



Where Do We Go From Here?

Issue 2

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Contents

[\[Inside Cover\]](#)

[Where Do We Go From Here?](#)

[Tom Ascol](#)

[The Man in Romans 7](#)

[Fred Malone](#)

[The Doctrine of Regeneration: Biblical and Historical Perspectives](#)

[Bill Ascol](#)

[Being Filled With the Spirit](#)

[Ernest C. Reisinger](#)

[News](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

- *A Lifting Up for the Downcast* by William Bridge; Banner of Truth, 1979, \$6.45.
[Walter Johnson](#)
- *Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts* by Jerry Bridges; Navpress, 1988, \$12.95.
[Hal Wynn](#)

Announcement: [1990 Southern Baptist Founders Conference](#)

The Founders
Journal
Main Page

The Founders Journal



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

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Contents Issue 2

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Main Page

Where Do We Go From Here?

Tom Ascol

Cards and letters which have been received indicate that the initial issue of the *Founders Journal* has met with a warm welcome among ministers and laymen from across the country. A pastor in Valdosta, Georgia writes, "God bless your work. It is desperately needed!" His sentiments were echoed by many, and they highlight the rationale behind the *Founders Journal*. Although there are some valuable journals and newsletters available today which emphasize historic, biblical Christianity, none does so with a sensitivity to the particular ethos and heritage which are unique to Southern Baptists. This journal has emerged from within that context.

Our purpose is to encourage the return to and promulgation of the biblical gospel which our SBC forefathers held dear. Call it what you will--in essence it is nothing less than the divinely revealed truth that salvation is all of grace. It is the affirmation that God is absolutely sovereign in every dimension of life: creation, providence, and redemption. It includes the corollary affirmation that man, as a fully responsible creature who has been made in the image of God, owes unalloyed allegiance, devotion, faith, and obedience to his sovereign Maker.

Quite simply, the *Founders Journal* joins with that growing number of Southern Baptist voices in calling our Convention back to our historical and theological roots. The truth which R. B. C. Howell loved, we love. The gospel which W. B. Johnson, Richard Fuller, and P. H. Mell preached, we preach. The vision for the Convention which James Boyce, John Broadus, and B. H. Carroll held, we share.

No blind adherence to tradition motivates this desire to return to the faith of our founders. Nor is there any incipient desire to canonize our "Baptist fathers." Rather, as Bill Ascol points out in his article on regeneration, God's truth does not change. If what these men believed was true then, it is still true today. If they were correct in their understanding of the gospel, then it is incumbent upon us to have our own beliefs accord with theirs. If they were incorrect, then we ought to repudiate their views and renounce a significant part of this denomination's heritage. The question is open to debate, and should be addressed on the basis of what God's Word teaches.

A pastor from Palo Pinto, Texas, commends the first issue of the journal as "a fine balance of irenic polemics and devotional edification." This is precisely the spirit and balance which we hope to promote. We are not so naive as to believe that every Southern Baptist will join with us in returning to our theological heritage. Reasonable men who love the Lord and who desire to know His will occasionally differ in their interpretation of various biblical teachings. This has ever been the case. Where such honest disagreement exists, Christian charity should be extended while seeking to establish the biblical arguments for one's views. This journal intends to reflect such a spirit as it contends for the doctrines of grace.

It is hoped that by further education and familiarization with our denomination's doctrinal roots, others who disagree with our position will be encouraged to reciprocate a charitable tolerance toward us. Surely there is room in our convention today for those who stand with our early denominational leaders on matters of faith and practice. It is inconceivable, is it not, that past Southern Baptist giants like Boyce, Mell, Broadus, Carroll, Howell, Fuller, et al., were they alive today, would be excluded from or relegated to a "second class" status in denominational life? If the *Founders Journal* can help promote such tolerance it will serve a valuable purpose.

That is not to say that the journal is exclusively concerned with life within the SBC. Truth transcends denominational borders. Although our context is unique, our desire to see a return to orthodox, devotional Christianity is not. All

who long to see the doctrines of grace applied to every area of life will find here a common concern. We are Southern Baptist, but we are not sectarian. Several who have shown an interest in the journal are of different denominational persuasions. A PCA pastor from Florida writes, "[I am] united with the doctrine and spirit of which I read in the first issue." Along with Presbyterians, others, including Independents and Baptists of various connections, have shown an interest in receiving the journal.

This second issue of the *Founders Journal* is being mailed out to nearly three hundred individuals who have requested it and have expressed an interest in purchasing subscriptions. The encouragement to proceed with regular publication has been enthusiastic. Following are a few of the many comments which have been received:

"Praise the Lord for such a publication! I trust that the *Founders Journal* will be blessed of God and have a wide distribution" (SB pastor in Illinois).

"I pray that our God will bless the *Founders Journal* and all your efforts to spread the gospel of His grace through the SBC" (SB pastor in North Carolina).

"I think this is a God sent blessing. Thanks!" (Elloree, South Carolina).

"I was thrilled to receive your journal and enjoyed reading it. I believe it will meet a great need among Southern Baptists" (SB student from West Virginia).

"Much needed step. It is time to go beyond the inspiration issue and concentrate on the application of Scripture in our lives" (SB pastor in Illinois).

"Very good beginning. Please stay with your intentions. Avoid becoming part of the current political struggle" [advice which we have every intention of heeding! - Ed.] (SB pastor in Kentucky).

"Anxiously awaiting next issue" (SB deacon in Florida).

Among those who have written to express appreciation for the effort, several have pledged their prayerful and financial support. Because of the support which many have shown for this idea, the decision has been made to publish four issues during 1991.

In order to come close to "breaking even" financially, a minimum of 400 subscriptions is needed. Even without these, there is a commitment to continue quarterly publications for the next year. If the journal is useful and ought to continue beyond the first year, then surely it is not presumptuous to anticipate that God will provide the necessary financial support through gifts and subscriptions. If everyone who expressed interest in helping to promote the *Founders Journal* could secure one or two additional subscriptions, this minimum could be easily reached.

Articles, book reviews, and news items will be received and considered for possible publication. Write for details regarding form, length, etc. Letters are also welcome and occasional questions which are pertinent to the scope and purpose of the journal will be entertained.

Many have asked what they may do to help. The first and foremost thing you can do is to pray for this effort. Specifically, pray that God will own and bless it with a long and wide ministry.

Secondly, subscribe! There is included in this issue a subscription form and envelope for your convenience. On the form are spaces for additional names. You may order gift subscriptions for friends, or additional copies for yourself that can be distributed.

