

# The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

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Issue 73

Summer 2008

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## Church Purity

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Cover Photo taken at Water Gardens in Fort Worth, Texas by Ken Puls

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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 which Southern Baptists produced, *The Abstract of Principles*.

**Subscription Price (one year): \$20.00 (\$25.00 outside the USA)**

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# Church Purity

## *A Baptist Insight*

*Tom Nettles*

### Historical summary

When Baptists emerged in the context of 17th-century English Separatism, they shared the separatist desire for a congregation to be a “spiritual house, an holy Priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through him.” Its members would acknowledge Christ as Prophet, Priest and King and “be enrolled among his household servants, to be under his heavenly conduct and government, to lead their lives in his walled sheepfold, to have communion here with his saints, that they may be made meet to be partakers of their inheritance in the kingdom of God.” With the separatists they believed that each congregation has power, because commanded, “to elect and ordain their own ministry according to the rules prescribed,” as well as to “receive in or to cut off any member.” None “who are grown in years” can be received except “such as do make confession of their faith, publicly desiring to be received as members, and promising to walk in the obedience of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The separatists, however, sought to develop this view of a spiritual and disciplined church while maintaining infant baptism and the magistrate’s responsibility for suppressing “false ministries” and establishing by law “pure religion and true ministry.”<sup>2</sup>

Those within the separatist movement that began to see the incongruity between church spirituality and the two remaining enclaves of antichrist, infant baptism and magisterial intervention, adopted a different view of the church. They rejected infant baptism as inconsistent with the goal of church purity and as a violation of the regulative principle of biblical authority. They saw no command for baptism of infants in the New Testament and they found no example of its being performed by the apostles. In addition, the description of its meaning along with the expectations for deliberate sanctification for its recipients (Romans 6:3–13) made them believe it impossible that infants could be the intended subjects of the ordinance. The new birth with its accompanying responses of repentance toward God and belief of the gospel must be credibly professed before giving the symbol of one’s union with Christ in His saving passion and resultant resurrection. They rejected, therefore, their former confessional adherence to the belief that “such as be of the seed” of believers, “be even in their infancy received to baptism.”<sup>3</sup> They understood in detail both the hermeneutic and the doctrine of the covenant that seemed to be the strongest support of infant baptism in the reformed tradition. The argument from covenantal circumcision to covenantal infant baptism (“the sign of God’s covenant made with the faithful and their seed throughout all

generations”) seemed strained, unwarranted, and a severe misappropriation of the provisions of the new covenant (Philippians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 3:6–9, 14–18; Colossians 2:11–13). The identification of new covenant people assumes a spiritual change, which if not impossible, at least cannot be verified in infants.

Baptists, therefore, beginning with the General Baptist doctrine of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, and continuing with Thomas Grantham and Dan Taylor and the Particular Baptists John Spilsbury, William Kiffin, and Hanserd Knollys developed a theology of church purity. This theology led inexorably to a church practice committed to maintain gospel purity in the membership of the local church. The tension, the alarming disparity, between these two aspects of purity, theory and practice, constitutes the growing scandal of Baptist church membership, or as Mark Dever has said, “increasingly meaningless church membership lists,” among Southern Baptists.<sup>4</sup>

The theology of church purity is called “regenerate church membership.” This view has been promoted by Baptist confessions since John Smyth wrote in 1609 “That the church of Christ is a company of the faithful; baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ.” Helwys followed suit in 1611 confessing “That the church of Christ is a company of faithful people separated from the world by the word and Spirit of God, being knit unto the Lord, and unto another, by baptism, upon their own confessions of the faith and sins.”<sup>5</sup> The *First London Confession* stated, “That Christ hath here on earth a spiritual Kingdom, which is the Church, which he hath purchased and redeemed to himself, as a peculiar inheritance: which church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King.”<sup>6</sup>

## Biblical Summary

The vocabulary used to describe the churches in the New Testament incorporates regeneration and its concomitant graces: “the called of Jesus Christ ... beloved of God, called to be saints, [Romans 1:6, 7] ... church of God ... sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ; [1 Corinthians 1:2] ... called you into the grace of Christ [Galatians 1:6] ... those who are of faith [Galatians 3:9] ... the faithful in Christ Jesus [Ephesians 1:1] ... the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi [Philippians 1:1] ... the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, ... we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which ye have to all the saints [Colossians 1:2, 4] ... to the church of the Thessalonians ... our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power ... and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction [1 Thessalonians 1:1, 5, 6] ... your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other

[2 Thessalonians 1:3] ... Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works [Titus 3:8] ... the testing of your faith produces patience [James 1:3] ... to the pilgrims of the dispersion ... begotten again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [1 Peter 1:1, 3] ... to those who have obtained like precious faith with us ... as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue [2 Peter 1:1, 3].”

Those addressed in these New Testament letters have several traits.

- They are called “saints” and sanctified in Christ Jesus showing their observable attachment to the truth of the gospel, the completed work of Christ, and their separation from the world system.
- Their faith “grows”, that is, their knowledge of the truth of divine revelation increased culminating, at each point of truth, with an open commitment to embrace it and live in harmony with the truth thus received.
- They followed the example of Christian living set for them by the apostles and were instructed that good works would be the natural outworking of true faith.
- They loved their fellow-Christians and sought opportunity for increase of that love and the demonstration of its reality.
- Their “call” came with demonstrable power indicated by their moral transformation and their patience under trial.

While these descriptions do not exhaust the evidence for regenerate church membership, they create a compelling disposition to view the church in that way. Other aspects of biblical descriptions of the church give an increasing preponderance of expectation that born-again persons, and they only, constitute the material of Christ’s church. Christ taught this in increasing clarity during His earthly ministry. After the feeding of the five thousand in John 6, Jesus presented a new covenant picture of His people in saying “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me... It is the Spirit who gives life: the flesh profits nothing, the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:44, 45, 63 KJV). God’s people are those that the Father gave the Son. Their knowledge of the Son’s redemptive work is itself a work of God as the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind and heart bring the person, given by the Father to the Son, to repose in the words and work of the Son for eternal life.

Matthew 16:16–18 establishes that Christ builds His church with those that confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. This confession arises as a special gift of the Father rescuing the confessing one from Satan’s deceit and stronghold. Satan cannot bind the one to whom the Father speaks the words of

life. Their confession that Jesus is Lord and their belief that God raised Him from the dead comes by means of no less power than that power that raised Christ from the dead. Such confessors are given to the Son by the Father and believe by a special operation of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20–22; 1 Corinthians 12:3). In 1 John we learn that those thus called, who receive a saving revelation from the Father by means of the regenerating work of the Spirit shall “continue in the Son,” will practice righteousness, will not practice sin, love fellow Christians, believe that Jesus is the Christ, and overcome the world (1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 5:4).

Those that are born again walk in the truth (2 John 4; 3 John 3, 4). A person cannot walk in truth unless he has the capacity to hear it, respond to it, and love it, even as Paul indicated had been the experience of the Colossians. They had heard “the word of truth, the gospel,” they “heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.” In fact, from the standpoint of human instrumentality they “learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.” (Colossians 1:5, 6, 7 ESV). Those that are called, or born again, can “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3 NKJV) and can be “diligent to be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14 NKJV). The born-again recognize the glory of truth and grace, discern error and its devastating tendency, giving themselves to follow the first and reprove the latter.

Paul taught that the cleansing and renewing power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration brings a person to justification through the completed work of Christ and at the same time teaches him to “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly” right now and to anticipate with joyful expectation the coming of Christ (Titus 3:5–7 and 2:11–13). This work conforms to His purpose to “purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). Again this description must refer to a people that are born again and defines the church as the company of the born again.

This same dynamic he observed in the Thessalonians when he preached, for they received his message “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, “ and added this qualifier, “which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV). Evidence of this work of grace, and the expected results of it, were perseverance under affliction (2:14; 3:4, 5), sexual purity (4:3–8), brotherly love (with the new covenant emphasis that they had “been taught by God to love one another,” 4:9), and profound Christian hope (4:13; 5:9–11).

The New Testament leaves no doubt that sanctification is intrinsic to the work that gospel truth and power perform in the believer. “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ... But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Romans 6:1, 2, 22); “So then brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:12–14); “Do you not know that the

unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11); “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (Ephesians 5:3); “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, He who calls you is faithful: He will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5: 23, 24).

