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Cover:

The image on the front cover is the logo for the Southern Baptist Founders Conference on the Faith of the Founders. It is representative of the spirit and heritage that we are seeking to recover in this day. The **sword and trowel** call to mind the great work of Nehemiah as he both defended and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. Of course, the "prince of preachers," Charles Haddon Spurgeon, also employed this two-fold image to symbolize his ministry in the last century. Defending the truth "once delivered to the saints" and building up the Church of Christ through the work of evangelism is still essential to the gospel ministry. The **anvil** is the tool of that "tinker," John Bunyan, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* accurately depicts the Christian life in all its stages. The **cobbler's tools** are reminiscent of William Carey, who left his native England to travel to pagan lands with the gospel of grace, thereby laying claim to the title, "Father of Foreign Missions." Prominence is given to the **carpenter's tools**, which remind us of the Carpenter from Nazareth, whose perfect life and substitutionary death constructed the full redemption of His people, and whose glorious gospel it is our privileged duty to preach to the end of the age.

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

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Raison d'etre: An Editorial Introduction

Tom Ascol

The writer of Ecclesiastes well has said that of the making of many books there is no end. Such commentary is equally true of journals and periodical literature. If this be the case, then why should anyone presume to offer a quarterly publication in addition to those which already exist?

Perhaps the most significant reason is that there is no one periodical being currently published which is guided by the purpose which the Founders Journal hopes to serve. There are available some very fine journals with which we share many common concerns and interests and to which we give our hearty recommendation. Indeed, we count as friends those from various confessional backgrounds who recognize the need of modern Christianity to return to basic biblical foundations for both belief and practice. Reports of biblical reformation within different branches of Christ's Church from around the globe are occasions of much rejoicing. The revival of historic, orthodox Christianity transcends denominational borders and must be regarded as nothing less than the work of God wherever it is found.

It is the peculiar work of God among the people known as Southern Baptists, however, which provides the immediate context and occasion for this journal. During the last decade the SBC has been marked by serious political and theological division as debate over the inerrancy of the Scriptures dominated the agenda. The details of this controversy have been sufficiently chronicled and subjected to a plethora of interpretations by both "sides." These events could hardly have escaped the notice of any mildly aware North American evangelical. What is far less known, but perhaps far more significant, is the fact that over the last 10-12 years there has been an undeniable resurgence within the Southern Baptist Convention of what has commonly been denominated the "Doctrines of Grace."

Resurgence is an appropriate word, for the views to which many are returning are nothing less than the soteriological convictions which prevailed among the founders and early leaders of the SBC. Some call this position a belief in "sovereign grace"--that is, that salvation is sovereignly and graciously given by God to sinners. Others call it "Calvinism"--not because the reformer originated these views, but in recognition that he and his followers did much to systematize them in a coherent theological construct. It might with equal justice be called Augustinianism, or even Paulism. Regardless of what one calls it, it is, in the final analysis, nothing other than the conviction that "salvation is of the Lord." Were a register to be made of those who, throughout history, have unashamedly championed this position, it would contain a veritable "Who's Who" of nineteenth century Southern Baptist statesmen (to say nothing of earlier American and English Baptist leaders!). W. B. Johnson, R. B. C. Howell, Richard Fuller, James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, Basil Manly, J. B. Gambrell, Malcolm McGregor, P. H. Mell, William Williams, John Dagg, and J. M. Frost are but a few of the many whose names would be included. It is without question that these men, who were the denominational loyalists of their day, firmly embraced the Doctrines of Grace. Further, the thesis that this theological persuasion prevailed among Southern Baptists during the first 75 years of our existence has yet to be refuted by scholarly research (see *By His Grace, For His Glory*, by Dr. Tom Nettles). In fact, quite the contrary is true. The more old Southern Baptist works are scrutinized, the more support is mustered for this thesis.

This journal, as the name reflects, emerges out of the same concerns and principles which have guided the Southern Baptist Conference on the Faith of the Founders over the last eight years. The energy which is being generated by the divine renewal of the Doctrines of Grace among Southern Baptists should be conserved and guided. The *Founders Journal* hopes to be of use in this effort by providing historical, biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies which will glorify God, honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches.

Modern Southern Baptists find themselves in a similar position to that of Isaac in the Valley of Gerar. Through the years the wells of our fathers have been stopped up, and must be dug again if we are to be strengthened and refreshed with the same life-giving water which sustained those whose blood, sweat and tears founded our denomination. It is to this purpose that the *Founders Journal* is committed. In keeping with this goal the journal takes as its theological statement the first official Southern Baptist confession of faith, the *Abstract of Principles* (see p. 25).

The plan is to publish a quarterly journal with articles which reflect doctrinal and devotional commitment to the Doctrines of Grace (election, depravity, atonement, effectual calling, and perseverance) and their experimental application to the local church. Contemporary voices, as well as those who "being dead, yet speaketh," will be featured. Sermons, expositions, essays, letters, book reviews and newsworthy notes will be included. The anticipated subscription price is \$10.00 per year (domestic).

An undertaking of this magnitude is truly a venture of faith. For several years there has been discussion among various groups for the need of such a journal. In the past decade some have attempted to meet this need only to see their efforts met with hopeful beginnings and unfortunate demises. The current editorial staff (Tom Nettles, Ernest Reisinger, Bill Ascol, Fred Malone, and Tom Ascol) is committed to making this effort, under God, a lasting venture--if the reaction to the first two issues indicate that it meets with a favorable reception. For this reason, your response will bear heavily upon the decision of whether or not to continue publication after the second issue.

The first two issues come free of charge. They are designed to "test the waters" to see if such a project is viable. If, as we anticipate, there is sufficient interest and support generated, then the first full year of publication will be 1991. No subscriptions are being solicited at this time. Your response to this issue, however, will be a determining factor in the future of the journal. If you would be interested in subscribing for 1991, please fill out the response card that is included in this issue and mail it back as quickly as possible. Pass the additional card to an interested friend. All responses will receive the Summer 1990 issue in the mail free of charge. In addition, all who commit to subscribe will receive with the next issue a free copy of *Reforming a Local Church* by Ernest Reisinger.

