



An Attempt at Self-Identification

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The Matterhorn, part of the Pennine Alps on the Swiss-Italian Border

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An Attempt at Self-Identification

Tom Ascol

"Who are they?" This question, or a variation of it, is often asked when interested parties are first introduced to the Southern Baptist Founders Conference or *Founders Journal*. It is a question which, on one level, defies a quick and simple answer--largely because of the difficulty of identifying the "they" being asked about. Since there is no official Southern Baptist Founders organization which can be joined, there is no membership roll to determine who "they" are.

Are "they" the people who attend or have attended the annual conference? If so, then the answer would need to be broad enough to include the peculiarities (and idiosyncrasies) of several hundred men (mostly pastors) and women. Most share a deep interest in doctrinal and devotional Christianity. Within this number, however, would be found a variety of theological convictions and church affiliations. One need not pass a confessional litmus test in order to attend.

Any attempt, therefore, to draw a profile of the typical attendee (a sort of "Founder Fred") would inevitably tend toward caricature.

Moreover, there are those who appreciate the ministry of the Founders conference and journal who would object to being closely identified with either. This must be understood when trying to ascertain exactly who it is that has become involved with or supportive of the conference and/or journal.

On another level, however, the question, "Who are they?" suggests a desire to understand the rationale and purpose behind the efforts of those who plan the conference and publish the journal. This concern can be decisively, though not simplistically, addressed by considering the beginnings and abiding concerns of both efforts.

Historical Background

The conference, which this year celebrates its 10th anniversary, was born in a prayer meeting on November 13, 1982. On that day seven men gathered in a motel room in Euless, Texas, to consider the feasibility of planning a conference which would be based upon the doctrines of grace as historically articulated by our Southern Baptist forebears.

After spending half of the day in prayer, it was agreed to attempt such an effort. A Statement of Principles was drafted, assignments were made, and the result was the first Founders Conference.

That original statement still obtains. It describes the "Motive" of the conference as follows:

To glorify God, honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches by providing encouragement to Southern Baptists in historical, biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies.

The conference's "Purpose" is also clearly stated:

To be a balanced conference in respect to doctrine and devotion expressed in the Doctrines of Grace and their experimental application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness. This is to be accomplished through engaging a variety of speakers to present formal papers, sermons, expositions, and devotions, and through the recommendation and distribution of literature consistent with the nature of the conference.

In keeping with this stated purpose the decision was made in 1990 to begin publishing a quarterly journal. The *Founders Journal* is currently being mailed to 36 states and 8 foreign countries.

Abiding Concerns

This historical background gives some information about how we began, but it does not adequately address who and what we are. The following attempt at self-identification is perhaps better understood as a set of goals toward which we continually strive rather than ones which we have attained with finality.

We desire to be orthodox without being obnoxious. Surely such is possible. We believe that truth matters. There is such a thing as objective, absolute, unchanging, and unchangeable truth. God has revealed it. Through his Word and his Spirit, men can come to know it. Such knowledge is both desirable and necessary for genuine, vibrant Christianity. Therefore the Bible should be studied, proclaimed, and applied with a deep sense of submission to its authority.

This does not mean that we believe that wisdom ends with us. Neither do we make any claim to have a corner on the truth. Therefore we renounce theological pride and spiritual haughtiness. We are willing to learn from those with whom we disagree. Our goal is to contend for the truth of the gospel in that spirit of the gospel which recognizes that if one understands all mysteries and possesses all knowledge yet has not love, he is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

Secondly, we want to be confessional, yet contemporary. Our faith is unashamedly consistent with the great, time-honored confessions of our forefathers. It consciously arises from the historic stream of that "exalted system of Pauline truth which is technically called Calvinism" (to borrow John Broadus's description).

Our identification with historic Calvinism does not mean that we use the designation pridefully or require it as a test of fellowship. It is a mere tag; a nickname which says nothing other than "God is sovereign in creation, providence, and salvation." C. H. Spurgeon's sentiments are our own:

We only use the term "Calvinism" for shortness. That doctrine which is called "Calvinism" did not spring from Calvin; we believe that it sprang from the great founder of all truth. Perhaps Calvin himself derived it mainly from the writings of Augustine. Augustine obtained his views, without doubt, through the Holy Spirit of God, from diligent study of the writings of Paul, and Paul received them from the Holy Ghost and from Jesus Christ, the great founder of the Christian Church. We use the term then, not because we impute an extraordinary importance to Calvin's having taught these doctrines. We should be just as willing to call them by any other name, if we could find one which would be better understood, and which on the whole would be as consistent with fact.

Neither does our identification with historic, orthodox, evangelical Calvinism mean that we embrace the caricatures and misrepresentations that have often been associated with the designation. Specifically, John Calvin is not our final authority. We affirm the supreme and final authority of the Bible.

We do not deny or de-emphasize human responsibility in salvation. We affirm the absolute responsibility of man and insist that it be held as fervently as the absolute sovereignty of God. We do not deny or de-emphasize evangelism. Though we do challenge the legitimacy of much that parades under the banner of evangelism today, we strongly affirm the necessity to be zealous, bold, and compassionate in evangelistic efforts. Let it be clearly said that we are not Hyper-Calvinists. We strongly believe in the duty of all men to repent and believe the gospel, and we renounce Hyper-Calvinism as deadly, pernicious error.

If we must be labelled, call us evangelical Calvinists. Personally, I prefer the moniker, "Historic Southern Baptists." It is an appropriate designation because the truths that we hold dear were held historically not only by Augustine, Luther, Calvin, the Puritans, Edwards, and Whitefield, as well as by the English Baptists Fuller, Pearce, Ryland, Carey, and Spurgeon, but also (and, for the purpose of denominational identity, more importantly) by great early Southern Baptist statesmen such as R. B. C. Howell, R. Fuller, W. B. Johnson, B. Manly (Sr. & Jr.), J. A. Broadus, J. P. Boyce, J. L. Dagg, P. H. Mell, B. H. Carroll, M. McGregor, J. B. Gambrell, and J. M. Frost--to name but a few! Hence the names "Southern Baptist **Founders** Conference" and "*Founders Journal*."

These names do not suggest that we are trying to live in the past or that we have been overtaken with wistful nostalgia. Rather, they demonstrate that, in our belief and practice, we are standing in the historic stream of orthodox Christianity. What we are trying to do is proclaim and apply the old gospel in a new day. After all, if what our forefathers believed was true in their day, it is still true today.

We are Southern Baptist, though not sectarian. Much that is of spiritual value is being done in and through the Southern Baptist Convention. We want to affirm and encourage such efforts. We are consciously Southern Baptist and recognize the propriety of serving within the SBC borders. At the same time, we adhere firmly to the autonomy of each local church. Therefore, we have no political agenda which we are seeking to have implemented in the convention.

As Southern Baptists, we have great appreciation of and fellowship with those of other churches and denominations with whom we share fundamental, biblical convictions. We desire to maintain a genuine catholic spirit toward all who believe the gospel.