The New Testament also makes clear that this individual purity, as intrinsic to the work of the gospel in each believer, serves the purpose of establishing a holy colony, or outpost, a gathering that enjoys the heavenly delights of living before the Father, a body of people that celebrates the glory of the Son of God, an assembly brought together and equipped for service by the Spirit of God right in the bosom of a population controlled by the evil prince of darkness. As he addressed the corporate witness of the church at Philippi, Paul wrote, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” (Philippians 1:27, 28 ESV). As a matter of encouraging them in this corporate conflict he reminded them that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself” (3:20, 21 ESV). Meanwhile, as a body, they were to be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (2:15, 16 ESV).

He reminded the Ephesians of their inclusion in the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel so that “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places,” perhaps elect angels, but also perhaps those same rulers and authorities against whom the church does battle with the armory so fully supplied by the gospel (Ephesians 3:6, 10; 6:12, 13). The church as manifest through the ages is Christ’s continuing body in this world (Ephesians 1:22, 23) and that church in each local expression of it has been gifted by Christ so that each one of the members of it may grow to maturity and do his or her part in expressing the divine wisdom and glory. The church’s unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, the church’s ability to operate according to the will of God by the gifting of every member, and the church’s increasing maturity through the proper function of every member assumes a foundation of faith in every member as well as faithfulness

to the acknowledged purpose of glorifying Christ. Then this outpost of heaven will show its distinctiveness from the futility, darkness, callousness, and spiritual ignorance of the world to manifest the true righteousness and holiness of the people of God (Ephesians 4:13, 16, 24).

For all of these reasons, Baptists have believed that the church is a company of the reborn and, in their more consistent and biblically sober moments, have sought to foster that in their evangelism and in their church discipline. For not only through the waters of baptism do Baptist churches picture the sinners' holy and humble entry by the penitential form of death to sin and self and introduction to spiritual and eternal life through Christ's redemptive benefits, but through the holy, humble, and penitential reception of those continuing benefits (1 John 1:7) symbolized in the reception, as a church unit, of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27–32).

Because the churches consist of sinners on pilgrimage to holiness, much patience is needed in the church body toward those who might lag behind in some things. "And we urge you brothers," Paul wrote to the whole body of Christians at Thessalonica, "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). A bit more severe, but still brotherly is the admonition in 2 Thessalonians, "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the traditions that you received from us." And again he warned, "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15). Measures of admonition and refusal to consort socially with the idle and unresponsive should bring them back to an energetic participation in the body's pilgrimage of holiness. Patience and instruction may suffice in many cases of spiritual delinquency. Failure to respond would doubtless result in more severe warning or even in removal such as Paul indicates in Titus 3:10, 11: "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (NKJV).

Other cases, however, show such callous disregard for holiness that immediate removal from church fellowship is necessary. Such was the case with the immoral member of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1–8). A young man, it seems, was involved sexually with his step-mother. His action was worse than that of the pagans that lived around them. The church, however, did not seem to grasp the moral horror of such conduct. Paul said that their reaction was "arrogant" and that they were "boasting." Exactly what form this took and precisely the motive behind it we are not told. Maybe, as is seen in James 2:8, they felt that they were fulfilling the command to love their neighbor by such tolerance, or perhaps they prided themselves on their enlightened behavior. Clearly their attitude was not what it should have been. They should have mourned, they should have acted quickly and publicly to separate this person. Tolerance of his action amounted to the giving of

permission of consummate evil to infiltrate the entire body. A misguided patience and an unwarranted tolerance surely are not manifestations either of love or of moral enlightenment in such situations, but direct disobedience to Christ and spiritually dangerous for both the church and the offender. Paul put together several types of evil that were worthy of such action from the church—“anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not to eat with such a one” (5:11).

The images Paul employed indicate that he referred specifically to exclusion from participating in the Lord’s Supper (5:6–8). He used the word “eat” in reference to this meal of communion at least eight times in chapter 11. Allowing the immoral person to “eat” would be like disobeying the Lord’s command in the Passover and using leavened bread. A non-penitent, Christ-insulting person eating the meal to which one gains access only by repentance toward God and faith in Christ would be like throwing a package of yeast in the bread mixture at the Passover and daring the head of the house to serve the meal until the bread was risen and baked. Such eating in that case would be a direct violation of the divine mandate. Leaven, though not evil in itself, became a symbol for disobedience and the placing of one’s pleasure above the will and wisdom of God. Allowing this person to eat would leaven the meal and denigrate Christ, the true Passover, whose sacrifice bought for Himself a set-apart people zealous of good works. The life that insists on leaven cannot eat the meal and be a partaker of the fellowship of penitence.

Church discipline in a case like this, and others analogous to it, has just as much to do with maintaining a regenerate church membership as does the practice of baptizing believers only. A baptized person has given credible profession of repentance toward God and faith in Christ. The communing person gives continuing evidence of a walk in repentance, heart-felt confession of sin, and desire for righteousness.

## Editorial Overview

This issue of the *Founders Journal* includes two articles by J. P. Boyce in which he expressed his concern about the issue of church purity. One he wrote on church discipline during his first year of ministry at the First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina. His concern that the “abandonment of discipline” would mean “the utter ruin of the church” reminds one of the statement made by John L. Dagg some six years later in his *Manual of Church Order*, “It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”<sup>7</sup> Boyce pointed to purification of the visible church, the piety of its members, and effective evangelism as reasons for practicing church discipline. The second is the commencement address he delivered at the May 1879 graduation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Boyce had determined to define for the graduates, in a brief message, his understanding of a “successful” ministry. He showed how pertinent in his day

as well as in ours is the concern for what the statistics show about the dangerous spiritual inefficiency of our churches. Greater care, and thus probably a diminished number in baptisms, more emphasis on the implications for holiness of true conversion, and more intimate acquaintance on the part of the pastor with the spiritual lives and practical consistency of all church members would make for stronger churches and more successful pastorates Boyce contended.

Jeff Robinson wrote his PhD dissertation on an important figure in Baptist life, a contemporary and excellent friend of J. P. Boyce, H. H. Tucker. Tucker, as editor of the *Christian Index*, had serious, yea grave, concerns about the impact that modern evangelistic methods would have on the Baptist understanding of a pure church. Robinson gives the reader a vignette of Tucker's commitment to the historic Baptist view of regenerate church membership and the threat posed to this distinctive by the revivalist phenomenon. Was Tucker's point well taken? Is there a disparity between the size of Southern Baptist churches and the spiritual impact one might expect from such large gatherings of believers? Has Christ left the churches because of a failure in discipline and a carelessness in the ordinance of baptism?

The Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis adopted a resolution that has the potential of raising awareness of our present day failures, not only in maintaining, but apparently even attempting to maintain, this vital aspect of Baptist ecclesiology. Such a statement of opinion on the part of the Convention might well nerve and arm pastors to lead their churches in taking seriously their covenantal standing with each other and their biblical mandate from the Lord.

WHEREAS, The ideal of a regenerate church membership has long been and remains a cherished Baptist principle, with Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message describing the church as a "local congregation of baptized believers"; and

WHEREAS, A New Testament church is composed only of those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word, becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, the local church's only Lord, by grace through faith (John 3:5; Ephesians 2:8-9), which church practices believers' only baptism by immersion (Matthew 28:16-20), and the Lord's supper (Matthew 26:26-30); and

WHEREAS, Local associations, state conventions, and the Southern Baptist Convention compile statistics reported by the churches to make decisions for the future; and

WHEREAS, the 2007 Southern Baptist Convention annual Church Profiles indicate that there are 16,266,920 members in Southern Baptist churches; and

WHEREAS, Those same profiles indicate that only 6,148,868 of those members attend a primary worship service of their church in a typical week; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures admonish us to exercise church discipline as we seek to restore any professed brother or sister in Christ who has strayed from the truth and is in sin (Matthew 18:15–35; Galatians 6:1); and now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 10–11, 2008, urge churches to maintain a regenerate membership by acknowledging the necessity of spiritual regeneration and Christ’s lordship for all members; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we humbly urge our churches to maintain accurate membership rolls for the purpose of fostering ministry and accountability among all members of the congregation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention to repent of the failure among us to live up to our professed commitment to regenerate church membership and any failure to obey Jesus Christ in the practice of lovingly correcting wayward church members (Matthew 18:15–18); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we humbly encourage denominational servants to support and encourage churches that seek to recover and implement our Savior’s teachings on church discipline, even if such efforts result in the reduction in the number of members that are reported in those churches, and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we humbly urge the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention and their pastors to implement a plan to minister to, counsel, and restore wayward church members based upon the commands and principles given in Scripture (Matthew 18:15–35; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19–20).