You may help get this journal off the ground by passing it on to others and encouraging them to indicate their interest via correspondence. A limited number of additional copies of this issue are available upon request. May God be pleased to own this effort to the glory of His name and the good of His children.



The Church's Greatest Need

Ernest Reisinger

[The substance of this article is taken from an address which was delivered at the 1989 American Banner of Truth Conference at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee.]

Let me state at the outset what I believe to be the church's greatest need, and I do so without fear of contradiction by any serious, discerning observer.

The greatest need and one of deepest importance is for the continual manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. I did not say theological theory about the Holy Spirit, or just intellectual understanding -- I said, the power of the Holy Spirit; that has to do with experience not words. When we begin thinking and studying what the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit and the believer, we are immediately into experimental awareness. I am talking about that which makes men aware of and sure of the reality of Jesus--the Living Christ.

Many preachers have little or nothing to say about experimental awareness of God. Not much is heard in our churches about the anointing through which men are made sure of the reality of Jesus as proclaimed by the apostles. 1 John 2:20,27 is what I am talking about: *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One. . . . But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you."*

The Holy Spirit is a live subject on the contemporary scene, and many of the qualified people are not saying enough about Him. And some unqualified people are often saying too much and often saying many inaccurate things which sometimes leads to fanaticism and hypocrisy. There are few subjects more important to the Christian and the Christian minister because the Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual life, all spiritual worship, all spiritual ordinances, all spiritual witnessing and all spiritual service; He is also the "Divine Agent of Evangelism."

The Holy Spirit is to the life of the Christian what the Creator is to the world. Without God the Creator the world would not exist and without His continuing, sustaining, and preserving work the world would crash out of existence. So likewise, without the Holy Spirit there would be no Christians in the world and without His continual sanctifying influence the Christian would know no spiritual growth or power.

The churches of the reformation gave much emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit. The reformers stressed that what is necessary for correct interpretation of the Bible is not the church, but rather the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit on man's mind.

Spurgeon said, "One of the most effectual ways for a church to revive herself is to preach much about the Holy Spirit; after all He is the very breath of the church. And when a church, a minister or a Christian finds that it is winter time in his soul they must turn to the Holy Spirit and cry, *"Quicken thou me in the Way."* May that be our cry these days of the great need for reality in our lives and the life of the church.

Luther and Calvin set forth with clarity that it is the Holy Spirit that is necessary in applying the sacrifice of Christ in our lives--not the mass but the Spirit.

How many churches are seeking:

The power of the Spirit
The wisdom of the Spirit
The grace of the Spirit
The love of the Spirit
To pray in the Spirit?

I am not talking about some second experience subsequent to conversion. I am talking about seeking to experience the filling of the Spirit over and over and over again for gospel purposes.

In Romans 15:13,19 the great apostle shows the absolute necessity of the work of the Spirit for the internal growth of the church and for all the outside work of gathering God's elect from the world.

In verse 13 he attributes the power to be filled with joy and peace and abound in hope to the Holy Spirit. *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (NKJV).

In verse 19 he shows the necessity of the Holy Spirit for outside gospel work: *"in mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ"* (NKJV).

You see, my dear reader, that first of all, to keep the church happy and holy within herself there must be a manifestation of the power of the Spirit. Secondly, in order for the church to invade the territories of the enemy and conquer sinners for Christ she must be clothed with the same mighty power. And let me underscore one thing, that is, the power of the church for her external work will be proportionate with the power which dwells within herself.

What I am saying is this: gauge the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers and you may fairly judge their influence on unbelievers. Let the church be illuminated by the Holy Spirit and she will be sure to reflect light and power to the unbelieving world. Why?? Because we, ourselves, must first drink of the living water before the rivers of living water will flow to the unconverted. We can not distribute loaves and fishes out of an empty basket. Oh, the absolute necessity of the power of the Holy Spirit!

When we were baptized we were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

When we pronounce couples "man and wife" we do so in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

When we affirm our faith in the creed, we say that we believe in God the Father, and in God the Son and in God the Holy Ghost.

Yes, and the last words pronounced over our coffin before the mourners turn from our grave and the cold earth goes over our dead body, the last words to the mourners will be, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you."

When we think of the incarnation we immediately think of the virgin Mary and how the Holy Ghost came upon her and the power of the Highest overshadowed her (Luke 1:35).

When we consider the earthly ministry of our Lord we remember before that ministry began the Spirit "*descended from heaven like a dove and abode upon him.*" The Bible says that God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost; again, that the Father gave Him the Spirit above measure and that He was "*full of the Holy Spirit*" (John 1:32; Acts 10:38; John 3:34; Luke 4:1).

When the scripture takes us to the cross, where He suffered vicariously, we learn in Heb. 9:14 that it was "through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God. "

When we think of the keystone of Christian truth, the seal and topstone of all His work (the resurrection), the scripture again underscores the absolute necessity of the work of the Spirit. It is written that "He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

When we view His departure from this world and the tremendous pain and sorrow that filled His disciples--how did He comfort that little orphan family? Well, it was with that gracious promise that He gave to them the night before He died: "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth."

And when we think of His final mandate to the apostles to preach the gospel to all the world we again see the necessary place of the Holy Spirit. Hear His own words to them. "Wait for the promise of the Father." They were unfit to go forth with His message until they were "filled with the Holy Ghost." And we too are unfit.

What do you think of the whole dispensation under which we Christians live? You know we are privileged far above the Jews in that we are told in II Cor. 3:8 that we live under the "ministration of the Spirit."

Why do I say this is the need of the hour?

