although I am still in the minority in my own church.

Regards,
T. K., Richmond, VA

You are trying to argue [FJ 36]Justification by faith alone by attacking church doctrine and misinterpretation to suit your own argument. While you compliment the Pope you abuse him and his followers in the same breath. Do not call Christians naïve followers. Study your Bible and historical documents more thoroughly before you state your assumptions to support your viewpoints. More particularly the Council of Trent. The Pope is the head of the earthly church, a leader no more no less a man who has been called by God and instructed directly by Jesus through his lineage which is from Peter. Check it out with an open heart and you will be blessed.

S. via e-mail



Book Review

Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill. Stephen Mansfield. Elkton, MD: Highland Books, 1995, 225 pp.

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

This is the first volume of the *Leaders in Action* series which has George Grant for General Editor. The series intends to produce a collection of "short biographical profiles of notable leaders" with a goal of highlighting the leadership qualities which characterized the subject. Mansfield accomplishes that goal.

Churchill's life is the stuff of modern legends. It would be easy to slip into hagiography when writing about him. The author avoids this by casting his subjects incredible accomplishments in the light of his very real shortcomings. The result is a book that inspires as well as entertains.

From his strained, detached relationship with his father, to his less than stellar performance in school, the difficulties of Churchill's life make his accomplishments all the more interesting and exemplary.

Mansfield is convinced that Churchill was an orthodox Christian, having been instilled with these views by his nanny, Mrs. Everest. His life was filled with remarkable providences, of which he was fully aware. When he escaped from a Boer prison camp during the South African War, he randomly sought refuge in what turned out to be the only British house for twenty miles, thus avoiding being returned to his captors. Yet, the author does not fully prove his case with the isolated statements about God and Christianity which he cites from Churchill.

The book is divided into three sections. The first gives a sweeping overview of Churchill's life. The second identifies "pillars of leadership" which he exemplified. The third analyzes his life's legacy and lessons, ending with twenty-six aphorisms on leadership which would be fitting for popular motivational posters ("A man cannot lead his generation if he cannot lead his children" [227]).

That Churchill was driven by a sense of duty and devotion to that which is right and good is beyond doubt. When as a young member of Parliament he became convinced that he could no longer serve his country well in his Conservative Party, he simply and decisively "crossed the floor" to the Liberal Party in 1903.

Mansfield organizes his book around the defining characteristics of Churchill's inner life. Chapter titles include, "Courage," "Action," "Duty," "Realism," "Loyalty," "Humor," and "Compassion." The book is written with the conviction that "the chief lesson of Churchill's leadership is that greatness is a product of character, of matters like loyalty, sacrifice, endurance, and courage" (224). Such qualities, examined through the prism of such a useful and colorful life, make for very profitable reading.

This is a book which could be easily read by serious young people, and it ought to be. Much has been written and said about our sad "age without heroes." This book (and the series which it inaugurates) can helpfully direct our attention toward those giants of other generations whose lives have the power to inspire a renewed vision for principled leadership.



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Upcoming Conferences

- **Southern Baptist Founders Youth Ski Retreat (December 27-29, 1999)**

Winterplace, WV Contact: Todd Wilson (901) 758-1213

Theme: "The Sovereignty of God: In Creation, Providence & Salvation"

- **Ark-La-Tex Southern Baptist Founders Conference (February 3-5, 2000)**

Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport, LA Contact: Bill Ascol (318) 798-7088

Theme: "Gospel Worship"

Speakers:

Tom Ascol, Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL/Exec. Dir., Founders Ministries

Fred Malone, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Clinton, LA

Jerry Marcellino, Pastor, Audubon Drive Bible Church, Laurel, MS

- **Southern Baptist Founders Conference Midwest (March 14-16, 2000)**

First Baptist Church, St. Peters, MO Contact: Curtis McClain (314) 936-0858

Theme: "A Crisis of Worldview"

Speakers:

Al Mohler, President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

Dr. Ron Rogers, Associate Professor of Missions, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, KC, MO

David Miller, Evangelist, Heber Springs, AR

- **Heartland Regional Southern Baptist Founders Conference (April 6-8, 2000)**

Providence Baptist Church, Ponca City, OK 74601 Contact: Steve Harden (580) 762-2762

Theme: "Evangelism"

Speakers:

Tom Ascol, Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL/Exec. Dir., Founders Ministries

Don Whitney, Professor, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO

R. F. Gates, Associate Pastor, Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport, LA

David Goff, Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Edmond, OK