Finally, *our goal is to be doctrinally and devotionally balanced.* The doctrines of grace are intellectually satisfying. Spurgeon noted that one evidence of Calvinism's being truth from God is the fact that even simple believers without formal theological training can grasp its teachings.

With this advantage, however, comes an everpresent danger. There is a temptation to embrace the doctrines of grace intellectually without being embraced by the grace of the doctrines experientially. May the Lord deliver us from "intellectual Calvinism" and grant us in its place what older writers have called, "experimental Calvinism."

God's truth was never intended to illuminate the understanding while leaving the affections and the will untouched. To be properly received it must reach all three. Doctrinal precision and devotional warmth are equally important for balanced, vibrant Christian living.

This sheds some light on who we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go. We long to see a widespread recovery of the old gospel which was known and loved by our convention's founders. We long to see a real revival of true religion which that gospel is calculated to promote. We long to see churches strengthened, members and pastors encouraged, and men, women and children soundly converted to Christ. To this end we work and pray.



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Main Page

Lordship, Non-Lordship and Dispensationalism

Ernest Reisinger

In the first two studies of the Lordship controversy (*FJ 6 & 7*) I pointed out that this long, painful issue will never be resolved without coming to grips with the warped, twisted theology behind the non-Lordship teaching.

The non-Lordship teaching is just the tip of a theological iceberg. It is merely a small child of the warped, twisted theological system of Dispensationalism. This system is the result of faulty philosophical, and literal hermeneutics (there is a true, literal hermeneutic quite different from the dispensational hermeneutic).

The small child of non-Lordship theology has a father--his name is Arminianism; a mother her name is Dispensationalism; an aunt--her name is Antinomianism (she, like Dispensationalism, does not like the word "law"). There are also many cousins, some of whom will be addressed in subsequent studies.

Let me say at the outset that this dispensational system of theology is diametrically opposed to covenant theology. It opposes all historic Reformed Theology, such as that which is taught in the Westminster Confession, the Old Baptist Confession of 1689, and the Heidelberg Catechism. Dispensationalism would have been declared heresy by the Synod of Dort as was her husband, Arminianism. Arminianism, Dispensationalism and Antinomianism all live in the same theological house (and it is not a Reformed house!).

I say, without fear of contradiction, Dispensationalism is nothing less than a frontal attack on Covenant and Reformed Theology.

Autobiographical Sketch

In this article I wish to address some of the doctrinal issues which are involved in Dispensationalism.

Perhaps a brief autobiographical background may be helpful. I am very grateful for all the helpful things that I have learned on my way to the Celestial City. I am indebted to many teachers who taught me to revere the Holy Scriptures. The formative years of my spiritual development were spent under the ministries of godly men who were committed to Dispensationalism. It was through them that I was taught the importance of a personal devotional life. I was taught to be missionary minded. I was taught to be a personal witness for Christ. I was taught five fundamental truths: (1) the inspiration and infallibility of the scriptures; (2) the virgin birth of Christ; (3) the miracles of Christ; (4) the substitutionary atonement of Christ; (5) the bodily resurrection of Christ.

One of the first books that had a profound effect on my methods of evangelism was *True Evangelism*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer. I can still recommend it as being very helpful.

I did not find my way out of Dispensationalism easily. It took time and tears and cost me fellowship with some genuine, committed Christian friends. Some of them thought that I was departing from the faith or going liberal. The inward heart struggle to embrace the historic Christian faith involved not only intellectual conflict but also emotional struggle. The many changes were not made in haste, anger, passion, or ecstasy. It did not happen on a weekend. I spent the first ten years of my Christian life immersed in Dispensationalism. I wore out three Scofield Bibles and the fourth was falling apart. I heard Lewis Sperry Chafer in person. The only systematic theology I studied was Dr.

Chafer's eight-volume set.

My theological change resulted from a serious, exhaustive search to know three things: What saith the scriptures; what do they mean; and how do I apply them to my belief and practice?

I pray that this little history of my own journey will be kept in mind as I attempt the rather difficult task of dealing with principles of Dispensationalism without being disrespectful or unchristian to the many genuine Christians who sincerely hold this view that I now consider erroneous, unbiblical, dangerous and outside the historic stream of Christianity.

Although I strongly differ from my dispensational brethren in their interpretation of scripture, I would defend their right to adhere to their view. I do not wish to separate from their fellowship. However, I strongly believe Dispensationalism to be a departure from the historic faith of our fathers. No Christian wishes to be argumentative, but it is impossible to address this controversial issue without being polemic and somewhat censorious of the system. I must be very candid in saying that I cannot approach this contemporary issue in an unbiased manner.

This unbiblical and unhistorical theology has spawned many serious errors, and we are now reaping some of its fruit--especially in the areas of evangelism and teachings on the Christian life (justification and sanctification).

Defining Dispensationalism

It is impossible to give a concise, succinct definition of Dispensationalism today because of the many changes among dispensational teachers. There is more than one view of Dispensationalism today. Therefore, the old definition found in the Scofield Bible is no longer accurate or adequate: "A dispensation is a period of time during which a man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God" (*Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 5, note 4).

Recently I read a review of an excellent book by an able and respected theologian. The book was exposing the errors and dangers of Dispensationalism. The reviewer made an excellent observation that will underscore my premise that it is impossible to give a concise and succinct definition of Dispensationalism.

Referring to Dispensationalism the reviewer said: though the author had done his home-work, he is shooting at a moving target. It is no longer possible to speak of Dispensationalism as a unit. In the earlier days the system had a degree of various offshoots, but if Darby, Scofield, or even Chafer were to return today, they would be bewildered by the widely divergent stances of those still called dispensationalists. The reviewer was certainly correct when he referred to Dispensationalism as a "moving target." It has been and is a moving target. The question is what the next move will be.

Dispensationalism, Arminianism and Antinomianism wear many masks and there are many degrees, shades, and excesses in all three camps. This is one reason that it is so hard to address.

Although the dispensationalists have many differences among themselves and their theological positions are complex and hard to pin down due to various modifications of the system, I think I am safe in giving the following statement for our purpose in this study.

Dispensationalists divide the course of history into a number of distinct epochs. During each of these epochs God works out a particular phase of His overall plan. Each particular phase represents a dispensation in which there are

distinctive ways that God exercises His government over the world and tests human obedience.

It is possible, however, to consider for the purpose of our study three general views of Dispensationalism:

There is what is called *hyper-Dispensationalism*. One of their distinctives is the teaching that the Church did not begin until the middle of the Book of Acts.

There are those who are called *classical dispensationalists*. C.I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer and others of the old school would come under this designation. They held that Israel is on earth and the Church is in heaven and the twain shall never meet.

The *neo-dispensationalist* view is promoted by such leaders as Charles C. Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost and Zane Hodges. They hold that the Church and Israel shall come together after the millennium. They differ from the old dispensationalists, in that they teach that saints in the Old Testament were saved by faith.