1. Without the Spirit there will be no conviction.
2. Without the Spirit there will be no conversions.
3. Without the Spirit there will be no Spiritual growth.
4. Without the Spirit all preaching and witnessing is in vain.
5. Even the preaching of our Lord did not produce one convert apart from this life-giving power, though He Himself had the Spirit without measure.

The Bible says, "*You shall receive power.*" When? When the Holy Spirit shall come upon you."

When we think of evangelism we think of the Holy Spirit promised in Acts 1:8. Immediately our minds run to two things. First, to Pentecost where 3000 souls were evangelized, and secondly, to the effectual call that (1) enlightened their minds, (2) convicted, and convinced their consciences, and (3) renewed their wills.

Well, my dear reader, I trust that you can understand my assertion that the greatest need in the church today is a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was a Holy Spirit event--an evangelistic event. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost God laid the whole world in the lap of the church as her responsibility to witness. Just think what the Holy Spirit produced at Pentecost.

What Did The Holy Spirit Produce at Pentecost?

I hear someone saying, "tongues." Well, we will see that tongues is the least thing it produced--almost insignificant by comparison.

First, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost produced *powerful, evangelistic preaching*. See it immediately in Acts 2:14-36. This preaching was not only powerful but it was relevant; it made them ask the right questions. One of the things that serious preachers must always be concerned about is that their preaching be relevant. There is much preaching which is answering questions that no one is asking. That is like scratching where it doesn't itch.

One of the fundamental problems of our generation, both in the world and in the church, is that people are not asking the right questions. They are not itching in the right place. Well, what is the answer to that problem?

The answer is Spirit-breathed, Christ-centered, Bible preaching in the power and unction of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit can bring conviction. The New Testament and the history of revival clearly testify to that fact.

John 16:8: *"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."*

Under the powerful Holy Ghost preaching there is never any problem with people itching in the wrong places, and they will be asking the right questions (Acts 2:37). *"What must I do to be saved?"* Did any one ever ask a more important question?

N.B. They did not ask any questions about tongues or anything about the phenomena. They asked a much more important question--verse 37: *"Men and brethren what must we do?"*

Some think of Pentecost as producing tongues. It did that, but tongues did not produce converts. No. It was the powerful preaching induced by the Holy Spirit that made people itch in the right place, ask the right questions, and find the right answers. This powerful preaching produced converts, thousands of them.

If you never understand tongues it will not make one bit of difference. But if you never experience Spirit-anointed preaching it makes all the difference in the world--yes, the difference between life and death, heaven and hell.

The second thing the Holy Spirit produced at Pentecost was an *"Apostolic Church."* See Acts 2:42-47. The Holy Spirit is not just an "Evangelist" drawing people to Christ. The Holy Spirit is also a "Church Planter" and a "Church Builder." The Holy Spirit draws people into the fellowship of the church. The Holy Spirit creates the communion of obedient, teachable, worshiping, and witnessing Christians. Christians who are learning to love God, love God's people, and God's Church.

What is an Apostolic church? It is a church experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. This is apparent by what is revealed in Acts 2:42-47. The converts were steadfast. *"They continued steadfastly."* That is, they were not a church that was carried away with every novelty and every new gimmick or method of evangelism. An apostolic church knows what it believes and why it believes what it believes.

There are four areas or four distinct marks of an apostolic church set forth in these verses.

1. (v. 42) - They were continually devoting themselves to *Apostolic teaching*. Perhaps this is the primary mark. A real church will be submitting to apostolic truth. They will be interested in what the Bible says, what it means and how it applies to faith and practice.

2. (v. 42) - They were distinguished by *God-honoring worship* -- "*Breaking of bread, prayer and praise.*" I wish all ministers and church officers were as much concerned about the power of the Holy Spirit in our worship services as they are about a lot of minute details. There would be much more peace and true worship and far less pharisaic quibbling about secondary matters.

All the forms and ceremonies--even baptism and the Lord's Supper--though properly managed, will be empty and unedifying, and they will bring no glory to God or good to His people without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that the first concern in the official order of divine worship is the Holy Spirit. The hymn writer was correct when he wrote "All is vain unless the Holy One come down."

No ordinance has any effective spiritual power except the Spirit gives it. No Christian's heart is ever in the proper frame to worship without the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the worship of God issues in joy and gladness. They were distinguished by God-honoring worship.

3. (vv. 44, 45) - They were marked by *Christ-like love and unity*. They did not forsake the assembling of themselves together.

4. (v. 47) - They not only applied themselves to sound doctrine, and engaged in true worship, and were united by Christ-like love, but fourthly, they were increased by *God-centered evangelism*. The Lord added to the church. That is God-centered evangelism.

Did they just sit under apostolic teaching, worship and pray, and say the Lord saves? No, there was something else going on daily. Cf. 2:47. Every day or day by day the Lord added because every day . . . from house to house they kept teaching and preaching about Jesus.

Acts 5:42 (NKJV): "*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*" This was God-centered, Holy Ghost, God-honoring evangelism.

The Father has sent us the Comforter that He may dwell in us till the coming of the Lord. The Holy Ghost has never returned, for He came in accordance with the Saviour's prayer and the Saviour's promise, to abide with us forever. The gift of the Comforter was not temporary, and the display of His power was not to be once seen and never again.

The Holy Ghost is here and we ought to expect His divine working among us; and if He does not so work we should search ourselves to see what it is that hinders, and whether there may not be somewhat in ourselves which vexes Him, so that He restrains His sacred energy, and does not work among us as He did before.

Spurgeon's Hymn says it well:

The Holy Ghost is here, where saints in prayer agree,
As Jesus' parting Gift is near each pleading company.

Not far away is He to be by prayer brought nigh,
But here in present majesty, as in His courts on high.

He dwells within our soul, an ever welcome guest;
He reigns with absolute control, as monarch in the breast.

Obedient to Thy will, we wait to feel Thy power
O Lord of life, our hopes fulfill, and bless this hallowed hour.