Thirdly, help promote the journal. Tell others about it and encourage them to subscribe. Here you may be creative. One pastor in Louisiana is challenging members in his congregation to "adopt a pastor" in their local association by purchasing gift subscriptions for area ministers. A pastor in California indicates that his church will consider ordering a subscription for each of their families. Perhaps you could subscribe for a missionary or denominational servant.

Fourthly, as the Lord enables you, you may make a tax-deductible financial contribution to the journal (make checks payable to the Southern Baptist Founders Conference, Inc., and specify that it is for the journal).

As we labor in our respective fields of service in the closing decade of this century, may the prayer of the Psalmist (80:19) be frequently upon our hearts and lips:

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
Cause your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!*



The Man in Romans 7

Fred A. Malone

Introduction

The 7th chapter of Romans is teeming with important pastoral and theological insights. A careful study of it yields help for Christians who are confused or despondent over their remaining sin. Paul's comments in 7:14-8:4 contain important practical principles which dispel many erroneous and superficial depictions of the Christian life.

Consider the following theological questions as we approach this text:

1. What is the function of God's Law for the unconverted? What is the function of the Law for the converted? And which Law is God's Law? The Ten Commandments; the Nine Commandments; more or less?
2. Is the man in Rom. 7:14-25 regenerate, unregenerate?
3. If the man is a Christian, is this his entire Christian experience? Is it a periodic lapse from which he recovers? Or is this only a normal part of the daily Christian walk? Does one ever get out of Rom. 7 into Rom. 8?
4. Does the Christian have one nature or two natures? Is the Christian an Old Man and a New Man butting heads? Or is the Christian one unified nature? Where does sin come from in the Christian life? The Old Man, the New Man, or the bodily flesh?

These vital questions, which have implications for evangelism, sanctification, pastoral care, assurance of salvation and more, must be answered in the light of the seventh chapter of Romans. Specifically, verses 14-25 should be studied.

The New Covenant Christian

By delineating the biblical characteristics of a New Covenant Christian and comparing them to Rom. 7:14-25 we recognize that the kind of person which Paul has in mind is nothing less than a believer.

From Jer. 31:31-34 (fulfilled in Hebrews 8 and 10), we learn that a New Covenant Christian has two main characteristics: (1) a new record and (2) a new heart. His new record through the work of Christ is described this way: *"And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* And this is the new heart provided by the work of the Spirit: *"I will put my laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them."* This is what it means to be born again by God's Spirit.

One of the major differences between the Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant is this: God's law has been internalized in every covenant believer by the regenerating work of the Spirit. The Christian has a new attitude toward God's law as well as having the forgiveness of sins and the knowledge of God.

Which Law? The same law which Jeremiah understood when he prophesied; the same law the Israelites understood when they heard the prophecy; and the same law the Jewish readers of Hebrews understood. It is the only Law which God Himself wrote: the Ten Words, specifically called "the covenant" in Deut. 4:13. Old Testament exegesis demands this understanding of Law in Heb. 8:8-12. Further, Paul illustrates his meaning of moral Law in Rom. 7:7-25 by describing the tenth of the Ten Words in 7:7. God's moral Law has not changed between the Old and the New Covenants. Rather, it has been internalized in the heart of every New Covenant believer.

In Rom. 7:7-13, Paul uses the **first person, past tense** to recount his pre-conversion state. Before conversion, he was blameless as a law-keeper in his own eyes and before his countrymen (Phil. 3:6). However, when the Tenth Commandment came to his conscience, "*Thou shalt not covet,*" it killed Paul before God. It stirred up his heart, revealed coveting before God, and killed his self-righteous soul sometime before (or when) he looked into the righteous face of Christ on the Damascus road.

Rom. 7:7-13 perfectly parallels Paul's **past tense** description of every Christian's pre-conversion state in 7:5: "*For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body, to bear fruit for death.*" In Paul's unconverted state, God took the Sword of His Holy Law and pierced his heart, unleashing all manner of filth and degradation which killed him before God. There was nothing wrong with the Law. Paul was the problem.

In Rom. 7:14-8:4, Paul moves to the **first person, present tense**. This is a perfect parallel to the shift from the past tense in 7:5 to the present in 7:6: "*But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*" The shift from the past pre-converted state of every believer in 7:5 to the present converted state in 7:6 is illustrated by Paul's personal experience in 7:7-13 and 7:14-8:4 respectively. The man of 7:14-8:4 is described in the first person, present tense. He is Paul as a Christian.

What characterizes this Christian man? In 7:14, he believes that "*the Law is spiritual.*" In 7:22, he "*joyfully concurs with* (delights in) *the Law of God in the inner man.*" In 7:25, he serves the Law of God with his mind inwardly and spiritually in a way that he did not before. The Law, described as one of the Ten Words in 7:7, is no longer written only on tablets of stone. Now it is written on Paul's heart by the Holy Spirit. This is exactly the description of the New Covenant Christian above.

J. I. Packer was once asked if he really thought that Paul's use of the present tense in Rom. 7:14-25 refers to Paul as a believer. Dr. Packer's learned and scholarly reply was: "Of course!" The man in Rom. 7:14-8:4 is a Christian.

Objections to This View

The main objection to this view argues that Paul uses a first person, historical present tense in 7:14-25 to describe his pre-Christian state. This position states that surely **no** Christian, much less Paul, **could** say "*I am carnal, sold under sin . . . nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh . . . wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death*" (7:14, 15, 25). Rather, the argument goes, this must be the non-Christian of 8:7-8.

The problem with this objection is that it refuses to let 7:14-25 be admitted as evidence for the Christian life. This is presuppositional. This word "carnal" is used in 1 Cor. 3:1-3 of Christians caught in particular sins and acting as "babes in Christ." How were they "carnal?" They were arguing over the best preacher and his baptism. They were not totally "carnal" as is popularly conceived in the erroneous, so-called "carnal Christian" doctrine. Neither were they treated as non-Christians because they acted "carnal, fleshly" in this area of division over preachers. There is no such thing as a totally "carnal" Christian nor a totally "spiritual" one.