Each of these views has many distinctives and differences from the others. A careful study of all of them, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

Distinguishing Features of Dispensationalism

Charles C. Bass, in his excellent book entitled *Backgrounds To Dispensationalism* names some of the distinguishing features of Dispensationalism as follows:

- The Nature and Purpose of a Dispensation
- The Literal Interpretation of Scripture
- The Dichotomy Between Israel and the Church
- A Restricted View of the Church
- A Jewish Concept of the Kingdom
- A Postponed Kingdom
- The Distinction Between Law and Grace
- The Compartmentalization of Scripture
- The Pre-tribulation Rapture
- The Purpose of the Great Tribulation
- The Nature of the Millennial Reign of Christ
- The Eternal State
- The Apostate Nature of Christendom

Dispensationalism and covenant theology have differences on many biblical doctrines, such as: Grace of God, Law of God, Church of God, Word of God, Christian life, World and life view, Sanctification, and Eschatology.

Although there are many important differences between the two schools of thought, there are four differences that go to the heart of Dispensationalism. The truth or error of Dispensationalism stands or falls on four main pillars. These could be called the four main roots of the system:

1. Their literalism and Jewish understanding of Old Testament prophecy and the Messianic Kingdom.

2. The parenthesis theory of the Kingdom and the Church. According to this theory, (and it is only a theory) the Church Age is an unforeseen parenthesis in the Jewish program prophesied by Old Testament prophets. If the Jews had not rejected Jesus, the Jewish Kingdom would have begun at our Lord's first coming. But, God's "Plan A" was thwarted, or interrupted, or failed, and the Church age totally unforeseen by the Old Testament prophets was interjected, or, "Plan B" substituted for "Plan A." The dispensationalists call this the parenthetical Church age. My Bible knows nothing about a God who does not have power to perform His plan. The God of the Bible is sovereign in creation, sovereign in redemption and sovereign in providence. He is all-wise in planning and all-powerful in performing.

We must ask the dispensational teachers the following questions about their parenthesis theory. If the Church is a parenthesis, when did it begin, and how do you know? When will it end, and how do you know?

3. The third pillar or root of the dispensational system that most dispensationalists apparently have not seriously examined is the dichotomy between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. Dispensationalism teaches that the Old Testament saints are not now in the Church universal, which is the body of Christ.
4. The fourth pillar or root of this erroneous teaching is on the biblical relationship between the law and the gospel. The Moral Law (the Ten Commandments) to dispensational teaching today is nothing but the cold ashes and the dying fire of the religion of another day. However, the Moral Law carries permanent validity and goes straight to the root of our modern problems. It lays its finger on churches' deepest needs in evangelism and in the Christian life, namely, sanctification. We live in a lawless age. Lawlessness in the home, school, land and in the church. We must find the same rules for our actions, the same duties required, the same sins forbidden in the gospel as in the law. The law by which God rules us is as dear to Him as the gospel by which he saves us.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great preacher and soul winner, in a sermon called "The Perpetuity of The Law of God," said: "Very great mistakes have been made about the law. Not long ago there were those about us who affirmed that the law is utterly abrogated and abolished, and they openly taught that believers were not bound to make the moral law a rule for their lives. What would have been sin in other men, they counted as no sin in themselves. From such Antinomianism as that, may God deliver us. We are not under the law as the method of salvation, but we delight to see the law in the hand of Christ, and desire to obey the Lord in all things."

The dispensationalists would not agree with Charles Bridges on the law and the gospel. Bridges wrote the classic book on *The Christian Ministry*. He said, "The mark of a minister 'approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,' is, that he, 'rightly divides the word of truth.' This implies a full and direct application of the gospel to the mass of his unconverted hearers, combined with a body of spiritual instruction to the several classes of Christians. His system will be marked by scriptural symmetry and comprehensiveness. It will embrace the whole revelation of God, in its doctrinal instruction, experimental privileges, and practical results. This revelation is divided into two parts--the law and the gospel--essentially distinct from each other, though so intimately connected, that an accurate knowledge of neither can be obtained without the other."

The dispensationalists set up a false antithesis between law and grace. Of course when we are talking about how a person is justified there is real antithesis, and every Christian should recognize this. The error of Dispensationalism in this connection is two-fold. First of all, it applies this sharp antithesis to the successive dispensations and interprets the Mosaic Law as exemplifying law in contrast with grace, and the gospel dispensation as exemplifying grace in contrast with law. Secondly, this antithesis becomes a governing

principle which leads Dispensationalism into a false view of the law within the sphere of grace. This erroneous view appears very clearly in the Scofield Reference Bible (pp. 999f, 1002) and also in Chafer's *Systematic Theology*, (vol. 4, pp. 180-251).

Many true believers, traveling on the road to the Celestial City get very weary and discouraged with the many divisions and controversies. Christian, you must remember that God brings good out of evil. The cross is the best illustration of this principle. The most wicked thing that was ever done by the hands of men was crucifying our Lord, yet, the greatest blessings that God ever gave to us are the blessings that flow from the cross.

We will continue this study in the next issue with some of the history of Dispensationalism in America.

In the meantime, let me encourage you with the word of an old Puritan: "The road to heaven is very narrow, and worse yet, there is a dangerous ditch on either side of that narrow road. On the one side is the ditch of DESPAIR and on the other side there is the ditch of PRESUMPTION, but bless God, in front of the ditch of Despair is a hedgerow of God's promises and in front of the ditch of Presumption is a hedgerow of God's precepts."



On Controversy with an Unbeliever

"If you look upon him as an unconverted person, in a state of enmity against God and His grace (a supposition which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit), he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger. Alas! 'he knows not what he does.' But you know who has made you to differ. If God, in His sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, you might have been as he is now, and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defence of the Gospel. You were both equally blind by nature.

If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him, because the Lord has been pleased to open your eyes, and not his. Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation Our part is not to strive but in meekness to instruct those who oppose, 'if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth.'"

John Newton



Richard Fuller, Pt. 2 -- His Preaching

[*Don Whitney*](#)

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Fuller as a Preacher

Fuller's dying words ["Who'll preach Jesus?"] bear testimony to what he lived for--to preach Jesus. His biographer contends that "As a preacher of the gospel and a good minister of Jesus Christ, he must rank with the foremost of this or of any age."[\[1\]](#) W. T. Brantly, Fuller's successor at Seventh Baptist Church in Baltimore and the preacher at Fuller's funeral added, "And the glory of his preaching was that Jesus was the constant theme. . . . Whether the text was selected from the prophecies or the histories, the proverbs or the epistles, the psalms or the gospels, the sermon was always fragrant with the precious odor of Christ."[\[2\]](#) Cathcart's *Baptist Encyclopedia* says of his Christ-centered proclamation, "Dr. Fuller as a preacher had but few peers."[\[3\]](#)

Perhaps Richard Fuller's distinction in the pulpit can best be seen in the influence of his preaching at the annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention. He had already addressed the last two meetings of the old Triennial Convention when he was asked to preach the very first annual sermon of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1846. "In the subsequent meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention," writes Cuthbert, "it was generally understood that Dr. Fuller was to occupy on Sunday morning the pulpit of the church with which the body met. There were many able and devoted men present equal to any occasion; but they, as well as the community, were anxious to hear Richard Fuller. It was not unusual in this way for him to preach in the evening as well as in the morning of the great day of the feast."[\[4\]](#) And as far as I have been able to tell, Fuller did preach at one time or another at every annual meeting of the SBC at least until the meeting at Raleigh in 1872, totaling upwards of twenty-six consecutive years of preaching to the gathered messengers of our denomination. Some men said they traveled to the convention for the sole purpose of hearing Fuller preach.