What we long for supremely is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit--to know the fulness of the Spirit. Organization is helpful, but one thing is essential and that is the power of the Spirit.

With the fullness of the Spirit:

1. Our organization will be filled with power, peace and prosperity.
2. Our orthodoxy will pulsate with love. There will be no legalism or Pharisaism. Our liberty will serve the interests of truth and godliness, not self-indulgence.
3. A fuller tide of the Spirit means spiritual discernment, deeper insight into the scriptures.
4. The church will be "glorious in holiness," for wherever the Spirit of God dwells He is as the refiner's fire.
5. Peace, harmony, and unity will be insured. Fidelity to truth will carry no pride or bitterness.
6. The church will have a real missionary vision.
7. With the fulness of the Spirit the church will not use carnal and unworthy methods in worship or witness.

Whatever means you use to get people into the church is precisely what you must use to keep them. If you get them with a religious circus then you must keep the circus going--keep up the entertainment. If you get them with biblical preaching and teaching, then that will keep them and you will not need the entertainment.

The church will have an attractive power. When the fruits of the Spirit abound men will be drawn as bees to the apple blossom. Preaching will be *"in the demonstration of the Spirit and power."*

But I think I hear someone say, "O, that was an apostolic promise, you are talking about apostolic times." No, my friend, I am speaking to you about something that not only happened in the far distant past, I am speaking about a promise that is far-reaching, yes, the promise of the Spirit is a far-reaching promise.

Let me give you just two verses to establish that fact.

Acts 2:38,39 (NKJV): *"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'"*

Please note the words *"to all who are afar off."* If those words are not sufficient to convince you then underscore the rest of the words in the passage, *"as many as the Lord our God will call."* Oh, I am glad for this "far-reaching promise."

Do you realize that all that has been done by God the Father and all that has been done by God the Son will not accomplish one thing unless the Spirit makes them effectual? Surely this is the greatest need in the church. No acceptable action of the Christian life can be performed without the Holy Spirit.

How Shall We Hope to Obtain The Power or Fullness of the Spirit?

The Bible makes two things very, very clear in connection with fullness and power of the Spirit.

First, there is some relationship between the fullness and power of the Spirit and prayer. Two passages underscore this statement.

Luke 11:13 (NKJV): *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

Acts 4:31 (NKJV): *"And when they had prayed (and not before) the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."*

The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans but men. It is not great talent nor great learning that God needs but men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, great for God. These men can mold a generation for God.

Secondly, the Bible also teaches that there is some relationship to the power of the Spirit and obedience. Acts 5:32 (NKJV): *"And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him. "*

Our Lord condemned the religious crowd in His day on two counts (Mt. 22:29). He said to them, *"You do err [or you are mistaken], not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God."* They lacked knowledge and power. When the disciples could not heal the man in the gospels it was not a lack of knowledge but power. We do not lack knowledge-- we lack power.

Knowledge comes by studying. Power comes by prayer and fasting.

It is possible to know the plan (knowledge) and not know the power. You will not get power by attending meetings even though you may get the principle for receiving the power by the meeting; you will get the power by waiting on God. You may get the inspiration to seek the power in the meeting, but the power itself comes by waiting, not going.

Yes, it is true, the wind blows where it will. And there certainly is a sense in which the Spirit is sovereign to blow when, where and how He will.

But the supernatural does have some laws just as the natural world does:

1. Everything that grieves the Spirit must be put away. To use biblical language *"all malice and all guile and all hypocrisies and all unbelief, worldly mindedness, pride"* --everything opposed to the simplicity, the charity and purity of Christ.
2. We will not have the power of the Spirit without importunate earnest prayer (Acts 1:14 preceded Acts 2)-- prayer that has in it some intensity of desire; the kind of prayer expressed in Luke 11:9-13 (NKJV) *"And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*

This kind of prayer links together the whole communion of the faithful and knows no stopping till the answer comes. We cannot stop at mere theological consideration of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because sound theology without the Spirit will make you dry up. The Spirit without sound theology will make you blow up. But with both sound theology and the Spirit you will grow up.

My whole motive and effort in this article is to create within us a genuine desire for the power of the Spirit in our ministry and in our places of service.

The old Latin hymn of the 10th century expressed it well. May it be the desire of our hearts.

Come, O Creator Spirit blest,
And in our hearts take up thy rest;
Spirit of grace, with heavenly aid
Come to the souls whom thou hast made.

Thou art the Comforter, we cry,
Sent to the earth from God Most High,
Fountain of life and Fire of love,
And our anointing from above.

Make our dull minds with rapture glow,
Let human hearts with love o'erflow;
And, when our feeble flesh would fail
May shine immortal strength prevail.

Show us the Father, Holy One,
Help us to know the Eternal Son;
Spirit Divine, for evermore
Thee will we trust and thee adore.



The Founders
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A Circular Letter to Southern Baptists in 1853

Robert P. Selph

Imagine that you are a Southern Baptist pastor in what is now called the Stone Mountain Baptist Association of Georgia in 1852. You arrive at the fourteenth annual session of your associational meeting and begin hearing the reports. The "Stated Religion Committee" report this year is quite disturbing. Much thought and prayer has gone into the committee's work in evaluating the spiritual condition of the churches of the association in the past twelve months. Their conclusions center on a very alarming spiritual decline in the people of the churches with the responsibility laid primarily upon the pulpits. The pastors had increasingly been preaching less doctrine. Instead they spent greater portions of time trying to make church life more appealing to the common man. Time and energy previously given to the sovereignty and grace of God has been taken up in recent months, even years, with different measures to stimulate interest in spiritual matters.