May we all be led both to repentance from the practices that have generated our current failures unfaithfulness to Christ and to a specific strategy to return to obedience to the biblical doctrine of the church. 🙏

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> “A True Confession,” *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 86, 88, 89, 92, 94. Quotes are taken from articles 14, 18, 23, 24 and 37. The spelling is modernized.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., articles 35, 37, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., article 35.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Lumpkin, 101, 119.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 165 [article XXXIII]

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint ed., Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Press, 1982) 274.

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## News

### Thanksgiving and a Request for Prayer

Many of you are aware, from reading the Founders Ministries Blog ([www.founders.org/blog/](http://www.founders.org/blog/)), of the unusual providence of July 14, 2008. Our Executive Director, Tom Ascol, received a shock from a lightning strike as he reached for a car door in his driveway at home. You can read about the account on Tom's blog, "A Display of Divine Greatness and Mercy." We are thankful to the Lord that He spared Tom's life and that the doctors who are caring for him expect a full recovery. We ask that you continue praying for Tom as he rests and recovers in the coming weeks.

May our kind and merciful Father be pleased to use this difficult circumstance for His glory and for the good of His Kingdom.

### Founders Podcasts

In July 2008 Founders Ministries launched into podcasting. You can now listen each week as we explore issues related to the recovery and advancement of the gospel and the work of reformation in the church. The podcasts will feature interviews, lectures, sermons and discussions with pastors and church leaders who are praying and working toward this end to God's glory.

You can find Founders Ministreis Podcasts on iTunes or at:

[www.recoveringthegospel.net](http://www.recoveringthegospel.net)

Click on "Go to Podcasts" on the Welcome page.

# Church Discipline—Its Importance

*James P. Boyce*

From the *Southern Baptist*  
February 18, 1852

Anyone who will make a careful examination of the state of our churches, will be astonished at the low degree of spirituality which they manifest. This is owing, among other causes, to the laxity which they display in church discipline, and the leniency with which they regard the errors of those who lay themselves open to the punitive power of the church.

It has been customary, among certain classes of Christians, to deny to the church the possession of this power. But such assertions are made in utter disregard of the language in which Christ authorized His disciples to bind and to loose, and in which He asserted that their action should be regarded as His, and should be so far sanctioned as to be accompanied by like action on His part, as well as in disregard of the recorded action of the apostolic churches. The causes which have led to this assertion, so contrary to Scripture, are the same, in reality, though carried to a greater extent, as those which have led to the laxity with regard to exercising it, by those by whom it is allowed, that it is possessed and should be exercised by the church. It arises chiefly from the too great worldly conformity of the church, and from a feeling of unwillingness to blame others when we are ourselves liable to error. The latter feeling is legitimate, but, if it be accompanied by the conduct previously mentioned, it is evident it must lead us to a too great indulgence of others and thus to an abandonment of discipline to the utter ruin of the church. And we cannot but think that it is because exactly this course of conduct prevails and produces its effect upon those possessing the feelings here indicated, that the churches generally are in so low a spiritual condition. Under these circumstances, we may be excused for mentioned two or three of the reasons which make the exercise of this discipline important.

And first, and most obviously, it is necessary for the purification of the visible church. The true church is subjected to a different kind of purification, that of the Spirit, which works within us both to will and to do, according to His good pleasure. And were the visible church confined to the true church, so would it be there. But such never has been, and never can be the case. Even in the days of the apostles men were baptized into the church who had to be excommunicated from it. And no one need be told that if excommunication be a rare thing in our day, it is not because the condition of the church forbids it. Now it is manifestly essential that, so far as we can judge, the purity of the church should be maintained; otherwise, she cannot glorify God. A church of inconsistent members is the laughing stock of the world. It is composed of persons whose character is the very opposite of that which Christ has declared to be that of His disciples. They give no evi-

dences of the transforming power of the Spirit. They give no exemplification of the blessedness of obedience to the precepts of Christ. And hence the need of its purification. All the purposes to be subserved by the existence of a church fail to be subserved by the existence of such a church, and hence the necessity for exercising such discipline as shall lead it to subserve those purposes.

Another reason equally true, though not so obvious, is that the exercise of discipline leads to the advancement of personal piety among the members of the church. Strange as it may seem it is not less true that the disciples of Christ need every inducement which can be brought to bear upon them for their increase in holiness. The many motives to be found in God's Word, and in His providential dealings, are all necessary; and among these, church discipline stands prominent. In proportion to the strictness with which it is exercised, will ever be the want of worldly conformity on the part of the church. In proof of this, we need but look at different churches. Those who are most strict, are universally filled with the most vital piety. One reason for this is, that thus the members are enabled to know their duty. The high standard of excellence which is placed before them is aimed at, and in aiming thus high, they are constantly advancing in piety. It is a well known peculiarity of our nature, that by every action we tend to form or destroy habits. By that course of conduct, therefore, by which we may destroy evil habits, and form good ones, we are constantly led to increased holiness; and the church discipline which prevents sin, in so doing tends to holiness. By furnishing a restraint from the one, it gives an assistant towards the other; and hence it is that in like manner as those persons make the greatest advancement in piety who keep a watch upon themselves, so will those churches make similar advance which keep the strictest watch over their members; exercising discipline to cut off the dead branches, or to prune, in order to produce greater vitality, those branches which need the knife.

Another reason for exercising church discipline is, that thus only can the church be led to perform the glorious work of evangelizing the world. Not only is it true that to none but a holy church will the Holy Spirit be given as an assistant, and as a consequence of this, it could have no success; but the want of obedience to Christ's will in minor matters, and of conformity to His example in ordinary life, will prevent obedience to Him with respect to those commands which require the exercise of self-denial, and the putting forth of earnest and continued effort, and conformity to an example so far above that which man can attain, without divine assistance, as to give of itself sufficient proof of the discipleship of him who thus conforms.

Such are a few suggestions showing the importance of church discipline. Their object will be attained if, because of them, the churches in our State shall be led to remember and to meditate upon it. Could it be exercised throughout our church with the constancy and strictness that marked them in days gone by, we might look with assurance for similar spirituality in the church; and for additional efficiency in its present and future efforts for Christ. 🐦

# Commencement Address – 1879

*James P. Boyce, D.D., LL. D., Chairman of the Faculty*

*Western Recorder*

May 8, 1879

**T**he bestowal and reception of these diplomas have terminated your relations as undergraduate students to our Seminary. But with this ceremony will neither cease the desire you will feel for its prosperity nor that of its professors for your welfare and success. We shall ever remember you with anxious and prayerful hearts, and we believe that you will ever seek, so far as you can, to foster the interests of this Seminary.

You leave us to-day to enter upon ever more important duties of the ministry than have heretofore been permitted you. This is also true of most of those who have received to-day the diploma of English graduate, and indeed of nearly one-third of those who have this day been graduated in our separate schools. These, no less than you, expect at once to become pastors of churches, over the which by the call of their members and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit you will have the oversight. Well may you hesitate at the responsibility of the position you are about to assume, and well may we follow you with earnest exhortations to discharge faithfully your duties, and heartfelt prayer to God for that guidance and aid which alone shall insure success. This is attainable, with God's blessing, wherever He may call you to the discharge of the pastoral relation. But it must come as the results of persistent and prayerful efforts upon your part to do all in your power for its attainment.

In wishing you success in your future work as pastors, ours is not necessarily a desire that you may be popular pulpit orators. The idea that makes the oratory of the pulpit the test of ministerial efficiency is one of the popular fallacies of the day. Rightly used, as it is indeed by many, the gift of persuasive eloquence is greatly to be desired. It has its place among the most effective means conferred by God upon the preachers of His Word. But in most cases, those who have carefully studied its effects have found that its tendencies are really destructive rather than edifying, leading to sinful admiration of and attachment to the person of the preacher instead of to his Master, and an exaltation of his opinions about those of the Word of God. If, therefore, any of you shall find yourselves possessed of this desirable yet dangerous gift, we beseech you to see to it that it is used in strict subordination to the great objects of your ministry, and that you carefully guard yourselves and your people against the many evils which have sometimes accompanied it.

Neither do we desire that your ministry shall chiefly consist in bringing multitudes into the churches of Christ.

How often do we see references made in the obituary notices of ministers to the hundreds or even thousands whom they have baptized as converts to Christ. This is of itself a matter of rejoicing. Every soul is precious and every Christian heart must be made glad when even a single one is restored to God. But it is feared that too many of our past and present ministers have regarded this result as the great end of their ministerial work, when, indeed it is but its beginning. Our denominational statistics give us serious warning upon this point. Our Year Book shows that while during the past year throughout the United States 102,738 have been added by baptism, 30,266 have been excluded from fellowship. Were the churches more particular in the reception and more faithful in the exclusion of members, those figures would be greatly changed. But, as it is, the fact stares us in the face that three out of every ten of those received are thus excluded. To what then is this due? No one cause will account for it alone. But I venture to say that it arises mainly because so many of the ministers either really, or practically regard their work as completed with the profession of faith in Christ and baptism upon that profession.