The Importance of Preaching

He also spoke on behalf of needy Southern Baptist causes. Two of his most influential appearances before the convention were on behalf of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, then at Greenville, S. C., and for the Home Mission Board. When the convention met in Macon in 1869 a newspaper gave this report of his appeal: "He loved the seminary, because they there teach the students to preach Jesus. The Bible is written in other languages; and we Baptists should see to it that we have men able to interpret them, and to state and defend our particular views. . . . How important that these mighty interests should not be committed to ignoramuses!"[\[5\]](#) In Raleigh in 1872 he spoke of being touched by the need of home missions the day before when he had walked among the graves of soldiers from the recent war. In what must have been an emotional moment he asked, "Will we not send the gospel to their widows and orphans?" He went on to appeal for more missionary work among the former slaves.

In addition to his preaching before the convention, we should not forget his other denominational service. Fuller was the third president of the SBC, chosen twice as the man to lead the convention in what may have been the most difficult terms of office ever, 1859-1861 and 1861-1863. The Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists records his role in this little-known fact. "He was leader of the Provisional Board in Baltimore, which carried on foreign missions work during the Civil War when the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond was cut off from communication with missionaries in China and Africa, and funds from the South were not available."[\[6\]](#)

He loved our denomination and worked for it, but preaching was Richard Fuller's first love in the ministry and it was to

this Work that he gave his best and longest hours. This is not to imply that he was a great preacher who stayed aloof from people. He once admonished an inexperienced pastor, "Young man, don't you know you can't succeed anywhere without visiting?"^[7] But the heartbeat of his ministry was the proclamation of the Word of God. And though he was unusually gifted by God, one should not conclude that Fuller coasted into pulpit effectiveness. Commentator William Newell said of him at Harvard that "His brilliant talent was united with great power of work, with close and indefatigable study."^[8] Of his later ministry Newell observed, "He was certainly a gifted and powerful preacher, whose success, however, was due quite as much to his full and elaborate preparation of thought for his subject as to his readiness of speech."^[9]

Fuller gave three days' preparation to his messages. "Monday morning by nine o'clock," he use to say, "I have my texts for next Sunday. I am at work on the morning sermon until Thursday: the rest of the week I give to the second, Then, if something occurs to you in the pulpit, say it."^[10] Cuthbert adds at this point, "Some of his own happiest sentences were in this way strictly extemporaneous; but they came with him, as they must with every one, from the momentum of a previous and thorough preparation."^[11] His preparation was so thorough that in the latter part of his ministry he preached without a single note.

Applicatory Preaching

It is impossible to appreciate fully the preaching of Richard Fuller, without focusing specifically on his masterful use of application. As part of my my doctoral studies I examined the use of application in the sermons of ten well-known Southern Baptist preachers--five living and five deceased. One of those whom I studied was Richard Fuller. I discovered that, in terms of the sheer number of applications of the text in his messages, Richard Fuller consistently ranked higher than any other preacher I studied. This includes some modern men who are considered unusually relevant and practical preachers by today's pragmatic standards.

We need to learn from Richard Fuller how to be doctrinal preachers who clearly demonstrate the application of the doctrines we preach. Fuller's sermons were heavy with theology on one side, and equally weighted with the practical outworkings of that theology on the other. Notice the doctrinal titles of some of his sermons:^[12] "Predestination," "The Law and the Gospel," "The True Christian," "The Judgment," "Mortification of Sin." Richard Fuller preached the deep things of God, yet he always showed the difference these doctrines make and how we should respond to them. For instance, there are no less than thirteen practical applications in his sermon on predestination. In one of these applications he said, "Let us pray for grace that we may acquiesce in all the mysteries of God's sovereignty, and yet hold inviolate all the strenuous activities of the life of faith. . . . Take prayer, for example. God promises to answer prayer, and we know he does answer prayer. Let us not perplex ourselves by curious speculations as to the manner in which our petitions can be granted, and how the prevalence of our supplications can consort with God's unchangeableness."^[13] Fuller teaches us that no matter how well we explain a doctrine, we do not *preach* it until we *apply* it.

What Fuller did is true of all great preaching. His younger contemporary, John A. Broadus wrote, "The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done."^[14] Broadus then quotes Spurgeon's statement, "Where the application begins, there the sermon begins."^[15]

Methods of Application

Fuller used four different methods of applying his message to the lives of his listeners. The method he used most often we may call the *principal method*. This means he applied the text in terms of a principle. In a lengthy application in his sermon, "Fellowship in Christ's Sufferings," Fuller makes his point by setting forth biblical principles on suffering:

'We all suffer by the will of God;' it is plain that he means us to pass through this ordeal. A single fact is conclusive on this point; it is, that in our bodies, minds, hearts there are exquisite capacities for pain as well as pleasure. God intends that we shall experience sorrow and anguish, or he would not have opened

this source of bitterness in the very centre of our being. As man, Jesus was 'made perfect through suffering;' and it is through the same austere discipline that we are to reach the true dignity and glory of our nature--to 'come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. . . . The religion of Jesus is designed to confer upon us a good far superior to any present enjoyment. To secure this good, afflictions are indispensable. And therefore in the Gospel system our sorrows are preferments; chastisements are the expressions of God's love. Afflictions are indeed the only blessings bestowed without being asked for--so necessary are they. And what the Bible declares is confirmed for every child of God. He feels that afflictions are distinctions. For him there is in sanctified suffering an alchemy which turns everything into gold.[16]

These statements, in principal form, on Philippians 3:10 cause us immediately to identify with the implications of this verse.

A second method he used in applying the Scriptures is the *directive method*. This method is more straightforward. By it Fuller tells his hearers what action they should take. Regarding predestination he asks, "What are we to do? It is evident that there is only one hope left us. We must confess our absolute blindness, and procure a guide who comprehends all the dark intricacies; one in whom we have perfect confidence; who can and will conduct us safely; and we must surrender ourselves to him." [17]

Then there is the *illustrative method* of applying the message. This is the use of an illustration not necessarily to clarify the explanation of a text, but to clarify its application. Fuller does this in his sermon, "Danger to the Soul from Lawful Things": "God gives us temporal blessings 'richly to enjoy;' but to set our affections upon any earthly objects so as to make them essential to our highest happiness, this is at once a mistake and a sin. An impatient restlessness to possess them; a pining after them as if they were our life, in the temper of Rachel when she exclaimed, 'Give me children, or I die;'--this shows clearly that our hearts are given up to idolatry; and unless mercifully withheld, such objects will cause our souls to come to grief, and to sad experience." [18]