Paul's claim, "*I am carnal, sold into bondage to sin,*" is explained by Horatius Bonar in the following way:

This is not the language of an unregenerate or half-regenerate man. When, however, he adds, "I am carnal, sold under sin," is it really Paul, the new creature in Christ, that he is describing? It is; and they who think it impossible for a saint to speak thus, must know little of sin, and less of themselves. A right apprehension of sin; of *one* sin or *fragment* of sin (if such a thing there be), would produce the oppressive sensation here described by the apostle--a sensation 20 or 30 years progress would rather intensify than weaken. They are far mistaken in their estimate of evil, who think that it is the multitude of sins that gives rise to the bitter outcry, "I am carnal." One sin left behind would produce the feeling here expressed. Who

can say, "I need the Word less and the Spirit less than I did 20 years ago"?[1]

The true Christian knows very well that **every time** he falls into sin that *"The Law is spiritual . . . [but] I am carnal, sold into bondage to sin."*

The same man who cries *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death (of this body of death)?"* also cries, *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (7:25-8:1). This man is not convicted under the weight of his sin's **condemnation**. He is groaning as a regenerate man convicted under the weight of his remaining **condition** of sin. He cries out to Jesus Christ for help because he wants to be free from the condition of indwelling sin.

Granted, this is not all that there is to Christian experience. The man in 7:14-25 is also the man in 8:1-4 at the same time. He repents (7:14-25) and believes (8:1-4) daily. Rom. 7:14-24 is but one aspect of the mature Paul and every Christian. All Christians feel within the inward struggle against remaining sin. This is the man in whom God has written his Law upon the heart and who mourns over his daily failures to please the God of Grace. If you see yourself in 7:14-25, you are in the company of an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Practical Lessons

First, every Christian delights in the Law of God in the inner man, agreeing that it is spiritual and good. To put it another way: You cannot have Jesus as Savior unless you bow to Him as Lord. By the very definition of the New Covenant, the covenant Law of Sinai (the Ten Words) is written upon the Christian heart by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 8:8-12). While we may be ignorant in many ways of the implications of those Laws, failing in many ways to keep them, still the saint has a disposition to walk in the commandments of God. And he is grieved and hurt and he mourns when he fails daily. Yet every mourner has this hope: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

No passage in the Bible better enables the saint to look within and know that he has come to know God (1 John 2:4). If he cannot say "I do all the good that I wish," he can always say "the good that I wish, I do not do." This is no excuse for sin, but it deals realistically and biblically with remaining sin. Pastors ought to open up God's Word in Rom. 7:14-25 and read to struggling saints their spiritual condition so that they might know that God has not left them to hardness of heart. They must learn from 7:14-25 that repentance is still at work in their soul and is deepening. They must understand the Rom. 7 comfort that *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 1:16). This is not "negative preaching" and "joyless experience." It is the binding up of the broken-hearted. Should not **every** Christian say of **every** remaining sin: *"I am carnal, sold into bondage under sin,"* yet *"I delight after the Law of God in the inner man?"* Should not every Christian yearn to be free from this body of death?

Second, this passage teaches that sin remains in the New Covenant Christian. Some have tried to teach that there is no sin in the new creature and have been driven to distorted views of the Christian's nature and life. This has resulted in the spiritual bondage of many. This error usually quotes Rom. 7:16-17 as a proof-text to divorce the existence of remaining sin from the new creature: *"So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me."* In other words, some say that when the Christian sins, he does not sin with his new heart. Rather, sin has a separated existence in the Christian. This path inevitably leads to irresponsibility, laxity, and antinomianism. This error takes several different forms.

One form of this teaching says that the Christian has two natures within--the sinful Old Man and the perfect New Man.[2] Each is in a continual battle for supremacy. Sometimes the Old Man wins and sins. Sometimes the New Man wins and does righteous acts. They butt heads in Rom. 7:14-25. Theoretically, if one can "make Jesus Lord" and surrender to Him in an act of absolute faith and "total commitment," He will take control and live His life through the New Man. Some proponents of this view go so far as to claim that perfectionism (of a limited kind) is possible.

However, if this line of reasoning is correct, when (not if) the Christian sins, who is responsible for the sin committed? In

this view, the New Man cannot be responsible because he is "perfect" and "cannot sin." The true saint who has surrendered all to Christ has to figure out how the Old Man (or Satan) became stronger than Christ who controls the New Man. How did Christ fail to prevent sin once He took over? This causes doubt, despair, depression, lack of assurance of salvation, and even suicidal thoughts in some because of this confused teaching. Others will not examine themselves. They overlook sin since the New Man is not responsible. The result is a prideful, arrogant, spiritual elite who will not deal seriously with God's Law. Because of these errors the pastor who teaches holiness and obedience to God's Law should expect despair from some and opposition from others.

Further, if this teaching is true, when one sins, who needs the forgiveness? It cannot be the New Man for he is perfect and needs no forgiveness. It cannot be the Old Man, for he cannot go to heaven or repent or change.

Finally, who is it that makes progress against sin? Not the New Man, for he is perfect. Not the Old Man, for he is beyond change. The two-nature view does not explain adequately the responsibility for sin in the Christian life, nor the need of forgiveness, nor the truth of progressive sanctification.

Another form of this view is that of David Needham in his work entitled *Birthright*. Needham rightly contends for a one-nature view of the Christian against the confusing two-nature view. However, he advocates that the New Man is perfectly new and does not sin. Rather sin resides in the bodily flesh of the Christian in his brain patterns, thoughts, and desires.^[3]

The problem with Needham's view is that he does not explain satisfactorily how one can separate one's sinful thoughts and desires in the bodily flesh from the New Man's pure thoughts and desires, especially since the will of the Christian cooperates in the sin. Further, how can the sinful flesh overcome the perfect New Man, yielding sin? The practical effect of Needham's one-nature plus sin-in-the-flesh is the same as the two-nature view. Either the Christian must deny full responsibility for sin when he sins or he must be cast into despair and confusion when he feels guilt for sin.

The truth that sin is found in the New Man is revealed in Rom. 7:14-8:4. Paul identifies sin as the culprit, but it is sin which indwells *his* new nature when *he* sins. "*I do it,*" he says, over and over. Paul summarizes and clarifies himself in 7:25, saying: "*So then, on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God, but on the other (I myself) with my flesh am serving the law of sin.*" "I myself" is the New Man who serves both the Law of God with his mind and the principle of sin with his flesh **at the same time**.

How can this be? Rom. 6:6 explains: "*Our old man was crucified with Christ, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*" The two-nature view above tends to say that the Old Man is only judicially dead, that he still exists, and must be reckoned as crucified daily by faith. But Paul states that our Old Man (our former pre-Christian nature) dominated by sin and hostility to God and His Law, has been done away with through the work of the cross and its application to us by the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Now the Christian is a New Man: "*If any man is in Christ, he is [not has] a new creature* (2 Cor. 5:17). "*Since you have laid aside the old man with its evil practices, and have put on the new man who is being renewed . . .*" (Col. 3:9-10). No longer are Christians slaves to sin as when they were Old Men. Now they are New Men, dominated by slavery to God and grace and righteousness and delight in his Law. The Old Man is dead.^[4] Our slavery to sin is broken. However, the sins which once dominated us remain in the **imperfect** New Man.