Possibly the mentality was like this: "Make the Gospel as simple as possible, as easy as possible, and as appealing as possible. Work on the attractiveness of the church service and the programs, but by all means do not let the doctrinal instruction be a weariness to the common man. He hates to think his way through a worship service, so find ways to carry him through it and make it enjoyable. Don't press the demands of Christ and the Gospel or you will lose potential converts right and left. Emphasize all that the Gospel will do for him, and having secured his immediate assent to your presentation, baptize him and take him into membership without regard for a changed life or a serious, obvious, and spiritual discipleship to Jesus Christ." The result of such a "short cut" mentality?--a gradual, but sure spiritual decline.

One step the Stone Mountain Association took in dealing with this alarming decline was to enlist David Cook, Moderator, to write the "Circular Letter" for the following year. A circular letter was just as important as an appointment to preach the annual sermon. The letter was circulated among the churches prior to the annual meeting and then was read at the annual meeting. Each year it was to address a specific, stated need within the association. The following circular letter was presented to the Stone Mountain Baptist Association on September 10-13, 1853, during the fifteenth annual session that was held at the Macedonia Baptist Church in the vicinity of Atlanta, Georgia. It was secured from the minutes of the Stone Mountain Baptist Association by Pastor Bill Haynes of the Indian Creek Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Georgia. The emphases have been added.

I. That our churches ought to feel a deeper interest in, and higher observance of, the fundamental doctrines of the Bible.

1. We argue the necessity of *impressing these doctrines* upon the mind from the fact that they *promote good religion*.

"Make the tree good, and his fruit will be good." To obtain the purest water, we must repair the fountain. To attain an eminent degree of piety, "drink of the fountain of the water of life freely." "In that day, there shall be a fountain opened in the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for uncleanness." *The atonement of Christ, with special regard to the redemption of His people*, is first, last, and midst, in the great and glorious economy of Grace. Like the circle of the sun, it comprehends all the attributes of God's gifts to His children. The death of Jesus Christ, for us His enemies, embraces the most unmistakable proof of *God's electing love*; His *preordination* of obedient, true believers, to "eternal life." "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." The

assurance of an "eternal weight of glory," to all that love God and keep His commandments, is uttered and continued by the Lord Jesus, when He, in His unspeakable agony and awful death, exclaims, "It is finished." "The ceremonial law is finished; the rigorous, fearful, civil polity of the Jews is finished; the requisition of the moral code is finished; my suffering life is finished; my shameful, agonizing death is accomplished; Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

2. As the atonement of Christ is identified with the entire system of salvation, and as it corresponds with all those *primary doctrines which it is our interest and duty to believe and practice, it is therefore necessary that these doctrines be preached and advocated, both in the pulpit and elsewhere, without fear of contradiction, and with unwavering confidence that God will sanctify them to His chosen people.* Is the *covenant of redemption* true to the redemption of all that believe? Is *election* God's choice from eternity of all that obey Him? Is *predestination* to holiness of heart and life a Bible doctrine? *Is salvation by grace through the blood of Christ the heritage of God's elect?* Shall they *persevere* in pious living through the faithfulness of God? Do "all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to His purpose?" *Cannot Baptists answer these questions affirmatively? Surely. Then why neglect their propagation? Does the proclamation of truth injure the people of God? Certainly not.* When a man speaks a deliberate falsehood or is angry at the declaration of truth, or when he conceals a truth by using misleading language in any matter whatever, avoid him. Arminianism and Campbellism are subtly intending our dismemberment. Let us arise in the energy of the Holy Ghost, and "declare all the counsel of God, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints."

3. *The sovereignty of God* is perpetuated and confessed in "the churches of the saints." "God sitteth on the throne of His holiness. The Lord Omnipotent, reigneth. He shall reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." His *sovereign, immutable decree* produces all that is good for His church; and His permissive will tolerates moral evil. He "worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." In supreme power, and "dreadful majesty" He punishes the wicked. Executing the penalty of death upon the finally impenitent; He makes subservient to our benefit all the ills of life. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain? The penitent thief He brings to Paradise, but the dying persecuted robber He commits to eternal wrath. "Righteousness, Justice, and Judgment are the habitation of His throne." *It belongs to His absolute will, it is the prerogative of the Great Supreme to welcome the saints to glory, and consign the wicked to unquenchable fire.* "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; Depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." His law of benevolence prepared Heaven for the righteous before they were born, from the foundation of the world. His penal law prepared Hell for the devil and his angels. "In my Father's house are many mansions. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am. Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." Thus, we give glory to God in the highest, thus God extends peace on earth, good will toward men. Alleluia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Let the earth rejoice. Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

4. In penetrating the mysteries of Divine Providence and Grace, we must recollect that *to learn these doctrines, faith, prayer, and patience are indispensably necessary.* *Faith* must receive the word of God as it is; *prayer* will unfold the oracles of truth to the humble inquirer;--and *patience* will tarry in the temple until the interpretation is audibly spoken by the Holy Spirit: "Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may inherit the promise. He shall take the things which are mine, and shall shew them unto you."

Christians are not to learn the *doctrines of grace* in a day, or a year, "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." What an immense blessing is it thus to have all the gifts of the immortal mind in exercise! It is stated that "an ancient mathematician, who had been working a problem for many weeks, when he had found the solution, ran out

of his study, and through the streets of Athens crying--"I have found it--I have found it!" And the disciples of the Lord Jesus, who is ever working out the vast problem of man's redemption, will find an answer to his devout inquiries, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Therefore, "exercise thyself rather unto godliness." Beloved brethren, descend "into the unsearchable riches of Christ." *Be exercised in exploring the infinite mind of God. Make new discoveries of the Divine perfections.* "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

II. *These doctrines are the safeguard* of the Body of Christ. "He is made all things to the Church that in all things He might have the preeminence. No other foundation can any man lay, than that is laid: which is Christ Jesus. Salvation will God appoint, for walls and bulwarks. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. Yea, and all the promises of God, in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us."