A fourth method, which Fuller employs less frequently than the others but with great effect, is the *interrogative method*. By asking one or more questions he presses the truth of Scripture right into the heart of his hearers. Near the end of his sermon on predestination he says to the unconverted in his congregation, "if you are bent on self-destruction--if no entreaties from God . . . no solicitation of the Spirit, . . . no fears of your Saviour can stop you--at least do not insult Heaven by pretending that you are waiting for more effectual influences. This plea admits that you feel some strivings of the Holy Ghost; why do you not comply with these? Why resist these, and desire more powerful movements? What is this, but openly to proclaim that you . . . are resolved to strive against your Maker, to yield nothing to him willingly, to defy him as long as you can, and only to submit to a sad necessity when he shall compel you? Is there any thing in Revelation--do you seriously think there is any thing in the secret counsels of eternity--to justify the hope that God will thus be appeased? What, my beloved friend, what can you expect from such deliberate , unrelenting opposition to the Sovereign of the Universe?" [19]

A further point to be noted about Fuller's use of application is his tendency to apply a text throughout the sermon as well as at the end. He knew that if he did not begin showing the text's relevance in his introduction and continue to do so throughout the message, there might not be anyone listening by the time he came to apply it all at the end.

Lloyd-Jones argued for continuous application in his classic work, *Preaching and Preachers*: "But as you have presented your message in this way it is important that you should have been applying what you have been saying as you go along. There are many ways of doing this. You can do so by asking questions and answering them, or in various other ways; but you must apply the message as you go along. This again shows that you are not just lecturing, that you are not dealing with an abstract or academic or theoretical matter; but that this is a living matter which is of real concern to the people in the whole of their life and being. So you must keep on applying what you are saying." [20]

However, in the great tradition of the Puritans and later of Lloyd-Jones himself, Fuller often had a separate section of application at the end of his message. Many of the Puritan preachers would say they had finished expounding the doctrine found in their text, and now they had come to its "uses." Fuller sometimes made a similar formal transition to a separate part of his message devoted exclusively to application. Near the end of his sermon, "The Law and the Gospel," he announced, "I have now finished the discussion of this subject. Many reflections are suggested."[\[21\]](#)

Lloyd-Jones practiced and encouraged the same approach: "When you have ended the reason and the argument, and have arrived at this climax, you apply it all again. This can be done in the form of an exhortation which again may take the form of a series of questions, or a series of terse statements. But it is vital to the sermon that it should always end on this note of application or of exhortation."[\[22\]](#)

Concluding Lessons

What lessons can be learned from the preaching ministry of Richard Fuller? At least three immediately suggest themselves.

First, good preaching requires devotion to application. Fuller's preaching was powerful because it was practical. It was mighty because it mattered. He never assumed that people would automatically understand the possible applications of a text to their situations. He knew that for the nails of Scripture to be well-driven he should use the hammer of application to fix them into people's lives. Broadus said it tersely: "If there is no summons, there is no sermon."[\[23\]](#)

Secondly, good preaching requires devotion to Christ-centered declaration. When Paul reminded the Corinthians of the focus of his initial ministry among them, he described it this way: "*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*" (1 Cor.2:2). Apostolic preaching--which Fuller exemplified--centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Everything the apostles preached was in some sense an expression or extension of that same message.

Thirdly, good preaching requires devotion to preparation. As uniquely gifted as Richard Fuller was, everyone agreed that it was his study and preparation that distinguished him as a preacher. Thomas Armitage acknowledged this as well: "As a preacher Dr. Fuller was appreciated throughout the nation, for he found but one answer to the question, How can a man preach with power? He believed the word of God with all his soul and walked with its Author continually. . . . To this he added the most painstaking study to ascertain by every form of help what the Scriptures required him to preach. Aside from the dutiful visitation of the sick and sorrowful, and other indispensable duties, his mind was bent upon the divine results of the coming Sabbath."[\[24\]](#)

At his funeral it was said of Fuller, "Great gifts were not used by our brother as a substitute for diligence in his calling, As a workman for Christ he proved himself a great man. From early manhood up to threescore years and ten, he led a life singularly laborious."[\[25\]](#) His usefulness over many years came through the discipline of intentional, life-long diligence in study.

In a day when preaching is being increasingly judged as irrelevant, and many who make a start in the ministry do not finish there, Richard Fuller's legacy provides a much needed challenge. May God raise up men of like faith and diligence in our own generation.



¹J. H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller*, (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1879) p. 313.

²W. T. Brantly, *Richard Fuller: Recollections of His Life and Character* (Baltimore, MD: J. I. Weishampel, Jr., 1876). p. 6.

³William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881; reprint ed., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1988), p. 424.

⁴Cuthbert, p. 181.

⁵Cuthbert, pp. 186-187.

⁶*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958).

⁷Cuthbert, p. 172.

⁸Cuthbert, p. 38.

⁹Cuthbert, p. 39.

¹⁰Cuthbert, pp. 320-321.

¹¹Cuthbert p. 321.

¹²Richard Fuller, *Sermons by Richard Fuller*, (Balltimore: John F. Weishampel, Jr., 1877).

¹³Fuller, p. 27.

¹⁴John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; 4th reprint ed., Vernon L. Stanfield, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 165.

¹⁵Broadus, p. 165,.

¹⁶Fuller, pp. 270-271.

¹⁷Fuller, p. 18.

¹⁸Fuller, p. 39.

¹⁹Fuller, p. 30.

²⁰D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 77.

²¹Fuller, p. 108.

²²Lloyd-Jones, pp. 77-78.

²³Broadus, p. 165.

²⁴Armitage, p. 761.

²⁵Brantly, p. 7.



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Confessions of a Former Bultmannian

Eta Linnemann

Editor's note: This article is taken, by permission, from the "Author's Introduction" of Eta Linnemann's book, Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?, translated by Robert W. Yarbrough, published by Baker Book House, 1990. The book paints a dark picture of the current state of much biblical scholarship. As one who spent years embracing and propagating the most radical dimensions of higher criticism of the Scripture, Dr. Linnemann's testimony carries a sober warning to all who are uncritically enamored of this approach to biblical studies.

"Why do you say 'No' to historical-critical theology?" I have been confronted with this question, and I wish to state at the outset: My "No!" to historical-critical theology stems from my "Yes!" to my wonderful Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and to the glorious redemption he accomplished for me on Golgotha.

As a student of Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs, as well as Friedrich Gogarten and Gerhard Ebeling, I had the best professors which historical-critical theology could offer to me. And I did not do too badly in other respects, either. My first book turned out to be a best-seller. I became professor of theology and religious education at Braunschweig Technical University, West Germany. Upon completing the rigorous requirements for a university lectureship,^[1] I was awarded the title of honorary professor of New Testament in the theology faculty of Philipps University, Marburg, West Germany. I was inducted into the Society for New Testament Studies. I had the satisfaction of an increasing degree of recognition from my colleagues.