This position is not popular. "Has God made the New Man imperfectly? Has He done an imperfect job? But God does nothing imperfectly," say the objectors. This objection is full of emotion, not Biblical argument. The fact is that God has chosen to make the New Man so that the sinner's (not God's) sins remain. When Thomas Boston described regeneration in his *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, he said:

It is a universal change; "All things become new." It is a blessed leaven, that leavens the whole lump, the whole spirit, and soul, and body. . . . Yet it is but an imperfect change. Though every part of man is renewed, there is no part of him perfectly renewed.^[5]

John Murray clarifies this state in his *Principles of Conduct*:

The believer is a new man, a new creation, but he is a new man not yet made perfect. Sin dwells in him still, and he still commits sin. He is necessarily the subject of progressive renewal; he needs to be transfigured into the image of the Lord from glory to glory.^[6]

Rom. 7:14-25 teaches that the Christian has one nature, now dominated by service to God but in which remains sin. His mind seeks to know God's ways, his affections seek to please God, and his will seeks to obey God. Slavery to sin is broken. But the existence of sin remains in his mind, his affections, and his will so that *"the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you may not do the things that you please."*

Who then is responsible for obedience to God's Law? It is the New Man who loves Christ and seeks to keep His commandments. He cries out to Christ for help and deliverance from his remaining sins by the power of the Spirit. He cooperates with God's Spirit in obeying Christ and fighting against sin.

Who then is responsible for sin? It is the New Man who grows in sensitivity to remaining sin, who is grieved when he finds it each day, who confesses his sin and finds God faithful and just to forgive him his sins and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness. He continues to repent of his sins and deepens his repentance. He continues to believe and when he sins, he flees to His Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is not surprised by sin anymore. He knows he needs Christ daily. He knows that he must guard and keep his heart every day until he sees Christ in glory.

Rom. 7:14-25 teaches that the Christian has one nature. A new work has begun, but it is not yet perfected. There is hope here for those who struggle with sin, yearning to be free of it. There is assurance here for those who mourn over their remaining sins. And there is joy here for convicted ones because *"there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1).

A third lesson which Rom. 7:14-8:4 teaches is that the Christian life is not so much a staircase by degrees to holiness nor a dramatic second experience, but it is an increasing dynamic of repentance and faith daily exercised. The Christian never gets out of Rom. 7:14-25 into 8:1-4 because he always lives in both chapters! Faith increases on the upper plane though sometimes weaker and sometimes stronger as we live by grace. We increasingly depend upon the blood and righteousness of Christ. We increasingly love Him and seek to keep His commandments. Moreover, repentance deepens on the lower plane, though sometimes weaker and sometimes stronger as we discover more sins that need putting to death. **Daily** we mourn and cry out, *"I am carnal."* **Daily** we rejoice in the truth that *"there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* **Daily** we die to sin. **Daily** we live to righteousness. **Daily** by the Spirit we *"put to death the deeds of the body that we might live."* **Daily** we put aside anger, wrath, malice, and slander while the inner man is being renewed day by day.

Rom. 7:14-25 and Rom. 8:1-4 speak of the Christian from different aspects. The first is the Christian's inward battle against remaining sin and his imperfect obedience to God's Law. The second is the Christian on the counterattack with faith in Christ and the Spirit's assistance to fulfill the righteousness of the Law. Both aspects are a continual dynamic in Christian experience. This is a mark of true conversion. In 7:14-25 it is our guide to point out remaining sins and to deepen our hatred of them, and to increase our heart love for Christ and His graces (for he that is forgiven much loves much). In 8:1-4 it is our teacher to lead us in the paths of righteousness by the power of the Spirit. For *"He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* If you live in Rom. 7 and find repentance deepening and live in Rom. 8 and still flee to Christ for redemption and the Spirit's help to fulfill the righteousness of the Law, it is enough.

Conclusion

Do not deny that Rom. 7:14-25 is the Christian. You will despair if you are honest with your soul. Do not think that you will ever get out of Rom. 7 into Rom. 8. If you do, you will chase a figment of men's theological imaginations which will destroy your assurance of salvation and blind you to the work of God in your soul or else it will foster a spiritual pride and antinomianism which may end up destroying your soul in hell. Rather, look into Rom. 7:14-25 and see the work of God begun in the Christian soul and rejoice that He has not left you alone to harden your conscience against sin. Rejoice that the dominion of sin is broken and he is leading you into deeper repentance, increased holiness, and greater dependence upon Christ and joy in His free and ever available grace. Then do with your people what Bunyan did: "I preached what I smartingly did feel."

There will be a day when faith will be needed no more. For then faith will become sight in His beautiful face. And repentance will be no more, for the need of it will be gone--eradicating from our glorified soul. But until then we live in need of deepened repentance and increased faith every day as we endeavor to love Him and keep His commandments. Learn the lessons of Romans 7. *"Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

John Newton has expressed it well:

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with his own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried,
'Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for grace and faith.

'These inward trials I employ
'From self and pride to set thee free;
'And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
'That thou may'st seek thy all in me.'



Ministerial Doctrine

It is of great importance that a minister keep to the proper point in evangelical doctrine. We must take

heed that we swerve not from the truth. We are in great danger of losing the simplicity of the gospel. We may be in danger from the authority of great names; of the well-known views of those we preach to. It is a very great temptation, "we ought not to displease people." It is true that we ought not to displease them from *caprice*, or from *ill-feelings*; we ought "to please every man for his edification." But if the question be whether we shall please men or God, do not hesitate here. Preach the gospel as contained in the Scriptures, that you may be able to say, "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God: I am pure from the blood of all men."

-Andrew Fuller



¹*God's Way of Holiness* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1979), p. 91.

²Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 34-35.

³*Birthright* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1979), pp. 36, 44, 49, 52, 65, 75, 78-79, 82-85, 125, 135, 139.

⁴John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NIC) (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 219-221.

⁵*Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), pp. 208-209.

⁶*Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), p. 219. See pp. 202-228 for a full explanation.