Whence is it otherwise that we have so large a membership and so few effective churches? Whence too that so many of our so-called strong churches are utterly inefficient. Why is it that in many not one seventh to one-fourth make any contribution at all for work abroad, or even for the expense of their church work at home? Why is it that so often the roll of the membership has to be reviewed and names cut off because no one, not even the deacons, yes, not even the pastor knows what has become of them?

Many other indications of this evil might be pointed out, but I only refer to those to show you why in wishing you a successful pastorate we do not mean one which shall be chiefly marked by the numbers which you baptize.

Nor do we have the desire that you shall be called to large city pastorates. The success of a minister is often measured in this way. The important places which have been filled by him are often mentioned as indication of his great ability and fitness for any others. Yet manifestly we ought to look not so much at these places as at the manner in which their occupant has discharged their duties. Thus you will find that some men have held important positions by constantly changing from one to another, never staying in one place longer than two or three years. Having by that time exhausted the whole round of pulpit preparations possessed before they came, and having been unable from the pressure of other work to make new ones, a change has to be made. It is plain that the history of such persons, so far from having shown ability for such places has manifested utter inability, from the evil effects of which they have only escaped by removal before their inefficiency became too plainly apparent.

The difficulty in filling such pastorates does not however arise so much from the extraordinary demand for fresh and thorough pulpit preparation as from the need of executive ability by which the church shall be trained to growth in holiness and working power for Christ. Such training is indeed needed everywhere.

It is the lack of it which causes all our denominational work to languish and our churches to be feeble instead of strong and mighty in their faith and works. But in smaller churches the young pastor who has gained the true idea of what is needed can put it in practice with comparative efficiency. The work will not be so large, not so various. The ability demanded will not be so great. The pastor will have time to train himself for it. The experiments which he must sometimes make will be on a smaller scale, and the mistakes more easily rectified. They will be directly under his eyes and he will not only be able to see more quickly, but also more clearly when there is danger of failure. And when time shall have proved to him and others that he has either naturally or by acquisition the power necessary for the more important field, it will then be soon enough for him to enter upon it. In wishing you successful pastorates we earnestly recommend that you begin your work with some church in the country or in some small town and gradually fit yourselves for charges which will make greater demands upon you if you should ever be called to assume them.

From the few points I have thus made, it will be apparent what must be the work of a successful pastor.

1. He must win souls to Christ. This is the foundation work. He must either gather a church of believers or he must take one already established by another. Yet in any community, even in any congregation, however largely composed of church members, there must always be a large number dependent upon his ministrations for the acceptance of Christ through the offer of the gospel.
2. These thus brought into the church need to be instructed in the doctrines and duties of God's Word. That minister is culpable whose members continue to be always babes in Christ feeding simply on the milk of the Word and not capable of digesting its strong meat.
3. It is one in which the church is led in paths of increasing holiness. Faith and hope are but first principles. Repentance should be constantly bringing forth a deeper sanctification. Christianity is not simply a profession. It is not a mere system of opinions. It is a life, and life means growth until the perfect stature of manhood is attained. It is union with a personal Saviour, and that union should become more perfect, bringing Saviour and saved more closely together, and assimilating the child of God daily more and more unto his older brother. Some one has said that this increase in holiness in the flock is the only true test of a successful pastorate. While this may not be true, it is one of the most important tests; and that pastor who sees his people daily attain more holiness of life, may well thank God and take courage even amid many discouragements.
4. A successful pastor is also one under whom the whole church is at work. There is no room for idlers even in the largest church—certainly no need

for them in the smallest. It is the pastor's duty to see that every one does some work, that he does the work for which he is best fitted, and that he does it faithfully and efficiently. If any one be not thus engaged, the pastor should studiously discover what work that member should do, and induce him to perform it.

5. A successful pastor will also see that the benevolence of each church member is exercised to the fullest extent possible. He will naturally know the pecuniary ability of each one and the extent of his contributions, especially those connected with his religious life. If those be not in accordance with that ability, it is his duty to instruct and urge, to warn and exhort, and to point out on the one hand the sin of covetousness and on the other the great blessedness to be experienced in giving.
6. A successful pastor will also develop the power of prayer among his members. He will teach them and lead them to adopt the best methods in this respect. The duty of secret and family prayer will be enjoined. Each will be encouraged and exhorted to unite in the prayer meetings of the church and personally to engage publicly in prayer upon all suitable occasions. Only through such attainments will the church be spiritually developed; only through such prayers of his people will he himself be able most successfully to discharge all his duties among them.

From these glimpses at the nature of a successful pastorate, does the work appear to you to be one beyond human power? I grant that it is, and that only through divine grace can you perform it. I need not tell you that that grace must be sought, not remind you that a faithful God has promised it to the full extent that it is needed. Pray for it with all the earnestness of one who feels his utter need of God's help; but remember that God blesses not the prayers of the idle, but will grant his favors only to those who laboriously strive to perform the work to which He has called them.

Go forth, then, this day with the earnest desire and purpose by the help of God to become successful pastors of the churches to which you may minister. "Let no man despise your youth, but be ye examples of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in purity." "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." "Preach the Word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." "Feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." "Give yourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the Word." "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." And "may grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" be with you at all times and in all your work. Amen. 🌸

# Transformed by the Renewing of Your Minds

*Tom J. Nettles*

## **An Imperative with Provisions**

**T**ransformed churches require transformed people. The work of initial regeneration has made the tree good, and now the continued infusion of divine truth gives fructifying energy for growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. The operations of divine grace through divine truth make for transformed fruit-bearing. Christian truth challenges the innate, inbred, and culturally reinforced worldliness of the thought life. This evokes an internal revolution in the way we view ourselves and our neighbors in light of biblical theology. Christian doctrine ascends to a status of relevance previously undiscerned and carries implications to redefine our entire being.

The total revolution of perception appropriate to the Christian informed Paul's urging in Romans 12:1, 2. Paul pointed to the cornucopia of divine mercy as the seed-bed for this transformation. Christ's atoning work, the Spirit's work of transformation, the Father's sovereignty in the entire process of salvation ("by the mercies of God") from eternal covenantal love ("whom He foreknew" 8:29) to glorification ("He also glorified" 8:30) call for a lifestyle of worship ("spiritual service of worship") that involves the immolation of self ("present your bodies a living sacrifice") in the interests of God-likeness ("holy and acceptable to God"). This is to be accomplished by a radical change in worldview. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." This renewing of the mind provides the foundation for the testing and approving of the intrinsic goodness and perfection of God's will.

## **Church Credibility Requires It**

Circular letters written from associations of Baptist churches to member churches in seventeenth-century England urged on all the members a serious and sober meditation on the transforming effect of doctrine. The meetings addressed several issues—some doctrinal point, judgments on practical issues and ecclesiological matters, and exhortations to holiness and transformation of life. These letters engaged both mind and affection to greater Christian consistency through showing the applicability of Christian doctrine.

Their historical context pressed on them the necessity of proving to be a peculiar people. They claimed to be a church of believers. The established church included everyone and brought pressure on Baptists to conform. Enemies brought many false accusations of immorality and unlawfulness and scrutinized their be-

havior for opportunities to attack. These pressures only made meticulous care on these issues ever-present in their Christian consciousness.

This concern may be seen clearly in the admonition written from the Midland Association in England to its member churches in October 1657. The letter expressed the desire “that you may adorne the pretious gospell of our Lord Jesus with a holy and humbell conversation and that you may presse forward towards the marke that is sett before you and that you may be kept unblameable untill the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They had prayed earnestly for the prosperity of “Zion in general” but more particularly “that wee might be thereby the more enabled to glorifie him in our generation and performe the duties of our relation each to other as becometh a people redeemed by Christ.” They especially noted the necessity to “be more in consideration of those blessed cautions that our Lord hath left uppon record for to warne us that so a slugish and drowsie frame of spirit sease [seize] not upon us.”<sup>1</sup>

The “blessed cautions” include direct warning against worldliness and sluggishness in spiritual matters, enforcing the point by reminding them of who they are by God’s grace in this world. What implications do the doctrines of the gospel have for them as a people that are in the world but not of the world? Failure to take to heart the truths of their calling by the gospel has allowed the “world as a canker to eat out your affections to the Lord Jesus.” Too often have they been “asleep in the lap of this Dalilah” so that their “locks have been cut off and you are but as other men.” Worldly approval in some cases has “made the world too beautiful” in that Satan “hath shewed them the kingdomes of the earth and this hath bewitched them.” This condition has made the families of Christians “so dry, useless, and unprofitable” and has eaten out all the “divine sweetness of regenerating and sanctifying grace.”<sup>2</sup>

When the yearly reports of churches indicated no improvement, but only a pattern of “all the same things that wee have endeavored reformation of,” the leaders seemed distressed. Church and family neglect, deadness and coldness still abounded in the churches. Apparently the churches were content merely to complain, to confess fault and sin without forsaking them. Only a true grasp of God’s grace toward them could prompt humility and heavenly-mindedness. The remedy for such sullen spirituality lay not in bare reprimand or moral exhortation, but in a mind absorbed by the kindness of God.