To preserve the church of Christ from wicked encroachment, the citadel must be well defended and secured: "His place of defense shall be the munition of rocks." Inherent strength is comprised and promoted within these enclosures. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people, from henceforth, even forever." The sun in his orbit, burns and shines without hazard from any of his attendant planets. So be the Church of the adorable Redeemer. Let her "be as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid." Let her be "the light of the world." Illuminated by the Son of Righteousness, she is in her celestial training and towering majesty, the peerless queen of her Lord and King; subservient to no earthly pollution, or defilement from without, but guarded and honored by the power and intelligence of her Almighty and All-Wise Redeemer, she stands replete in the love of God, and beauty of salvation. "Upon His right hand did stand the Queen, in gold of Ophir."

III. The visibility of the Church of Christ, by *the inculcation and exhibition of these doctrines* is better understood. "Ye are not of the world." If the Church can be *distinguished apart from the world* in her principles taken from the Bible, and impressed by the spirit of God, she will evince, first, by her *vitality*, and secondly, in her *sober, sincere and godly intercourse*, that she alone is "the heavenly Jerusalem," that in her alone are the dawn and light and glory of the precious Saviour's image on earth. Grace "without money and without price" is free grace; it is unmerited, *therefore it must be and will be illustrated in Christian character, and exemplified in Christian conduct.*

IV. To do these things, the power is given us. "All power in heaven and earth is mine, and to whomsoever I will, I give it," says our Immanuel, "which name, being interpreted, is God with us."

1. In the government of the Church, the *distinctiveness of these doctrines must be quietly and affectionately advocated and enforced. We require a good moral character of every applicant for church membership.* But we need no reference to a man's previous life. If God has converted, has shed abroad His love in his heart, *this contains all the elements of moral character.* Ananias might not object to the baptism of Saul. His previous persecutions of God's children were no barrier to his immersion, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." *Caution, however, in the reception of applicants for immersion should be persistently and intelligently observed. And in the admission by letter of Baptists from a distance, there should be the most scrupulous adherence of moral character.* A church letter, written sometimes in full fellowship, is but a transcript of hypocrisy and base imposition. *Never admit to church membership any person on the merit expressed in his letter, unless his commendation is borne out in Christian conduct.* Object to him and reject at once his letter of recommendation, if he is not in action what his letter signifies.

Reclaim, as speedily as possible, backsliding Christians. Excommunicate incorrigible members. Never mind their great age. The hoary-headed sinner is the most ingenious contriver of mischief. Have no lenience for the opulent hypocrite. "Wealth maketh many (mischievous) friends." "Holiness becometh God's house."

2. In the good character of Jesus Christ's preacher, and deacons, *these truths must be sanctioned and sanctified.*

Aaron and the Levites (deputy priests) were irreproachable. Paul exercised himself "daily, to have a good conscience void of offense toward God and toward men." He addressed the deacons of Philippi with profound regard and unwavering confidence; and placed them second in the scale of pious distinction and manifest utility, in the Philippian church. From the deaconship of Stephen, he rose to the ministration of the Gospel, and was crowned with the earliest honors of the martyrdom of the New Testament. "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

3. The ordinances of God's house will be diligently and devoutly attended to. "Faith without works is dead." *Where there are no Christian works, there is no Christian faith. Christian faith is lively, animating, productive.* "I will show thee my faith by my works." Strong faith has strong and powerful evidence in the love of God. "God is love. We love Him, because He first loved us." Here is the motive power of heavenly ordinances. This is the great interpreter of Christian action and patient suffering. "The love of Christ constraineth us." In the ordinances of preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, exhortation and praise, "the King is held in the galleries."

4. In the secular support of Gospel Ministers, *the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures are patronized and appreciated.* Nor is it sufficient that brethren endorse these truths with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from them. Brethren in the Lord, do not censure us for our candor. Suffer this truth. Never, never were the people of God more in opposition to their own welfare; never, never did they reproach the Gospel of Christ, the doctrines of the Cross, more bitterly and cruelly than in withholding the support that is due to the Ministers of the Lord Jesus. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." The love of Christ is intercepted by the cheerless withholder of the Minister's dues. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The Minister and his widowed wife, and orphanized children are blessed in receiving the laborer's hire. But the church is more abundantly blessed in imparting cheerfully what the minister is entitled to.

'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts; if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

-David Cook, Moderator

This letter addresses the very issues being raised now in Southern Baptist life with regard to doctrinal laxity and the low vital spirituality among our fifteen million church members. A major difference between David Cook's day and our own is the belief in the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace which prevailed then. Though man's wicked nature recoils under the declaration of such truths, they alone, embraced and applied to life, as David Cook clearly explains, secure the true and lasting blessing of God upon His Church.

Today the majority of Southern Baptist churches do not believe the same doctrines as our forefathers. The doctrinal preaching of the English Particular Baptists, the American Baptists affiliated with the historic Philadelphia and Charleston Associations, as well as nearly all Southern Baptists from 1845 to 1920 would not be welcome in Southern Baptist churches today. The call must go out again today, as in DeKalb County, Georgia, in 1853--we must return to understanding, preaching, and applying Biblical doctrine as in days gone by. To some, such belief and practice would surely squash evangelism, bleed the life out of any mission enterprise, and dampen the joy of our churches. But this is simply not so. The Christian faith of Boyce, Dagg, Carroll, Mell, Broadus, Manly, Gambrell, and many other Southern Baptists, not to mention Spurgeon, Carey, Wayland, Judson, Rice, Edwards, and Whitefield, will not have such effects if rightly proclaimed and applied. Indeed, exactly the opposite is true.

If this letter tells us anything, it tells us this: the five truths of Calvinism are historic Baptist theology. Preaching these "Doctrines of Grace" will not injure the people of God, rather, it is the surest way to build them up in the faith, comfort their souls, purify their daily lives, expand before their eyes the love of God, and make them more diligent students of the Scriptures.