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The Doctrine of Regeneration

[Bill Ascol](#)

The Bible doctrine of regeneration has suffered at the hands of its enemies as well as its friends. Its enemies marketed the doctrine in the 1970's after a Southern Baptist layman who was running for the office of President of the United States announced that he was a "born again Christian." Not long after this, many products on the market were described as "born again." Love songs spoke of feelings which were akin to "being born again." Actors and athletes alike were considered to be "born again" in their respective careers when they made a comeback of one type or another. More tragic than that, perhaps, is the treatment that the Bible doctrine of regeneration has received at the hands of its professed "friends." In many Christian circles today experiencing "regeneration" (or "being born again") is simply something that happens when a person "makes a decision to accept Jesus Christ into his heart as personal Savior." Now it is certainly true that Jesus is the Savior, and that he saves sinners on a personal level. However, the idea that the experience of regeneration is a decision which every sinner ought to make and indeed every sinner can make is an idea which is seriously defective. The defects in this idea become increasingly clear when viewed from the vantage points of Biblical material, historic Baptist teachings, and the contemporary Southern Baptist position on this doctrine. Regeneration may be defined as *that supernatural work of the Holy Spirit of God which is performed in the life of a sinner whereby the sinner is given a new heart, being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, and is made able and willing to repent of his sin before God and trust alone in Jesus Christ to be his Lord and Savior.*

The Bible and Regeneration

There are many texts of Scripture which teach us about this work of the Holy Spirit. Two particular Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, were led by the Holy Spirit to communicate the doctrine of regeneration in terms of what God will do. One such reference is found in Ezek. 36:26-27: *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."* From these verses (and others like them--see Jer. 31:31-34, and Ezek. 11:19) it is easy to see that the force of the work of regeneration is bound up with God's initiating activity. It is also evident that the stony-hearted sinner will do nothing until God gives him a heart of flesh.

It should not surprise us that the New Testament writers are of one mind in their agreement with the language of the Old Testament writers concerning this matter of the new birth. For John, the only explanation for the fact that any "received Jesus" was that they were *"born . . . of God"* (see John 1:12-13). In fact, John categorically denies the possibility of a person being born again by virtue of a human decision when he states that these believing ones *"were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* It is John who records for us the teachings of Jesus on the subject when he instructs Nicodemus that the new birth is mysterious much like the movement of the wind, and that, furthermore, it is a supernatural work so that we must be *"born of the Spirit."* (see John 3:1-8).

Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that it was while they were still dead in their trespasses and sins that they were quickened to life by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth (Eph. 2:1-5). James asserts that our new birth experience must be traced back to the will of God (James 1:18). Peter exults that the new birth did not come to pass by the agency of anything corruptible, but by that which is incorruptible (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

It should be clear from this brief overview that the key Old and New Testament passages on the subject of regeneration do not teach that it is the decision made by a person to accept Jesus as personal Savior. The Biblical

language forces the serious and honest student of Scripture to consider regeneration as a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a sinner producing a change of heart that is the equivalent of being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. Repentance and faith are evidences that this spiritual life has been planted in the soul of the individual. Some of this may happen in a manner that is beyond our comprehension, but those things which are comprehensible cannot be denied.

Historic Baptists and Regeneration

There is much talk today by people from all corners of the Southern Baptist denomination calling for the need "to return to our historic Southern Baptist heritage." That is a wonderful desire and a prospect much to be longed for. In order to do this, however, one must go back before 1925 (the year the Cooperative Program was initiated). Indeed, one must go back before 1845 (the year the Southern Baptist Convention was established). One must go back at least to the first Baptist association in the South in order to understand and appreciate what actually is the "historic Baptist position" regarding the doctrine of regeneration. The Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina was organized in October of 1751. This body of Baptists in the South adopted for its confession of faith *The London Baptist Confession of 1689*. Later, in 1813, the association commissioned the printing of a book which came to be known as *The Charleston Manual*, consisting of *The London Baptist Confession of 1689*, *A Summary of Church Discipline*, and *The Baptist Catechism*. This association was the womb out of which the Southern Baptist Convention was born. Turning to their catechism we find the following instruction on the doctrine of regeneration (or, effectual calling, as they spoke of it):

Q. 32. *How are we made partakers of the redemption obtained by Christ?*

A. We are made partakers of the redemption obtained by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us [o], by His Holy Spirit [p].

o. Galatians 4:5

p. Titus 3:5-6

Q. 33. *How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption obtained by Christ?*

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption obtained by Christ, by working faith in us [q], and thereby uniting us to Christ [r], in our effectual calling [s].

q. Ephesians 2:8

r. Ephesians 3:17

s. I Corinthians 1:9

Q. 34. *What is effectual calling?*

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit [t], whereby convincing us of our sin [u] and misery [w], enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ [x], and renewing our wills [y], he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, revealed as the free gift of God to us, in the gospel [z].

t. II Timothy 1:9

- u. John 16:8
- w. Acts 2:37
- x. Acts 26:18
- y. Ezekiel 36:26
- z. John 6:44-45

These brethren were followed by a great host of Southern Baptist statesmen who agreed wholeheartedly with the above statements concerning the nature of the new birth. A few excerpts will have to suffice.

James P. Boyce (first president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Louisville, Kentucky): "It is not strange, therefore, that they [i.e. regeneration and conversion] are often confounded. Yet, after all, the Scriptures also teach that regeneration is the work of God, changing the heart of man by his sovereign will, while conversion is that act of man turning towards God with the new inclination thus given to his heart" (*Abstract of Systematic Theology*, p. 374).

John A. Broadus (distinguished professor of New Testament and successor to Boyce at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary): "1. Q. What is meant by the word regeneration? A. Regeneration is God's causing a person to be born again. 9. Q. Does faith come before the new birth? A. No, it is the new heart that truly repents and believes" (taken from Broadus' *A Catechism of Bible Teaching*, reprinted in *A Baptist Treasury*, pp. 67-68).

John L. Dagg (first writing Southern Baptist theologian; president of Mercer University in Georgia): "In our natural state we are totally depraved. No inclination to holiness exists in the carnal heart; and no holy act can be performed, or service to God rendered, until the heart is changed. This change, it is the office of the Holy Spirit to effect. . . . But, in his own time and manner, God, the Holy Spirit, makes the word effectual in producing a new affection in the soul: and, when the first movement of love to God exists, the first throb of spiritual life commences" (*A Manual of Theology*, pp. 277, 279).