Though wee find much cause of filling our luynes [lines] with complaints yet wee would not forget the kindnesse of the Lord both to you and us. And, first, that hee should make choyce of such unworthy ones and give his Sonne to dye for us and send forth his Spirrite in the Gospell of peace to call us from darknesse. Yea when wee were running to the pit of misery to bring us backe and put us among his children, setting us together in the hevenly places in Christ Jesus, giving us the everlasting hope of everlasting glory. Yea, such things that eye hath not seene nor eare heard not entered into the heart of man so wee may cry out with David, Oh,

how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that feare thee. May not our hearts leape for joye in the thoughts of this glory and bee much to the admiring the distinguishing grace of God that wee should [sic] be chosen, others left. We have also cause to take notice of the love of God and his power in keeping us to beare his name and owne his trueth where so many are lost in the dark above and many turned from the precious wayes of God.<sup>3</sup>

Holiness should pave the way for evangelism. The letter expressed deep gratitude that He had given “successes in that great worke of conversion” by opening many “dores in severall parts for the teaching of the Gospell to the world.” In light of such blessing, the churches must resolve that “henceforth yee walke not as the gentiles walked in the vanity of their wishes but that wee put off the old man which is corrupt and that wee put on the new man which after God is created in righteousnesse and true holinesse.”

In addition to holiness of life, church order and church officers according to biblical example prepared the churches for evangelistic engagement. Those near at hand are of immediate concern, that is, “poor friendes lying in their blood (among whom you were in tymes past) may bee much upon your hearts before the Lord and that, both at home and abroad, you may much endeavor their conversion.” Further afield, evangelism was encouraged: “And it may bee a very acceptable service to the Lord if you may bee sendinge forth the joyfull sound into darke partes remote from you.”

Their view of life, in other words, must conform to doctrinal truth if they were to find spiritual joy, bear spiritual fruit, and propagate the Christian message. The biblical pattern for Christian living develops out of the radical changes implied in regeneration, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and the nature and attributes of God. A Christian worldview involves life transformation in light of doctrinal truth.

## **The Consistent Biblical Pattern**

### **Christ the Lord of One’s Thinking**

This is exactly what Paul had in mind when he spoke of “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Often used as a verse advocating philosophical confrontation, its main emphasis concerns the relation between orthodox theology and holy living. The challenge to Paul’s apostolic authority had grown severe and the misrepresentations of his character, his qualifications as an apostle, and his manner of conduct toward the Corinthians seemed to be taking root in their minds. In light of that, false apostles had been altering his gospel message and falsely presenting the person and work of Christ (11:3, 4, 13–15). Paul defended his apostleship, including his gifts of power, his sufferings, and his motives, so that they would forsake neither the Christ nor the gospel. He

wanted to build them up, not destroy them (10:8; 12:19; 13:10). On his visit to them, would he find them in the faith, or out of it? If they accept false doctrine, they also will lead destructive lives. “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced” (12:20, 21).

No admonition could more clearly demonstrate that a false theology leads directly to an untransformed life. A false gospel and a false Christ cannot lead to a rationale for holy living. On the other hand, when every speculation and every lofty thing “raised up against the knowledge of God” is brought into captivity to Christ, then a people will cleanse themselves “from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1).

## **Divine Reality the Source of Personal Holiness**

### *A Present Glorification*

Paul taught the Colossians how to develop transformed relationships through serious engagement with the truths of the divine nature and Christ’s redemptive work. In chapter three, Paul reminded the believers that they have an entirely new life, the prototype of which is already in heaven in Christ’s glorified humanity (1–4). Since our present true life is in heaven and we actually will be glorified in the future, all that belongs to the life of rebellion and provokes divine wrath must be put to death. The members of this present body may already begin to reflect that glory that currently shines in Christ. The old self dominated by the depraved worldview gives way to the new self in the incipient stages of restoring the divine image (5–11). This is the worldview change Paul encouraged when he wrote, “I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument” (2:4).

### *Election and a Kind Spirit*

Each aspect of God’s gracious dealing with His people has its own appropriate corollary in human conduct and attitude (3:12–17). In verse 12 we read: “Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (HCSB). God’s choice, His determination to set apart (“holy”) certain sinners to receive His redemptive love (“loved”) resulting in His patience with them should radically impact the way we respond personally. If we have been loved while godless, then we must be compassionate. We can never go beyond the compassion shown us by God. We must emulate the kindness of God, for when we were hated and hateful He showed kindness in sending Jesus: “For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, captives of various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one

another. But when the goodness and love for man appeared from God our Savior, He saved us ... according to His mercy”(Titus 3:3–5, HCSB). Election shows us that we have nothing of our own about which to boast, but owe all to God’s sovereign choice; humility, therefore, is the only appropriate response.

Election also has established a component of gentleness and patience in God’s dealing with us; though He could have destroyed us in eternal wrath and kept us under miserable temporal judgments until that destruction, he has been filled with gentleness and His patience has extended to infinite lengths. Paul had experienced this (1 Timothy 1:16) and, therefore, to change the personal worldview of his readers, reminded them that they should see themselves as well as other people through the lens of election.

C. D. Mallery (1801–1864) argued for the sanctifying influence of healthy reflection on the issue that “guilty, hell-deserving sinners are absolutely dependent on His unmerited favor for pardon and salvation.” He is not moved at all by human will but by “His own free, sovereign, gracious pleasure” and bestowed through Christ “according to His stable and everlasting purposes.” These doctrines are to be studied “with a view to holy practical ends.” When that is done, it will “secure to the soul a precious, fragrant, ripening holiness” in a context that “will smite down their pride and fill them with adoring wonder.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The Blood of Christ*

Forgiveness by the blood of Christ also has a powerful effect in changing our understanding of the world. By the sacrifice of His only-begotten, well-beloved Son, God has opened the door of forgiveness for sinners. We have been forgiven at infinite cost, and have been lovingly welcomed to benefit from what Christ has done. Remember, Christ died for the helpless and the ungodly (Romans 5:6). If we absorb that reality into the way we perceive relationships, how can we ever be reserved about forgiveness? What can be done to us that has not been done seven-fold by us against God. Christ emptied Himself of heavenly glory and put our well-being, our best interest, before His own immutable pleasure, and submitted Himself to the vagaries of human suffering and fickle relationships (Philippians 2:7, 8; Romans 15:3). No human agent ever gave Him any comfort or encouragement as He undertook the most extreme act of love ever, or ever to be, performed.

If both wife and husband lived with that theological reality well-entrenched in heart and approached marriage with deep gratitude for such infinite mercy shown them, the tension and argumentation that arises from taking personal offense would diminish greatly. We would discover much less pride to offend and far fewer rights to maintain. When we consider others better than ourselves and their interests more pressing (Philippians 2:3, 4), we are much slower to be defensive or feel it our right to confront them.

In social relationships the same theological model operates. “Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification,” Paul wrote. The reason is cen-

tered on the incarnation and atonement, “For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me” (Romans 15:3, KJV).

The reality of our helplessness (Romans 5:6) throughout this transaction should transform our attitudes toward providing help for the helpless. Those that have no ability to respond to our kindness, who cannot reciprocate either with action, or money, or emotional acknowledgement must nevertheless receive our care. Those actions that most closely reflect the redemptive mercies of God are often the things that are never seen and yet involve the most arduous and thankless labor. Those tasks that have the greatest tendency to sanctify and show that the heart is being fit for heaven are those things that are the most menial and least celebrated and desired among men (Mark 9:33–37; 10:42–45). That the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom, if grasped mind and soul, would create a true servant-spirit and evoke servant-action on the part of Christians. This involves a true transformation of worldview.