Intellectually comfortable with historical-critical theology, I was deeply convinced that I was rendering a service to God with my theological work and contributing to the proclamation of the gospel. Then, however, on the basis of various observations, discoveries, and a resulting self-awareness, I was forced to concede two things I did not wish: (1) no "truth" could emerge from this "scientific work on the biblical text," and (2) such labor does not serve the proclamation of the gospel. At the time this was just a practical realization emerging from experiences which I could no longer deny. Since then, God through his grace and Word has given me insight into the theoretical dimensions of this theology. Instead of being based on God's Word, it had its foundations in philosophies which made bold to define truth so that God's Word was excluded as the source of truth. These philosophies simply presupposed that man could have no valid knowledge of the God of the Bible, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Father of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

Today I realize that historical-critical theology's monopolistic character and world-wide influence is a sign of God's judgment (Rom. 1:18-32). God predicted this in his Word: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:3). He also promised to send "a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). *God is not dead, nor has he resigned. He reigns, and he is already executing judgment on those who declare him dead or assert that he is a false god who does nothing, either good or evil.*

Today I know that I owe those initial insights to the beginning effects of God's grace. At first, however, what I realized led me into profound disillusionment. I reacted by drifting toward addictions which might dull my misery. I became enslaved to watching television and fell into an increasing state of alcohol dependence. My bitter personal experience finally convinced me of the truth of the Bible's assertion: "Whoever finds his life will lose it" (Matt. 10:39). At that point God led me to vibrant Christians who knew Jesus personally as their Lord and Saviour. I heard their testimonies as they reported what God had done in their lives. Finally God himself spoke to my heart by means of a Christian brother's words. By God's grace and love I entrusted my life to Jesus.

He immediately took my life into his saving grasp and began to transform it radically. My destructive addictions were replaced by a hunger and thirst for his Word and for fellowship with Christians. I was able to recognize sin clearly as sin

rather than merely make excuses for it as was my previous habit. I can still remember the delicious joy I felt when for the first time black was once more black and white was once more white; the two ceased to pool together as indistinguishable gray.

About a month after entrusting my life to Jesus, God convinced me that his promises are a reality. I heard the report of a Wycliffe [Bible Translators] missionary who served in Nepal. He reported that while he was away, his newly converted language helper was thrown into prison because it is illegal to become a Christian in Nepal. He also reported what this new Christian said at his trial. On the basis of earlier reports which I had heard about this language helper, it instantly became evident that he could never have given such an answer merely on the basis of his own ability. Mark 13:9-11 surged before my eyes^[2]--a passage of which I had earlier taken note with only academic interest--and I had no choice but to admit that here was a fulfillment of this promise.

Suddenly I was convinced that God's promises are a reality, that God is a living God, and that he reigns. "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:9). All that I had heard from testimonies in recent months fell into place at that moment. I became aware of what folly it is, given what God is doing today, to maintain that the miracles reported in the New Testament never took place. Suddenly it was clear to me that my teaching was a case of the blind leading the blind. I repented for the way I had misled my students.

About a month after this, alone in my room and quite apart from any input from others around me, I found myself faced with a momentous decision. Would I continue to control the Bible by my intellect, or would I allow my thinking to be transformed by the Holy Spirit? John 3:16 shed light on this decision, for I had recently experienced the truth of this verse. My life now consisted of what God had done for me and for the whole world--he had given his dear Son. I could no longer brush this verse aside as the nonbinding, meaningless theological assertion of a more-or-less gnostic writer.^[3] Faith can rest on God's binding promise; speculative theological principles are of merely academic interest.

By God's grace I experienced Jesus as the one whose name is above all names. I was permitted to realize that Jesus is God's Son, born of a virgin. He is the Messiah and the Son of Man; such titles were not merely conferred on him as the result of human deliberation. I recognized, first mentally, but then in a vital, experiential way, that Holy Scripture is inspired.

Not because of human talk but because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in my heart, I have clear knowledge that my former perverse teaching was sin. At the time I am happy and thankful that this sin is forgiven me because Jesus bore it on the cross.

That is why I say "No!" to historical-critical theology. I regard everything that I taught and wrote before I entrusted my life to Jesus as refuse. I wish to use this opportunity to mention that I pitched my two books *Gleichnisse Jesu . . .*^[4] and *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte*, along with my contributions to journals, anthologies, and *Festschriften*.^[5] Whatever of these writings I had in my possession I threw into the trash with my own hands in 1978. I ask you sincerely to do the same thing with any of them you may have on your own bookshelf.



¹[Linnemann refers to her *Habilitationschrift*, a scholarly writing which in the USA would amount to something very much like a second doctoral dissertation. It qualifies one to lecture in the German university.]

²["You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."]

³[As one might well do if one followed the lead of Linnemann's teacher Rudolf Bultmann; see his *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).]

⁴[This work appears in English translation as *Jesus of the Parables. Introduction and Exposition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966.)]

⁵[In addition to her books, Linnemann's earlier publications included: "Überlegungen zur Parabel vom grossen Abendmahl, Lc. 14, 15-24/Mt. 22, 1-14," ZNW 51 (1960) 246-55; "Die Verleugnung des Petrus," ZTK 63 (1966): 1-32 (in which the historicity of Mark 14:54 and 66-72, is denied); "Der (wiedergefundene) Markusschluss," ZTK (1969): 255-87 (in which Linnemann proposes that Mark's original ending consisted of 16:8, then two verses preserved in Matt. 28:16f., and finally Mark 16:15-20); "Tradition und Interpretation in Rom. 1,3f.," EvT 31 (1971): 264-75; "Die Hochzeit zu Kana und Dionysus oder das Unzureichende der Kategorien. übertragung und Identifikation zur Erfassung der religionsgeschichtlichen Beziehungen," NTS 20 (1974): 408-18.]



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Singing in the Holy Spirit

Joe Nesom

C. S. Lewis described the ideal "Christian society" as "full of singing and rejoicing."^[1] Historically, Christians have been a singing people and that is especially true of those denominations that have a reformed heritage. Still, not all those who profess faith in Christ are equally enthusiastic about music in the life of Christ's church. Many years ago, a friend told me that he did not care much for the "preliminaries." He would have preferred to go to the sermon without any initial "distractions."

What does God's Word teach us on this subject? Should we sing? Why? Further, what songs are appropriate to the worship of our God?

Singing in the Spirit

Our Lord told the Samaritan woman, "God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24, NIV). What is the meaning of the phrase "in the Spirit?" Without the motivation and aid of the Spirit of God, there can be no true worship. Those who would worship God in the manner that pleases him must be born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit.

The new birth is a miracle of the grace of God. It is nothing less than the Holy Spirit's coming to the rescue of a soul that is dead in trespasses and sins and imparting to that soul the life of God. Without regeneration no one can do anything in the Spirit. The unconverted man does not have the Spirit of God. He is devoid of any legitimate impulse to adore our God. He may sing with the congregation of the redeemed but he does not sing "in the Spirit." His "worship" is not acceptable to the Lord.

But what of the converted? Is his worship always acceptable? Is it not possible for the regenerate man to fail in the practice of acceptable worship? Indeed it is. He must be filled with the Spirit of God; i.e., his worship must be the product of his faith in the Lord (Eph. 5:18).

Why Should We Sing?

We serve a master who is King of kings and Lord of lords. When he commands us we must obey.