No, we do not teach heavy-duty doctrine for some intellectual ego trip. A pastor is called to speak as a dying man to dying men the careful and thorough exposition of God's revealed truth. Therein do men learn of the unsearchable riches of Christ, the excellencies and infinite attributes of the transcendent God of majesty, and the strait gate and narrow way that leads to life eternal. Only from such a doctrinal pulpit will Christ's lambs be fed and grow into strong soldiers in Jehovah's army. Only there will sinners be sufficiently warned and the costs of discipleship be enumerated.

Have we fallen prey to the church growth nonsense of ballooning our attendance with generic methods that would entice self-centered sinners into having an interest in Jesus regardless of doctrinal convictions? Have we bought into an "ends justifies the means" pragmatism that is only concerned with adding baptisms with minimal instruction, even though the result is pervasive doctrinal ignorance? Does not the poor attendance and Bible understanding of many "members" bring an indictment on our preaching methods?

Imagine a church where the people come not needing any awards, recognitions, sensational music, or special days. Imagine that they only come to seek God and to worship in spirit and in truth at the feet of Jesus. They would need nothing to dress Jesus up or to make church "interesting." Smaller churches wouldn't be so worried about losing all the program-hunting church people who gauge the value of a ministry by whether it offers all the social attractions their children supposedly need. Parents would assume their responsibility to teach and train their children to view the church and the worship of God for what they really are. This lofty goal will be achieved to a great degree where the pulpit is not as concerned with programs and promotions as it is with grounding God's people in solid truth and setting before sinners the fulness of God's holy law and the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Dagg on Church Membership

"The churches are not infallible judges, being unable to search the heart but they owe it to the candidate [for membership] himself, to exercise the best judgment of which they are capable. To receive any one on a mere profession of words, without any effort to ascertain whether he understands and feels what he professes, is unfaithfulness to his interests, and the interests of religion."



The Abstract Of Principles

The Abstract of Principles is the first official confession of Faith which Southern Baptists endorsed. As Southern Baptist Theological Seminary opened its doors in 1859 in Greenville, S. C. (later to be moved to its present location in Louisville, Ky), the principal founder and first President, James P. Boyce, was greatly concerned that the professors of the new school believe and teach within acceptable boundaries of recognized Southern Baptist orthodoxy. To insure this (so he thought) Boyce commissioned Basil Manly, Jr., to draw up an "abstract of doctrinal principles" which would be included in the official foundation documents of the seminary.

The "Fundamental Laws" of the Southern Seminary, which were written into its charter on April 30, 1858, contain the follow section: "9. Every Professor of the Institution shall be a member of a regular Baptist Church; and all persons accepting Professorships in this Seminary, shall be considered by such acceptance, as engaging to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the Abstract of Principles hereinafter laid down." (Mueller, *History of Southern Seminary*, p. 238). This 20-point document remains today the doctrinal foundation of Southern Seminary, and its professors are still required to sign it before assuming their duties in the classroom.

The Editorial Advisory Board recognizes this confession as the theological framework for the *Founders Journal*.

I. The Scriptures.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.

II. God.

There is but one God, the Maker, Preserver and Ruler of all things, having in and of himself, all perfections, and being infinite in them all; and to Him all creatures owe the highest love, reverence and obedience.

III. The Trinity.

God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.

IV. Providence.

God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures.

V. Election.

Election is God's eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life -- not because of foreseen merit in them, but of his mere mercy in Christ -- in consequence of which choice they are called, justified and glorified.

VI. The Fall of Man.

God originally created man in His own image, and free from sin; but, through the temptation of Satan, he transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original holiness and righteousness; whereby his posterity inherit a nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors.

VII. The Mediator.

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed mediator between God and man. Having taken upon Himself human nature, yet without sin, He perfectly fulfilled the Law, suffered and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended to His Father, at whose hand He ever liveth to make intercession for His people. He is the only Mediator, the Prophet, Priest and King of the Church, and Sovereign of the Universe.

VIII. Regeneration.

Regeneration is a change of heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit, who quickeneth the dead in trespasses and sins enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the Word of God, and renewing their whole nature, so that they love and practice holiness. It is a work of God's free and special grace alone.

IX. Repentance.

Repentance is an evangelical grace, wherein a person being, by the Holy Spirit, made sensible of the manifold evil of his sin, humbleth himself for it, with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrence, with a purpose and endeavor to walk before God so as to please Him in all things.

X. Faith.

Saving faith is the belief, on God's authority, of whatsoever is revealed in His Word concerning Christ; accepting and resting upon Him alone for justification and eternal life. It is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and is accompanied by all other saving graces, and leads to a life of holiness.

XI. Justification.

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal of sinners, who believe in Christ, from all sin, through the satisfaction that Christ has made; not for anything wrought in them or done by them; but on account of the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith.

XII. Sanctification.

Those who have been regenerated are also sanctified, by God's word and Spirit dwelling in them. This sanctification is progressive through the supply of Divine strength, which all saints seek to obtain, pressing after a heavenly life in cordial obedience to all Christ's commands.

XIII. Perseverance of the Saints.

Those whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end; and though they may fall, through neglect and temptation, into sin, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the Church, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be renewed again unto repentance, and be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

XIV. The Church.

The Lord Jesus is the Head of the Church, which is composed of all his true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to his commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches he hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which he hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are Bishops, or Elders, and Deacons.

XV. Baptism.

Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus, obligatory upon every believer, wherein he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up to God, to live and walk in newness of life. It is prerequisite to church fellowship, and to participation in the Lord's Supper.

XVI. The Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, and to be observed by his churches till the end of the world. It is in no sense a sacrifice, but is designed to commemorate his death, to confirm the faith and other graces of Christians, and to be a bond, pledge and renewal of their communion with him, and of their church fellowship.

XVII. The Lord's Day.

The Lord's Day is a Christian institution for regular observance, and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, resting from worldly employments and amusements, works of necessity and mercy only excepted.