### *The Trinity and Love*

A healthy doctrine of the Trinity does wonders for one’s personal worldview. After all, the Trinity is the fountain and foundation of all reality. The triune God has created the world to reflect His nature. When we contemplate the nature of the Trinity, therefore, and take to heart, as much as possible, the relationships that give the one God an eternal three-personed existence, we create a fabric from which unity may function in the midst of diversity. For this reason, Paul writes, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14).

The biblical teaching of the Trinity shows three infinitely excellent persons all having the same essential deity, yet having distinctive and person-appropriate modes of relating, both within the eternal divine essence and to the universe in creation, providence, and redemption. If love is the eternal fountain of the three-personed God, then love is the key to unity in the world he has created, particularly in the church for which Jesus has died in obedience to the will of the Father. Nothing could be more wholesome for church unity, for sympathetic relationships, and wholesome fellowship than a profound wonder and heartfelt joy in the doctrine of the Trinity.

### *Reconciliation*

In a fallen world, however, the road to unity and love involves a radical restoration of relationship. Christ’s reconciling work has produced peace between God and sinners. For this reason Paul can say, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body” (3:15). If God has taken initiative and removed the offense He had against me, such a reconciling work should affect my desire for peace with others. I was at enmity with God, and He also justly stood as my enemy because of my unjust aggression against

His lawful rule. He has taken action to appease His wrath and restore my heart to its proper subjection to Him, and gives the call “Be reconciled to God.” On this basis He has preached peace to sinners in all places. Since the eternal God has pursued the making of peace as a priority in the manifestation of His glory, I should let Christ’s peace rule in my heart. An understanding of reconciliation by Christ’s death, including the destruction of the barrier between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14) and the absolute claim that Christ’s death gives Him over our lives (2 Corinthians 5:15), should motivate me to refuse to nurse any offense. Grudges have no place in the interpersonal relationships of Christians. To allow personal offense, hurt feelings, or a social *faux pas* bring division in a local church completely contradicts the very act by which the church was established. A part of the renewing of the mind, the alteration of personal worldview, hinges on a deep-dyed processing of Christ’s work of reconciliation.

### *Word of Christ*

Finally, Paul admonished the Colossians to let the “word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.” The Word of God must prevail; its rule, moreover, comes through a thorough understanding and full appropriation in application. When the word dwells in us richly, we have absorbed its content, understand the leading themes of it, their relationship to each other, and the power of their truth. Systematic theology, or confessions of faith, no longer impress us as unrealistic, academic barriers to the dynamic life of Scripture, but as friends to give guidance in a rich journey through the Word.

Knowing this Word as the “word of Christ” shows that we see its expression most accurately when we are able to relate it to Christ. We are driven, not by mere arbitrary and undisciplined sentiment, but by awareness of the divine intent to restore His people and display His glory through the covenantal arrangements with the well-beloved Son of God. All the contents of the Bible point us in some way to Christ. Jesus’ religious opponents showed their ignorance of the Word of God, when their knowledge of it did not lead them to Him. “And the Father who sent me has Himself borne witness about Me,” Jesus told them, in a clear reference to the Father’s intention that the Old Testament Scriptures should lead its readers to recognize and embrace the Messiah. Jesus continued, “His voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen, and you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent.” To summarize His judgment of the source of their resistance He said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:37–40).

Not only to His detractors did He emphasize the christocentric nature of Scripture, but He showed the same thing to His disciples that their faith would be strong, informed, and formidable. “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” He told those two bewildered and distressed disciples as He joined them on the road to Emmaus. Had they seen the entire

message of the Old Testament, how all its history, all its poetry, all its wisdom and all its prophecy pointed to Him, they would have known that it was “necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory.” To put them on the road to a mature, cross-carrying faith, therefore, He began “with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, ESV).

Our understanding of Scripture will be focused correctly and bear vibrant and lasting fruit when it is handled as the word of Christ. Our worldview will be transformed when we relate all our activities (“whatever you do in word or deed”) to the “name of the Lord Jesus” and live in gratitude that our approach to the Father comes “through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

When we admonish one another in wisdom, we simply encourage our sisters and brothers to act in a way consistent with the truth of Scripture. We do not desire a spirituality, that is, transformation of personal worldview, that rises above doctrine. In fact, we must pursue lives that more and more approximate the beautiful lineaments of clearly articulated, comprehensively developed, and conscientiously enfolded Christian, and Baptist, doctrine. We desire that the rich truths of Scripture, expressed as discreet yet indivisibly related doctrines, so saturate our minds and affections that our conduct will itself be a reflection of the gospel and its truth and grace.

We will know that justification is more than just a doctrine; it transforms our hearts to relationships saturated with grace. We will know that election is more than just an objective description of how God goes after a people for Himself; it commends to us a life of patience and kindness and active pursuit of friendship to do good to others. When we encourage others with the blessed and infinitely glorious truth of the Trinity, we purify our worship of Him and, also, we set forth a goal for unity through the binding sinews of love. When we admonish one another in the wisdom of reconciliation, we hold out hope that no barrier is too huge to transcend; bitterness, hostility, betrayal—all can be overcome through just, loving, and holy strategy under the blessing of God’s grace. Our personal worldview can be radically altered through eternal truth; we can approve the things that are excellent in order to be found sincere and blameless until the day of Christ (Philippians 1:10). The word of Christ fits us for the day of Christ.

## Conclusion

C. D. Mallery, who treated the entire spectrum of biblical doctrine in its tendency to produce holiness, which he called “soul prosperity,” summarized the power of biblical realities in promoting personal piety and reformation in a section on “active faith.”

At first the sinner, convinced of sin, renouncing all the works of righteousness which he has done, and all other human dependencies, flies to Christ for refuge and complacently relies on Him as his wisdom, righ-

teousness, sanctification, and redemption. He is now accepted, pardoned, and justified; he is united to the Savior by faith; he is now a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. But that faith which first bears the soul to Christ abides in the bosom, a permanent and living principle, depending upon Him at all times, and trusting Him through life for all needed good. And, moreover, that faith which rests on the Savior secures in the bosom a cordial reception of all God's testimony, as far as the mind progresses in the right understanding of the terms in which it is propounded. It takes God at His word in all things. It expands and ripens into the sweet revealed truth at large; the truth that concerns ourselves, the Father, the Savior, the Holy Spirit; the works, providence, and government of God; the soul, the Church, angels, eternity.

To faith is assigned, by the Scriptures of truth, a most dignified position, it has much, very much, to do in the whole spiritual history of the saint; and according as it prospers or declines does the soul prosper or decline in its vital interests. Without it, it is impossible to enjoy God, to obey God, to please God. It nurtures the comfort, quietude, and stability of the soul. By faith we stand; by faith we walk; by faith we live, labor, fight, and conquer. It is that by which we purify our hearts; it is the victory that overcomes the world, the shield by which we quench the fiery darts of the wicked. It gives boldness and success in prayer, a sweet odor to praise, a spiritual excellence to our patient enduring. What is the word read, or heard, or remembered, unmixed with faith? A profitless thing. Faith, by receiving the word of God in its true import and for its true intent, converts it into precious nourishment for the soul; feeding by faith upon the manna of truth, the soul is made prosperous—it flourishes in beauty and in strength, in hope and in gladness.<sup>5</sup>

This sort of worldview not only will be the most unanswerable challenge to the unbelieving philosophies of the world, but will be the true fruit of ongoing reformation in the churches. We must strive always to have a holy discontent with our present status that it not be quo, but pursue the status of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, a church that is reformed and always reforming, a transformed people living with transformed relationships. 🌸

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> B. R. White, Ed. *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, 3 Parts (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1971), 1:35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:98.

<sup>4</sup> Charles D. Mallary, *Soul Prosperity: Its Nature, Its Fruits, and Its Culture* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1860; reprint ed., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1999), 295, 297, 299.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–26.

# “Our great distinguishing characteristic”

## *H. H. Tucker and the Battle for Church Purity*

*Jeff Robinson*

In January of 1866, Baptist leaders in Virginia introduced a proposal that would integrate Southern Baptists and Disciples of Christ—Campbellites—into a single denomination.

The development stunned many Baptists in the commonwealth, but editors of the *Religious Herald* newspaper supported the union of the two denominations with a level of enthusiasm that captured the attention of H. H. Tucker, editor of the *Christian Index* in Georgia. Tucker fired an editorial volley aimed at underscoring a crucial point that Virginia editors had apparently overlooked: such a union with the Campbellites amounted to an egregious violation of Baptist doctrine and polity, particularly as it related to regenerate church membership. If the Campbellites wanted to become Baptists, each individual would have to assent to Baptist and evangelical doctrine, testify to a clear work of grace in their hearts and submit to believers' baptism by immersion. After all, Tucker argued, to be a Baptist was to be committed to a pure church.