God's word is filled with commands that call for his worship and many of these instruct his servants to sing his praises, "Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious" (Psalm 66:1-2, NIV). It is true that the Lord graciously invites us to sing his praises, but we must not err in thinking that singing the glory of the name of God is optional. God's gracious invitations are also commandments to be obeyed.

We also find a rationale for singing in that our God deserves such adoration. Psalm 66 calls us to "Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf" (Psalm 66:5, NIV). The psalmist recounts the great salvific acts of God and rightly calls us to worship. What greater motive for praise than the character and works of God? We are to sing because the Lord is praiseworthy.

A third reason for singing is that it is good for us. Singing is a useful means of edification. Paul taught the Ephesians to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19, NIV). We sing to the Lord but in doing so we speak to each other. By singing the great doctrines of the faith we build each other up in truth.

And, we sing because it is the most appropriate way of expressing the joy we find in our Lord Jesus Christ. James taught that a heart filled with delight should find a voice. "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise" (James 5:13, NIV).

What Should We Sing?

Psalms

Our God has given us a hymnal which was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the Old Testament collection of songs that we know as the book of Psalms. The word "psalmos" used by Paul in Ephesians 5:19 always denoted a song sung to musical accompaniment and was understood to refer specifically to the psalms found in the collection that constituted the prayer book and hymnal of ancient Israel.

It was inevitable that the church should also sing the praise of God using the Psalter and that she should model original hymns on the inspired hymns of the book of Psalms.

Baptists and other Christians have at times debated whether the church should sing anything other than biblical psalms.

Today, singing from the Psalter is virtually a thing of the past in most evangelical churches, but some of the great metrical versions of the psalms still survive. Perhaps the best known is the adaptation of Psalm 23 from the *Scottish Psalter* of 1650:

1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green
He leadeth me the quiet waters by.
2. My soul He doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.
3. Yea, tho I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill,
For thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.
4. My table thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

5. Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me,
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.

It is important to observe that the psalms give us examples of both hymns of praise to God and songs that describe the experience of God's people. The book of Psalms is very much a complete hymn book for the people of God. Had no other hymn or spiritual song ever been written, we could hardly complain of hymnodic impoverishment.

Hymns

In classical Greek this word was used of a festive lyric written in praise of a god or hero. Therefore we understand a hymn to be a song that is of extra-biblical origin and employs us in the direct praise of the Most High. Such hymns are sometimes overtly "Christian," that is, Christ is the subject. One such example is "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name."

All Hail the power of Jesus name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all!

In a day when subjectivism and individualism threaten the cause of truth and genuine Christian experience, the singing of hymns provides a much needed corrective.

Spiritual Songs

There does exist a need for musical vehicles that express the many concerns of spiritual experience. The nineteenth century provided us with thousands of spiritual songs that have served the church well for many years. Many are exhortative in character. George Duffield wrote one of the best known.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict,
In this his glorious day.
Ye that are men now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.

Practical Warnings

The church is ever in need of reformation, and it is our responsibility to examine contemporary practice to see if it conforms to biblical precept. We have already alluded to the sad absence of psalm singing in the churches today. A revival of psalmody in the churches would be very welcome indeed. Can we go on pretending that our worship is "biblical" if we do not sing psalms?

But what of innovations that detract from the worship of God "in Spirit and in truth?" Can we have reformation in these areas?

The Show Business Syndrome

When I was a teenager I attended a youth camp where young people were encouraged to "give their testimony." Camper after camper paraded to the "altar" where a microphone was available. Most of the "testimonies" were primarily subjective in character but were sprinkled with pious sounding sentiments. One little girl got caught up in the spirit of the thing and told us her life story minus the "piety." She saw people performing and she jumped at the opportunity to take center stage for herself.

Today there is little embarrassment about such behavior. Religion is show business. The sacred desk, symbolic of the primacy of preaching, has been all but obscured by something that looks increasingly like a theatrical stage. In many churches the "audience" sits and is entertained by choirs and soloists. The "audience" often expresses its appreciation by applause. If hymns are sung few verses are used.

"Choruses" (which are not always to be despised) are preferred because they are short. The church that emphasizes hymn singing is a precious commodity in our day.

Balance

Little thought seems to attend the choice of songs in Christian worship today. Well-intentioned people often lead the congregation in several good songs, but they may all be hymns or they may all be songs of Christian experience. A mixture of the two would be far better. Best of all would be the inclusion of a psalm in every service as well as appropriate hymns and spiritual songs.

Musical Integrity

Finally, let us show care in the choice of musical settings. A "catchy" tune may be popular but inappropriate. Our God is a Sovereign of matchless dignity and therefore is worthy of our best offering. We may pander to popular taste and please man, but the worship--including music--that pleases the Lord God is that which reflects his glory.

Footnotes

[1] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (McMillan Publishing Company, NY, 1943).



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Heart Obedience

[Charles Bridges](#)

(This article is adapted from A Commentary on Proverbs published by the Banner of Truth Trust.)

*My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments;
for length of days, long life, and peace shall they add to thee.
Proverbs 3:1, 2*

This is not the stern language of command. It is our Father's voice in all the endearing persuasiveness of promise--*My son*--He had before instructed us to *seek and search* after wisdom, and set out before us its invaluable blessings. Now he calls us to bring it into practical exercise--Forget not my law. The willful forgetfulness of the heart (Prov. 2:17; Ps. 9:17, 10:4; cf. Prov. 4:23; Deut. 4:23; Ps. 119:93, 76), not the infirmity of the memory (for which a special, though we fear too much neglected, help, is provided) (John 14:26) is here implied. *Let thine heart*, like the ark of the testimony, be *the keeping-place of my commandments* (Prov. 4:4; Deut. 11:18; Isa. 52:7). And is not this the child's desire--"O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes" (Ps. 119:6; cf. Ps. 119:69, 129), while his conscious helplessness take hold of the covenant promise--"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33)?

Indeed no laws, but God's, bind the heart. All acceptable obedience begins here. The heart is the first thing that wanders from God: the first also that returns. Here is the vital principle (Prov. 4:13; Rom. 6:17). All religion without it is a mere name; and, however the professing believer may practice a thousand arts to put life into it, all must fail, "The root being as rottenness, the blossom goes up as the dust" (Isa. 5:24). If every moment were filled up with the deeds of benevolence, or external piety; yet, except the heart was quickened to keep the commandments, the voice of rebuke would be heard--"Who hath required this at your hand" Isa. 1:11, 12)? "The inner man's delight (Rom 7:22) stamps the excellency upon the service. And this pleasure and perseverance in duty flow from a gracious change upon the heart (see Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27).