B. H. Carroll (founder and first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas): "The true scriptural position [concerning regeneration] is this: There is, first of all, a direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the passive spirit of the sinner, quickening him or making him sensitive to the preaching of the Word. In this the sinner is passive. But he is not a subject of the new birth without contrition, repentance and faith. In exercising these he is active. Yet even his contrition is but a response to the Spirit's conviction, and the exercise of his repentance is but a response to the Spirit's conviction, and the exercise of his repentance and faith are but responses to the antecedent spiritual graces of repentance and faith." Carroll goes on to state that "repentance and faith are fruits of regeneration" (*An Interpretation of the English Bible*, Volume 4, p. 287).

J. B. Tidwell (professor of Bible at Baylor University in Waco, Texas): "Regeneration is a change of the soul's affections from self to God--an act of God by which the governing disposition of the soul which was formerly sinful becomes holy, 2 Cor. 2:17--this making us new creatures." (*Christian Teachings*, p. 54)

W. T. Conner (professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary): "This change [i.e., regeneration] is one that is wrought in the moral nature of man by the Spirit of God. Nothing but divine power could produce the change. . . . God's power works this change. . . . The man who experiences regeneration knows as well as he knows daylight from darkness that he himself did not work the change." (*The Gospel of Redemption*, p. 189)

Many more could be added to this sampling of Southern Baptist worthies who have taught in times past on this

subject with Biblical faithfulness and crystal clarity. Though dead, truly they yet speak.

Contemporary Baptist Statements

One might be led to believe that the excerpts cited above reflect the beliefs held only by Baptists of days gone by, and that beliefs such as these went into their tombs with them. Such is not the case, however. In Southern Baptist life today two documents hold a high place of prominence: *The Abstract of Principles* and *The Baptist Faith and Message*. *The Abstract* serves today as the guiding doctrinal statement at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Every professor who teaches at these institutions must sign with a clear conscience *The Abstract of Principles*, agreeing to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, its doctrinal precepts. As recently as October 4, 1984, the entire faculty of Southern Seminary unanimously reaffirmed *The Abstract*. Among other wonderful Biblical truths, *The Abstract* teaches the following on 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 God and practice holiness. It is a work of God's free and special grace alone."

The *Baptist Faith and Message* is a statement of faith adapted from the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*. The *Baptist Faith and Message* has been vigorously reaffirmed by messengers to recent meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention, and presently serves as the confession of faith of very many local churches in the Southern Baptist denomination. In addition to this, it is the guiding document concerning doctrinal matters (subservient to the Bible, of course) for several Southern Baptist institutions and agencies. The article on regeneration reads as follows:

"Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Conclusion

The truth concerning the Bible doctrine of regeneration is the same today as it was when God the Holy Spirit taught it to the inspired writers of Holy Scriptures, and as it was understood by our Baptist forefathers who labored to the glory of God in the name of Jesus Christ within the confines of the Southern Baptist denomination. But then, that should not surprise us, because truth does not change. If the rank and file of Southern Baptists today do not embrace and impart the Bible doctrine of regeneration as set forth in this brief survey, then it must be either that they have not been taught or that they refuse to be taught.

Those who have not been taught need to be instructed. We must do all we can to teach this glorious truth to them for two reasons: 1) Their spiritual well-being depends upon a right understanding of this truth. 2) The task of mission and evangelism cannot truly advance apart from a proper understanding of this truth. Those, however, who refuse to be instructed in this way need to be identified as having forsaken the biblical and historic Southern Baptist understanding of this essential doctrine. Whether in the pulpit, the class room, the agency administrative office, or the trustee board room, it must be acknowledged that there has been a violation of doctrinal integrity when men (and/or women) teach an aberration of this vital subject concerning the new birth.

May our gracious God give to us a recovery of the glorious doctrine of regeneration, and may He then be pleased to teach us many divine object lessons by magnifying his grace in the salvation of a multitude of poor sinners.



Being Filled with the Spirit

Ernest Reisinger

"And I will put My Spirit within you "Ezek. 36:27.

The promise of the Spirit is a far-reaching promise--Acts 2:39: *"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"* (NKJV). It is to all that God shall call, yet the work of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, and the filling of the Spirit are not much emphasized in most Baptist churches.

The very subject of the Holy Spirit divides not only Christians of different denominations, but it divides Baptists. Most Christians are not divided on God the Father, or God the Son, but often they are divided on God the Holy Spirit. For example, some of the best of men have differences on the baptism of the Spirit; the witness of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit.

We would all agree that whatever Christians have, whatever we are and enjoy compared to the worldly unconverted, we owe to the agency of the Holy Spirit. He makes the difference. The apostates separate themselves from real Christians because they are *"sensual, having not the Spirit"* (Jude 19).

By Him we are first called, quickened and made alive. Of Him we are born again, and made new creatures. By Him we are convinced of sin, guided into all truth and led to Christ. By Him we are sealed unto the day of redemption. He witnesses with our spirits--gives us the spirit of adoption, makes us cry Abba Father, and makes intercession for us. By Him we are sanctified. By Him the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. Through Him we wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. Through Him we walk. In Him we live. In short, all that believers have from grace to glory--all that we are from the moment we believe to the day we depart to be with Christ--all, all, all may be traced to the work of God the Holy Spirit. (John 6:63; 3:8; 16:9,10; Eph. 4:30; I Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:15,16,26; I Thes. 2:13; Rom. 5:5; 15:13; Gal. 5:5,25; Rom. 8:1,13.)

Let it be settled in our minds that the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, is absolutely and equally needful to the salvation of every saved soul. The election of God the Father, and the atoning blood of God the Son, are the foundation stones of our faith. But from them must never be separated the applicatory work of God the Holy Ghost. The Father chooses. The Son mediates, absolves, justifies, and intercedes. The Holy Ghost applies the whole work to man's soul. Always together in Scripture, never separated in Scripture, let the offices of the three Persons in the Trinity never be wrenched asunder and disjoined in your Christianity. What God hath so beautifully joined together let no man dare to put asunder.

The Holy Spirit Breathed the Holy Scriptures

Scripture is now perfected: therefore the work of the Spirit is now, not to perfect Scripture, nor to add anything to its discovery, nor to be instead of Scripture where it is wanting, but to remove the darkness from our understanding, that we may see clearly what the Scripture speaks clearly.

Power to Evangelize (Acts 1:8)

"But you shall receive power," When? *"after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you."* For what purpose? Not tongues--not healing--but, *"and you shall be My witnesses"* (Acts 1:8). This point alone should make every serious Christian jealous for the work and office of the third Person of the blessed Trinity. The Jews in our Lord's day lacked two things according to our Lord: *"not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God"* (Mt. 22:29). Is this not our great need? Oh, for the power of God to be known in our pulpits, our churches and in our individual lives.

Filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)

The sacred manual of evangelism is the book of Acts. Therefore, I want to appeal to that sacred manual for some instruction on the most common terminology to express the relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit--*"filled with the Spirit."*

Consider Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-37. After being filled with the Holy Spirit he preached.

In Acts 2 and in Luke 24:49 we find our Lord's promise of the Spirit. In Acts 1:8 this promise was fulfilled. Yes, they spoke in tongues but "tongues" was not the real purpose. Tongues was almost insignificant. They were to receive power, not to speak in tongues, but to witness--evangelize (Acts 1:8). The real purpose is seen in Peter's bold witness--Acts 2:14-37. Only being filled with the Spirit will produce such preaching and such results; in short, Peter gave witness and many were converted (see Acts 2:41, 47).

Acts 4--When Peter and John were before the Sanhedrin for healing the lame man they were on the spot. They were asked, *"by what power have you done this?"* *"Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit gave witness to the rulers and elders"* (v.9). Yes, power to witness. Exactly what he witnessed is found in verses 4:9-23. After they boldly witnessed they prayed (see 4:24-30). What happened after they prayed (v. 31)? *"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke [not in tongues] the word of God with boldness."* Being filled with the Spirit was for power to evangelize, to witness.

Acts 6:3, 5, 7--The apostles chose seven men *"full of the Holy Spirit."* In v. 7 we learn some of the results of being filled with the Spirit: *"The word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly."* I like that word "multiplied." This is another example of the connection of being filled with the Spirit and real biblical evangelism.

Acts 6:5, 8--*"Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit"* (v. 5). *"And Stephen a man full of power."* (v.8) What did this man, filled with the Holy Spirit, do? The very next chapter, Acts 7, gives us the answer. He preached (Acts 7:2ff). He witnessed as to who Jesus was, and it was so powerful that it cost him his life. Filled with the Holy Spirit not for the phenomena but for witness.

Acts 9--This chapter records what was probably the greatest conversion to Christianity--Paul's conversion. In Acts 9:17 we learn that Paul was *"filled with the Spirit."* What did he do immediately after he was filled with the Spirit? Acts 9:20: *"Immediately he preached Christ."*

Acts 11:24--Barnabas was *"a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith."* What was the result of being "filled with the Spirit"? *"And a great many people were added to the Lord."* (see Acts 5:14; 11:21.) Barnabas was empowered to evangelize.

Acts 13:9--This passage again speaks of Paul being *"filled with the Holy Spirit."* In this same chapter (v. 52) we see they were filled with joy. They preached the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews (v. 5). And, as we usually

find when the word of God is going forth, there is opposition. In this case it was a false prophet, surnamed Bar-Jesus, who was seeking to turn a good man who desired to hear the word of God (v. 9) away from the faith. Here we see what a man "filled with the Holy Spirit" does. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in a language that could be understood (he did not need an interpreter): *"You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness."*

Acts 8--In this chapter the apostles were given apostolic power to do some unusual things, and again, we have a false prophet, Simon the sorcerer, who had witnessed these men filled with the Holy Spirit proclaiming Christ in power (v. 5). Simon wanted, by this power, to work miracles that were real, because he knew that the miracles that the apostles worked were not fraud, fake or fanatical. Again, we see men "filled with the Holy Spirit" were so filled to empower them for gospel purposes, particularly for evangelizing.

There are other references in the Book of Acts to "being filled with the Spirit." And any careful study will clearly show that the filling of the Spirit was to give power for gospel purposes and to empower the apostles to do unusual things to authenticate and confirm their message.

Conclusion

The giving of the Spirit, then, is for empowering men and women for gospel purposes, gospel work, and particularly, for evangelizing. This one thing is very clear from any serious reading of the whole Book of Acts, namely, the reason the Holy Spirit came in power was not to produce a class of super Christians who were identified by the gift of unknown tongues--those who have IT and leave the have-nots to struggle without IT. No! No! The Holy Spirit was given to empower the Church to bear a faithful witness to Jesus Christ to the end of the earth--in words that people can understand (Acts 1:8).

My object just now is not to write of the descent of the Holy Spirit as a piece of history, but to view it as a fact bearing upon us at this hour, even upon us who are called in these days to evangelize.

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. The Bible very clearly teaches that He can be grieved and that we can quench the Spirit.

May God grant that this meditation may increase our faith in the Holy Spirit, and inflame our desires toward Him, so that we may look to see Him fulfilling His mission among men as at the beginning.

This article is not suggesting that the filling of the Spirit is a once and for all experience subsequent to conversion, or a second work of grace. Rather, such filling is something that must happen over and over again until we reach the celestial city.

This is entirely practical, and, I suggest, most important. If we stop at a mere theoretical consideration of this great doctrine, this great truth, it will avail us nothing. The whole object of dealing with the doctrine is to create within us a desire for this great blessing which characterized the early church as we have seen, and which has always characterized the church in days of revival, true quickening and awakening, when the church, vibrant with power, is acting truly as the body of Christ in this sinful world.

It is this truth and this alone that holds out any hope for us today. Pray, Christian, pray. *"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!" (Luke 11:13).



B. H. Carroll on Creeds

"A church with a little creed is a church with a little life. . . . The modern cry: 'Less creed and more liberty,' is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity, and less morality, and it means more heresy."



News

1991 Southern Baptist Founders Youth Conference

This youth camp, which has been sponsored by the FBC of Clinton, Louisiana, has grown into a valuable ministry to young people. The 1990 camp had over 180 registrants. Next year it is scheduled to meet once again in Panama City, Florida, on June 24-28. The theme will be "Building Godly Relationships." The speakers are Dr. Fred Malone and Dr. Tom Ascol. For more information contact the SBFYC secretary, Cindy Kemp, FBC, P. O. Box 552, Clinton, LA, 70722; phone (504) 683-5153.

Membership Statistics Inflated

The April 25, 1990, edition of the *Wall Street Journal* carried an indicting article under the headline, "Official Number of Southern Baptists Is Overestimated, Even Their Leaders Agree" (p. A16). It charges that official claims of 14.9 million members are terribly inflated: "Baptist statisticians and even some top denominational officials acknowledge . . . that as many as half of that number no longer set foot in a Southern Baptist Church." Over 4.4 million of these are "so-called non-resident members, a technical term [which, we might add, has absolutely no biblical justification, - Ed.] that actually allows the counting as members those the church has simply lost touch with."