*Religious Herald* editors jostled with Tucker for several months over the proposed union, but leaders among Baptists in Virginia wisely voted to remain separate from the Disciples. In the end, Baptist ecclesiology had defeated a dangerous form of pragmatism, Tucker wrote in the aftermath. Happily, Tucker argued, Baptists in Virginia had chosen to remain faithful to their regulating principle of *sola Scriptura*, a principle that demanded that the church be comprised exclusively of those whose hearts had been subdued and renovated by a unilateral work of the God's effectual grace.

Who was H. H. Tucker and why is he an important witness to call to the stand in defense of Baptist principles?

### H. H. Tucker: “*The Jonathan Edwards of the South*”

In his tribute to Tucker in the preface of a 1902 volume of editorials which the Georgia Baptist Convention published, Henry McDonald, Tucker's pastor for many years in Atlanta, called his late parishioner the “Jonathan Edwards of the South.” Indeed, Tucker was Edwardsean in his ability to synthesize theology with crucial worldview-related disciplines such as philosophy, contemporary culture and religious movements of his day.

Born in Warren County Georgia in 1819, Tucker bore the namesake of his grandfather, Henry Holcombe, one of the eminent Baptist pastors in Georgia in the early nineteenth century. Holcombe was one of the founders of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Tucker spent his teen years in Philadelphia and received a

classical education, graduating from Columbian College in Washington, D. C. in 1838 and for two years he practiced law in Forsyth, Georgia.

In 1948 two landmark events occurred in Tucker's life: he married Mary Catherine West (she died a few months later and he remarried, having two children) and he abandoned his work as an attorney and surrendered to the high calling of Christian ministry. Soon, Tucker moved to Penfield, Georgia and received private theological instruction from J. L. Dagg at Mercer University. Tucker pastored for only one year and labored as a Christian educator for more than a decade. He served as president of both Mercer University and the University of Georgia, teaching theology, history, philosophy and the Bible at both schools.

While Tucker was noted as an educator, his work as editor of the *Christian Index* was the means by which he achieved perhaps his greatest notoriety in Georgia and across the Baptist South, a kingdom Tucker tenderly referenced in his editorials as "my Southern Zion." Tucker spent four separate tenures as editor of the *Index* from 1866—just a few months after the close of the Civil War—through 1889. In 1888 Tucker bought the *Index* and operated it until his abrupt death in September of 1889.

While Tucker served as a pastor for a brief time, but viewed himself as a shepherd-editor at the helm of the *Index*, writing often on doctrine and biblical exposition. He sought to teach, rebuke and warn from the editor's chair. Upon his death, one longtime admirer said of Tucker, "the ink that touched his pen turned to light."

A stalwart evangelical Calvinist in the mold of Dagg, J. P. Boyce, Basil Manly, Jr., P. H. Mell and John Albert Broadus, Tucker wrote prolifically on the doctrines of grace and related topics such as divine providence. He also fed readers on a regular diet of practical divinity—prayer, family worship, sanctification—demonstrating how Christian doctrines worked out in real life. Perhaps more than any other topic, three subjects captured the attention of his pen most often, subjects which Tucker saw as intimately interrelated, subjects demanded by Baptists' commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture: regenerate church membership, the doctrine of regeneration and the pernicious threat to church purity of Finneyite revivalism.

### *"Our great distinguishing characteristic:" A Pure Church*

Tucker argued that regenerate church membership was a logical extension of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, and he insisted that it was a doctrine that sat at the heart of the Baptist genius. The doctrine of regenerate church membership was not singled out and separated from Tucker's theology, but was an irreducible extension of it; if the doctrines of grace were true and God had chosen to save a people, sent His Son to die as their substitute and caused them to persevere to the end, then, by logical necessity—and in fidelity to the overwhelming teaching of the New Testament—the church must be comprised of believers only. The Baptist

view of the church was, in Tucker's mind, a necessary complement to Reformed soteriology.

This doctrine rings clear from his polemic against the union of Virginia Baptists and Campbellites, in which Tucker argued that membership requirements for a Baptist church could be synthesized into a single litmus test: "A person must first come before the church and relate his experience of grace; that is, he gives satisfactory evidence from a relation of his feelings that he has passed from death unto life and become a new creature. We cannot conceive of such a thing as a church on the New Testament model, except it be composed entirely of those who have made a credible profession of their faith; that there can be any difference of opinion on such a subject as this, is to us a strange mystery... This is our great distinguishing characteristic."<sup>1</sup>

Tucker viewed regenerate church membership as a key battleground in the war for the glory of God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, one of the key doctrines that "holds all of Christianity together," he argued, is regeneration, or the new birth.

### *"Yet they stumble at the words:"* Regeneration

Remove the necessity of regeneration, Tucker argued, and you undermine the New Testament church; For Tucker, regeneration was the track upon which the train of theological orthodoxy traveled, pulling along all the graces of redemption—repentance, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification—in its path: "Right views of regeneration are apt to carry with them right views of the whole body of divinity; while on the other hand, wrong views on this subject are apt to lead to errors innumerable and disastrous."<sup>3</sup>

For Tucker, regeneration constituted the irreducible core of the gospel because it serves as the means by which rebellious sinners become the adopted sons of heaven. Any theological movement that denies the necessity of regeneration must be met square on with the truth of Scripture, Tucker asserted.

Regeneration was a critical doctrine, Tucker argued, because the fallen human heart, left to its own devices, would never overcome its opposition to its Creator. Thus, Tucker correctly expected his assertion of the centrality of regeneration to stir up controversy, for some who considered themselves Christians (and Baptists) opposed the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace with as much zeal as had the pseudo-disciples of Christ's day.<sup>4</sup>

While Tucker viewed some Arminians as genuine believers, still, their theology existed close to a deadly slough which sought to leave something for man in salvation: "Some will accept Christ and His gospel, yet they stumble at the words, 'No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.' They cannot wholly rid themselves of the Pharisaic thought, that the first motions toward salvation originate in man; for even human faith has its author in heaven."<sup>5</sup>

Tucker warned that the outcome of such theology was potentially lethal, such that "Many, who are Christ's 'disciples' up to this point, abandon Him when it comes to this," and "Thus does history repeat itself."<sup>6</sup> The cry of many in Tucker's

day—and a tired refrain heard far too often in 21st-century Baptist life—was that preachers should resist teaching such discouraging doctrines because they risked offending the sensibilities of some who might otherwise seek after Christ. These doctrines, the argument went (and still goes) undermine evangelism. Tucker's rejoinder to this assertion was pointed: only the biblical gospel saves.

"The man whose preaching drives nobody away is not preaching the gospel," he wrote. "The man who does drive people away by declaring the truth is doing exactly what Jesus Christ did.... Let the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation, as in everything else, be proclaimed as with an angel's trump, though men should be outraged by it now as when Jesus annunciated it."<sup>7</sup>

In Tucker's view, Baptist churches did not want those who were repulsed by such core biblical teachings, for their inclusion would only besmirch the integrity of the membership rolls and compromise the congregation's witness.

But the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation, Tucker pointed out, naturally stirs up the rebellious emotions of the unregenerate as illustrated by the pseudo-disciples who abandoned Jesus: "It was the doctrine that they could not bear. They were disgusted; they turned away from him, and never did come back. Up to this point they had received his instructions, but when it came to this, their nature rebelled, they could not endure it, and they abandoned him forever."<sup>8</sup>

Tucker's emphasis on regeneration arose out of a fundamental belief that depraved man lacked the moral ability to come to God. Dead men cannot seek God. Sinners, Tucker asserted, are like the Pharisees; they want to seek God on their terms and in their own time. The New Testament, however, does not speak of salvation as being available at the whims of man.

Thus it was the bad news of human depravity and the good news of the new birth which, more than any other tenet, animated Tucker's grave concern over the new methods being used to manufacture "revival on demand," methods that presupposed a Pelagian view of human nature, methods that were infiltrating Baptist churches in the post-Civil War South and filling their rolls with non-Christians.