XVIII. Liberty of Conscience.

God alone is Lord of the conscience; and He hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His word, or not contained in it. Civil magistrates being ordained of God, subjection in all lawful thing commanded by them ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

XIX. The Resurrection.

The bodies of men after death return to dust, but their spirits return immediately to God -- the righteous to rest with Him; the wicked to be reserved under darkness to the judgment. At the last day, the bodies of all the dead, both just and unjust, will be raised.

XX. The Judgment.

God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when every one shall receive according to his deeds; the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment; the righteous, into everlasting life.



News

Youth Conference

The 1990 Southern Baptist Founders Youth Conference is scheduled for June 25-29 at Panama City Beach, Florida. The theme of this year's conference is "Christian Living in a Global Age." Erroll Hulse, Pastor of the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church in England and editor of *Reformation Today*, will be the featured speaker. Cost is \$150.00 per camper. This covers all meals, nice accommodations in condominiums, and all study materials. This is the fourth year which the FBC of Clinton, Louisiana, under the leadership of Pastor Bill Ascol has sponsored this conference. Past years have witnessed very successful meetings with young and old alike being challenged by the exposition and application of God's Word. Several have been hopefully converted through this effort. In light of much that is being offered today for church young people, this camp is a welcome effort to evangelize and instruct our youth in a responsible manner. It is worthy of the support of churches and individual pastors who are concerned for the souls of our upcoming generation. Registration deadline is April 4, 1990. For more information contact the Conference Secretary, First Baptist Church, P. O. Box 552, Clinton, LA 70722; phone (504) 683-5153.

Founders Conference

The eighth annual Southern Baptist Founders Conference is scheduled to convene at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, July 31-August 3, 1990. Mr. David Kingdon from Great Britain will be the featured speaker addressing the theme of "The Church." Another first-time speaker is Dr. Timothy George, Dean of the new Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. He will preach on the Priesthood of All Believers and will present a biographical message on Basil Manly, Sr. These meetings have been the source of much encouragement and instruction over the last eight years. Pray that God will be pleased to own this effort once again for His glory. Cost per person is \$130.00. For registration information contact the Founders Conference Secretary, P. O. Box 50014, Pompano Beach, Florida 33074.

Ernest Reisinger

Many friends and beneficiaries of the ministry of Pastor Ernest Reisinger have been concerned and united in prayer regarding the recent health difficulties which he has experienced. For the past two years he has been plagued by a restricted flow of blood in some of the arteries in his head. This results in severe bouts of dizziness and general lack of physical stamina. In February of this year, he became blinded in his left eye due to retinal vein occlusion. Physicians are hopeful that medication can help prevent the loss of sight in his other eye. He has been forced to curtail nearly all of his traveling and speaking engagements, though he is able to maintain an active personal, prayer, and writing and literature ministry (last year alone he and Jane mailed out over 7000 pieces of literature from their home!). Remember to pray for the Reisingers as they await further medical counsel and entrust themselves to the wise and good providence of God.



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Book Reviews

Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages by Charles Colson; Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989, \$12.95.

Reviewed by [Tom Ascol](#)

The title and subtitle of this book are both significant. Colson, who since his conversion has been favorably influenced by R. C. Sproul of Ligonier Ministries, provides a convincing analysis of the modern "Dark Ages." He does so while calling upon the Church to stand *against* the benighted American culture in which we live. Much of this book has an unrelenting postmortem tone to it. Those who have judged dubious the cheery pronouncements that a great revival has swept across our country during the last decade will find here well-reasoned arguments for maintaining a healthy skepticism.

Colson compares our current scene in America to the destruction of earlier civilizations. He writes: "I believe that we do face a crisis in Western culture, and that it presents the greatest threat to civilization since the barbarians invaded Rome. I believe that today in the West, and particularly in America, the new barbarians are all around us. They are not hairy Goths and Vandals, swilling fermented brew and ravishing maidens; they are not Huns and Visigoths storming our borders or scaling our city walls. No, this time the invaders have come from within . . . They inhabit our legislatures, our courts, our film studios, and our churches. Most of them are attractive and pleasant; their ideas are persuasive and subtle. Yet these men and women threaten our most cherished institutions and our very character as a people" (pp. 23-24). Radical individualism and moral relativism are identified as damaging diseases which have infected civilization. The cure, which must be sent from above, will only come through an authentic Church declaring and embodying the authoritative truth of God's Word.

This is, beyond question, Colson's most significant book. Reflecting a wide range of insights (from Calvin to Mother Theresa), *Against the Night* is a very readable, sane, yet alarming evaluation of the challenge which is thrust upon God's people in the closing years of the 20th century in America. If indeed we are living in a new Dark Ages (and I, for one, agree that we are), then we must pray and labor for a new Reformation. This book (written, incidentally, by a fellow Southern Baptist!) is a helpful ally in demonstrating the need to call for biblical reform in the faith and practice of churches. It should be read by pastors and thoughtful church members alike.



The Value of Literature

"Books may preach when the author cannot, when the author may not, when the author dares not, yea, and which is more, when the author is not."

-Thomas Brooks

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Recommended Books

A Manual of Theology and *A Manual of Church Order* by John Dagg, first writing theologian among Southern Baptists. These fine works are being reprinted in 2 volumes by Sprinkle Publications.

Abstract of Systematic Theology by James P. Boyce, first President and principal founder of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, now located in Louisville, Kentucky.

Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility, by Basil Manly, Jr., W. B. Johnson, R. B. C. Howell, and Richard Fuller--all early Southern Baptist leaders. Each message is introduced with a biographical sketch written by Tom Nettles.

Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods by Ernest Reisinger. A biblical evaluation of contemporary practices of evangelism.

A Baptist Look at Calvinism, edited by Ernest Reisinger and Thomas Ascol. Two essays on the subject: one by Charles Spurgeon and the other by Patrick Hues Mell, for 17 years President of the Southern Baptist Convention.

These and other helpful books are available through the literature ministry of Grace Baptist Church, 204 S. W. 11th Place, Cape Coral, FL 33991, (813) 772-1400.