"Baptist officials say such members should be stricken from church rolls. But in a denomination where membership is often equated with success, few churches will do that." Beyond this special species of members, the article also identifies another 3 million members on our rolls who "haven't attended their church or donated to one in the past year." That leaves about 7.4 million "active" members. But the picture becomes even more bleak when one considers that, according to Sunday School consultant Glenn Smith, included in this "active" figure are those members who only attend once a year at Easter or Christmas.

Are we not forced to conclude, then, that for many of our churches and ministers the distinctively Baptist doctrine of a regenerate church membership has become a relic, or at best has been relegated to the realm of theory with no practical application? The 1990 Founders Conference, which will address the doctrine of the church, is timely indeed!

Help from the Historical Commission

In its recent "Foundations of Baptist Heritage" series, the Historical Commission of the SBC has included a pamphlet entitled, "Responsible Church Membership" by Charles W. Deweese. This is an excellent little tool to use with new members or with pastors who are not sensitive to the issues touched upon in the *Wall Street Journal* article mentioned above. After giving a brief historical overview of his subject, Deweese calls for the application to our contemporary scene of those biblical principles of responsible church membership which are firmly rooted in our Baptist heritage. He writes, "The stakes are high. And the regenerate quality of much Baptist church life is at risk. Evidence of the problem includes baptizing thousands of preschoolers, requests for rebaptisms by persons already baptized as 'alleged' believers, little attention to candidates' qualifications for membership, weak admission standards and procedures, inadequate attention to defining and carrying out membership responsibilities, decreased use of covenants and discipline, large numbers of non-resident members and numerous inactive resident members." To which we add a hearty, "Amen." You may order this pamphlet through The Historical Commission of the SBC, 901 Commerce Street, Suite 400, Nashville, TN 37203-3620.



The Founders
Journal
Contents Issue 2

The Founders
Journal
Main Page

Book Reviews

A Lifting Up for the Downcast by William Bridge; Banner of Truth, 1979, \$6.45.

Reviewed by [Walter Johnson](#)

This book is comprised of a series of thirteen sermons by the great seventeenth-century preacher, William Bridge. He uses Psalm 42:11 as a springboard from which he plunges into the subject of discouragement in the Christian life. In the chosen text David asked, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" While agreeing that true peace may be interrupted for a season, Bridge nonetheless answers these questions with the statement that is the theme of the book--"A godly, gracious man has no reason for his discouragements, whatever his condition be."

Bridge addresses nine specific instances which the Christian might perceive to be legitimate grounds for discouragement. These include such circumstances as falling into sin, lack of assurance of salvation, severe temptation, loss of the awareness of God's presence, and great suffering and affliction. In each case Bridge allows his imaginary counselee (a discouraged believer) to present his grounds for discouragement. At times the discouragement seems so profound that the reader wonders whether Bridge can support his contention that "a believer has no reason for his discouragements whatever his condition may be." But in each case Bridge draws deeply from the wells of Holy Scripture, and applies a soothing balm to the ailing believer. He embellishes his teaching with beautiful analogies from nature and human relationships to illustrate a point, but he relies on the Bible alone to prove a point.

In the final chapter Bridge prescribes the cure for the downcast as being faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith involves hoping in God, or expecting help from Him; trusting God, or relying on Him for help; waiting on God, or continuing to abide in this expectation of help. Faith is the reliance of the soul upon God in Christ for some benefit that lies yet out of sight. It is competent to bring peace to the discouraged soul because it gives a man the true perspective from which to view all things. Discouragement arises when one does perceive circumstances as they really are, that is, the way that God sees them. Faith remedies this myopia, by enabling the believer to rest in the sure hope of Rom. 8:28. With that, man can face trying times without being downcast.

While constantly giving comfort to those who are weak in faith, Bridge never encourages weakness of faith. While never underestimating the pain of discouragement, he never excuses such discouragement. While encouraging the weak, he never pampers the presumptuous. While writing on a subject that focuses on man, Bridge never loses sight of the fact that even here the glory of God is central.

This book contains profound insights into the hearts of believers and should be read by all who are called to be physicians of men's souls. To some degree this includes every Christian. In reading it one will find that it is truly "a lifting up for the downcast."

Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts by Jerry Bridges; Navpress, 1988, \$12.95

Reviewed by [Hal Wynn](#)

This book is well titled. It addresses the question, "Can God be trusted?" Bridges, who is a vice-president in the Navigators organization, answers that question with such biblical and practical wisdom that one comes away with a profound sense of renewed confidence in God.

People in our churches are experiencing so much pain. And C. S. Lewis is right, "Pain is the megaphone of God." Unfortunately, the most common advice that many suffering Christians receive today boils down to "grin and bear it." Bridges submits three truths about God that address the frustration and futility that people experience in the midst of adversity. These three foundational truths relate to God's love, wisdom and sovereignty.

Bridges' thesis is that since God is perfect in the harmonious expression of these three attributes, He can be trusted even when we do not understand His reasons.

We are reminded that it is easier to obey God's revealed will (which is clearly designed for our benefit) than to trust God concerning His sovereign will (which at times does not immediately appear beneficial, and may even seem pointless). But, Bridges points out that to fail to trust God is as sinful as failing to obey Him.

It would take several pages to recount the testimonies of the many people under my ministry who have been greatly helped by this book in the midst of adversity. I have used it in our home study groups with much evident benefit and blessing. The sovereignty of God is seen most clearly and grasped most meaningfully when presented in the context of everyday life where people can feel the truth in their hearts as well as understand it with their minds. With the skill of a master craftsman Bridges has accomplished such a presentation in this book.

The words of John Newton express my sentiments as I have understood the message of the book: "If it were possible for me to alter any part of His plan, I could only spoil it." That's trusting God even when life hurts.

[Note: These books may be obtained from Cumberland Valley Bible Books, P.O. Box 613, Carlisle, PA 17013]



The Eight Annual
Southern Baptist Founders Conference

Rhodes College
Memphis, Tennessee

July 31-August 3, 1990

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Speakers:

Mr. David Kingdon
Dr. Timothy George
Mr. Bill Ascol
Dr. Tom Nettles
Dr. Walter Johnson
Dr. Fred Malone
Mr. R. F. Gates
Dr. Tom Ascol

Cost per person: \$130.00 (includes room, 8 meals, and registration) For information write:

Founders Conference Secretary
P. O. Box 50014
Pompano Beach, Florida 33074