### *"The Kind of Evangelistic Work Popular at This Time:"* Revivalism

In the winter of 1885, a revival preacher well known in the South and Midwest brought to Cincinnati his itinerant ministry, promising to produce, in one week, an abundant harvest of evangelical fruit. Accounts of the revival in local newspapers indicated that many had indeed been converted through the revivalist's "sensational new measures." A few months later, however, "judicious Christians from Cincinnati and other places" offered a different outcome once the fires of emotion had banked: "The revival meetings of last winter were failures . . . . The conviction seems to have now been formed that it is better that churches do their own work by their own pastors and members, and that the religious interest of last winter was dissipated and not deepened or extended or instructed by the employment of evangelists."

In commenting on Cincinnati's encounter with the new methods which self-styled evangelists employed, Tucker referenced a similar event that took place in Georgia: "A little more than a year ago, it was claimed that eighteen hundred persons were converted in Atlanta, as a result of an evangelist's labors. It would be hard to find one in a hundred of them now."<sup>9</sup>

Because of its assumptions of free will and its exaltation of experience through such methods as the "anxious bench" at the expense of vital, life-giving gospel truths such as regeneration, revivalism found a ready opponent in Tucker. In one generation in America, Charles Finney's new methods of revival—built upon a denial of original sin and a lessening of human depravity—had seriously eroded bedrock aspects of conversion such as effectual call, the new birth and the necessity of discipleship.

In dozens of editorials and articles, Tucker opposed revivalism and asserted the traditional view that revival is every bit as much a sovereign effusion of God's Spirit upon a church as is the new birth that changes the heart of a sinner. He often reported on protracted meetings that boasted large numbers of converts and took every opportunity to warn readers: "We are ashamed to defile our columns with such abominable stuff. We publish the above [account] to let our readers see the kind of evangelistic work that is popular at this time. We wish it understood that we protest against it; and we counsel our brethren everywhere to be on their guard lest they be led astray."<sup>10</sup>

Tucker was no mere theological contrarian.<sup>11</sup> It would be easy to dismiss his critique of Finneyite methods and their fruit as the ravings one who possessed Calvinistic tunnel-vision. Nothing could be further from reality. Tucker's concern was driven by a heartfelt desire to see churches filled with spiritually healthy persons whose hearts had been subdued by the Spirit of God.

Revivalism, Tucker asserted, exchanged the biblical doctrine of the new birth for decisional regeneration. It also undermined the supremacy of the preaching ministry of the local church. As a result, Tucker pointed out, souls were placed in grave peril; many of the new revival's converts joined churches and presumed they were Christians, but possessed no genuine interest in the effectual grace of God. Often, Tucker warned, the roving evangelists themselves assured those who responded to the altar call, or who "broke through" to God after spending the appropriate amount of time on the mourner's bench, that they were indeed recipients of salvation. Only God can save a sinner, and the Holy Spirit alone can grant genuine assurance; revivalists who sought to do both, Tucker argued, were doing the devil's bidding to the eternal doom of many.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his numerous comments and editorials on revival, Tucker regularly argued that God pours out increased measures of grace through the pulpit ministry of the local church.<sup>13</sup> A new assumption that "no revival can be gotten up without a professional revivalist and protracted meetings" Tucker called a "mischievous heresy" because such a view "displaces our pastors or makes them appear second rate."<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere, Tucker characterized revivalism as “religion by power of attorney,” and called on pastors to be faithful in preaching the word, parishioners to be fervent in prayer, and he exhorted fathers to be constant in teaching the Bible in their homes.<sup>15</sup> God’s blessing comes through these simple, biblically-sanctioned means, and not through the novelties of the professional revivalist “who acts as an attorney for the church,” he argued.<sup>16</sup> Further, Tucker believed it to be impossible to predict when the Holy Spirit would move in such a way to produce a widespread awakening of the sort that revivalist ministers guaranteed.

Not only did revivalism promote works salvation and instill an unshakeable confidence in the unregenerate that they were converted, it also trampled on the blood of Christ and robbed God of His glory. As Tucker saw it, thieving glory that belonged to God alone was the most devious aspect of the “new school” of revival.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Tucker was a massive figure on the Baptist landscape in the Southern states over the second-half of the nineteenth century. As editor of the *Index*, he promoted the purity of the bride of Christ by defending the necessity of regeneration and warning Christians against the vagaries of revivalism. While revivalists boasted of adding large numbers of their converts to the local church, Tucker exposed their numbers game as “ill gotten gain” that polluted local churches and duped souls to their eternal damnation.☹️

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker, “Startling and Suggestive,” *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (11 December 1879), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker, “The New Birth,” *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (14 April 1887), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker, “Disgusted,” *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (12 February 1885), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (27 August 1885), 1.

<sup>11</sup> This notion is clear from Tucker’s positive case for authentic revival, which articulated by publishing, then affirming, an editorial by the Rev. George F. Pierce, a Bishop in the Methodist-Episcopal Church. Pierce was neither a Calvinist nor an adherent to regenerate church membership. On March 1, 1883, Tucker devoted most of his editorial space to Pierce’s writing on revival and appended comments expressing his agreement. One of Tucker’s stated goals was to show that he was

not an opponent of revival as some had labeled him: “We do not agree with our Methodist brother on some subjects of great importance; but the world knows that they have relied very greatly for their success on revivals; and it will be admitted that a man who agrees with them on the subject of revivals is not opposed to revivals.” Like Pierce, Tucker favored the time-honored historical view of revival that it was a gift sent from God and could neither be predicted nor manipulated.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Tucker followed Jonathan Edwards view on this issue. Calling Edwards a “revivalist preacher” is only partly accurate, for the language fails to account for the fact that Edwards was simply functioning in his pastoral role at Northampton, feeding his congregation on a steady diet of exegetical sermons, when God blessed his efforts in a profound manner through an increased effusion of the Holy Spirit. Even a portion of the title of one of his best-known works on revival, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* shows that Edwards, far from seeking to secure revival through a novel set of means, was surprised by it. Tucker regularly used this argument.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker, *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (4 February 1886), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Holcombe Tucker, “Religion by Power of Attorney,” *The Christian Index and Southwestern Baptist* (4 February 1886), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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## Book Review

Renihan, James M., ed. *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family*. Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004.

*Reviewed by Tom Nettles*

Though several persons that have dealt with the Baptist confessional tradition have noted in narrative style the relationship between Baptist confessions and other evangelical/Reformed confessions, none has given the critical attention to this phenomenon at the level of this volume by James Renihan. Renihan includes the *First London Confession* and the revision of 1646 comparing them to the 1596 *True Confession* and other possible sources such as Ames’s *Marrow of Theology* and the *Belgic Confession*. His section on the *Second London Confession* includes comparisons with the *Savoy Declaration*, *The Westminster Confession*, and some places in the *First London Confession*. The Baptist Catechism is compared to the Westminster Shorter Catechism as well as the Westminster Larger Catechism show-

ing its dependence in a few places on that document. The Orthodox Catechism produced by Hercules Collins placed side by side with its mother document, The Heidelberg Catechism, closes the volume. Renihan has developed a scheme by which he indicates each point of verbal independence of each of the Baptist documents through bold lettering. The early foundational symbols of Baptist doctrine ought to be known in every Baptist church. Renihan's approach shows how doctrinally aligned Baptists were with the doctrinal architects of other Protestant brethren in England. The bold lettering helps the reader understand the care with which the Baptists distinguished themselves by certain nuances of vocabulary and, at obvious times, by distinctive doctrines.

Readers of the *Founders Journal* would be interested in two other books presently in print. Both of these are excellent discussions of the atonement. Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2006). This is the third edition of a work first published in 1977. Long's book expresses an extended defense of his conviction that "salvation belongs to the triune Jehovah." His positive presentation, therefore, focuses on theology. First, definite atonement is implied in the eternal distinguishing love and the eternal purpose of God. Second, definite atonement is the most natural conclusion to be drawn from the Bible's discussion of the nature of Christ's work as a real substitute, a real reconciliation, a real redemption, and a real propitiation, as well as the highly definite and exclusive language often used to point to the ones for whom Christ's death will be effective. Third, Long points to the variety of operations of the Holy Spirit in salvation and concludes that these too can only be understood in all their biblical dimensions through the assumption of a definite atonement. Long concludes with exegetical studies of several key passages that are frequently used in the defense of universal, indefinite atonement. The Second book: Tom Wells, *A Price for a People: The Meaning of Christ's Death* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992). Wells does detailed studies of redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation and on that basis asks the question, "For Whom did Christ die?" He shows what the Bible means by the term world, discusses Christ's death for the church, for the many, His substitutionary death for the redemptive family, and also deals with what are normally considered the "problem texts" with particular redemption. These two books, already helpful for a number of years, and now available, can be helpful for those that might not have used them before. Both books are clearly written and radiate a kind and deferential spirit. 🌸

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