Herein also lies our interest, not less than our obligation. The reward of this hearty obedience (need we add--a reward of grace?) is a long and happy life--the highest earthly good (Ps. 34:12; Prov. 4:10; 9:11; 10:27). The wicked indeed live long, and the godly often "live out only half their days." The wicked die in outward comfort; the righteous in outward trouble (Eccles. 9:2). But *length of days* is the promise to the righteous; whether for earth or for heaven, as their Father deems fittest for them. In itself the promise, as regards this life, has no charm. To the ungodly it is a curse (Gen. 4:11-15; Isa. 65:20); to the people of God a trial of faith and patience (Gen. 27:46; 47:9; 1 Kings 19:4; Job 7:16; Philip. 1:23, 24; Rev. 22:20); to all a weariness (Prov. 15:15; Ps. 90:10; Eccles. 12:1). But *peace added* forms the sunshine of the toilsome way (Ps. 119:165; Isa. 32:17; 48:17, 18): "peace with God through the blood of sprinkling" (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:13, 14; Col. 1:20); eternal peace in his home and in his bosom (Ps. 37:37; Isa. 57:2); where all the fightings of a rebellious flesh, all the counter-strivings, of a perverse and ungovernable will, shall have ceased forever. "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they might have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gate into the city*" (Rev. 22:14).



Thoughts on Revival

"Revival is divine intervention in the normal course of spiritual things. It is God revealing himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power."

Arthur Wallis

"Revival is the exchange of the form of godliness for its living power."

John Bonar

"When God is about to do a great work, he pours out a spirit of supplication."

Jonathan Edwards

"It is useless for large companies of believers to spend long hours begging God to send revival. Unless we intend to reform we may as well not pray."

A. W. Tozer



News

Brazilian Pastors' Conference

The 7th annual leadership conference for Brazilian pastors and church workers was held October 7-11, 1991, in the town of Aguas de Lindoia. Bill Clark of England and Tom Nettles of the USA were the keynote speakers. Over 170 registrants from 13 Brazilian states and 8 denominations attended. The Editora Fiel publishing company, which sponsors the conference, continues to labor for reformation among evangelical groups in that country.

Zambian Pastors' Conference

A pastors' conference based on the doctrines of grace was held earlier this year in Zambia. The conference is under the direction of the Mulfira Baptist Church and Pastor Alex Machina. Pastor Machina serves as the recording secretary of the Baptist Convention of Zambia and was trained at the Baptist Theological Seminary in that country. He became convinced of the doctrines of grace through reading literature which was published by Banner of Truth. After learning of the Southern Baptist Founders Conference (through some providential contact with literature and people), Pastor Machina decided to host a similar effort in Mulfira. He writes that his prayerful desire is "to see Zambian Baptist Churches under the Southern Baptist Convention go back to its old doctrines." Fifteen men attended the meeting held in January. Their positive response can be measured by the fact that all of the participants asked for another conference to be convened three months later! Arrangements have been made to ship copies of John Dagg's *Manual of Theology* and *Manual of Church Order* to be given to those pastors who attend this next meeting.

Pastoral Tenure Increasing in SBC

The Baptist Sunday School Board reports that statistics from the 1991 Uniform Church Letter show that the median tenure for pastors in the convention has risen from 2.6 years in 1975 to 3.4 years in 1991. BSSB research from 1988 further indicates that 116 pastors were being fired each month by SBC churches.

Southern Baptist Founders Conference Southwest

The first SBFCSW was held near Lubbock, Texas, October 22-24, at the FBC of Roosevelt. Speakers included Jess Smith, pastor of the host church (Exposition of Psalm 73), Bob Selph ("Election and a Consuming Burden for World Missions"), Richard Moore ("The Doctrines of Grace and the Forgiveness of Sins"), Tom Nettles (3 lectures on the theology and evangelism of 19th century leaders and a biographical paper on B. H. Carroll) and Fred Malone ("Total Depravity" and "Encouragement to Ministers"). The 1992 conference is scheduled for October 19-21.



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Book Reviews

The Covenants by R.B.C. Howell; 1991, 135 pp. Hampton House Books (originally published in 1855 by the Southern Baptist Publication Society)

Reviewed by [Tom J. Nettles](#)

A book that the readers of the *Founders Journal* will find rewarding and enlightening is entitled *The Covenants* and is written by a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, R.B.C. Howell. Howell's treatment takes something of the intimidation and obscurity out of covenantal teaching while presenting a clear, edifying, orthodox, and coherent analysis of biblical covenants. The chapters on the covenant of works, the covenant of Eden, and the covenant of redemption are especially helpful.

The book is filled with pregnant theological affirmations worthy of lengthy discussion, and perhaps designed to evoke it. For example in the chapter on the "Covenant of Works" Howell says, "The violation of the covenant did not cancel his obligations still to obey all its requirements. Whatever disabilities may have been incurred by the transgression, and especially by the consequent depravity of human nature, our relations to the law were not thereby changed" (pp. 15, 16). And at the close of the chapter Howell says, "What blessing could this violated covenant now confer? It could only repeat perpetually, and it ever continues to repeat, *guilty; guilty; guilty!* In this attitude did they stand before God; criminal, and helpless and lost!" (p. 17). These statements combined with Howell's discussion of the nature of a covenant and the congruity of the covenant of works with the creator/creature relationship make for an important theological foundation essential for understanding the nature of redemption.

As Howell develops the work of the Triune God in the covenant of redemption, his discussion is filled with tantalizing suggestions for helpful teaching. For example, as he considers the covenantal work of the Son, Howell says, "His acts, therefore, had legal respect to them whom he represented, and by the supreme Lawgiver were held as a full equivalent for the sin of his people" (p. 38). The efficacy of the atonement is surely contained in such a statement.

The last chapter, entitled "The Teachings of the Covenants," has many significant suggestions and arguments. These concern the implications of the covenants for the nature of the church, their apologetic value for demonstrating the Messiahship of Jesus, the relation of Israel to the church, the use of the ordinances, and the consummation of covenantal provisions at the second coming of Christ. In this chapter Howell takes specific issue with the great Witsius on the implications of the covenant for supposed "signs and seals of grace." He asks, "Can this be reconciled with the teachings of evangelical religion? Never. It attributes to baptism and the Lord's supper vastly more of efficacy than ever was assigned them by the great author of our salvation" p. 132).

It is good that this book is back in print. It is well worth one's personal attention and is useful for introducing to others the concept of covenant as a unifying theme in Scripture. The riches are abundant for such a short book. Its implications for ecclesiology are obvious. In addition, foundations for dealing with the Lordship salvation controversy reside within an understanding of the various temporal administrations of the one eternal covenant. The "signs and wonders" movement and the idea of continuing revelation, or prophetic words/words of knowledge movements, fail in their understanding of the establishment and administration of the covenant under the gospel.

The reading is easy. But the content is hard-core, essential, biblical theology.

The Grace Escape by Bailey Smith; 1991, 175 pp. Broadman Press

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

What do Ernest Reisinger, J. I. Packer, John MacArthur, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Hodge, Charles Spurgeon, John Dagg, James P. Boyce, the Westminster Confession, B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge have in common with Bailey Smith? All of the former are favorably quoted in the latter's newest book, *The Grace Escape*. It is most encouraging to see one of the Southern Baptist Convention's most prominent evangelists draw from the wells of such respected theological giants. These sources are largely unknown or neglected by modern Southern Baptists. Yet, as Smith demonstrates, they are trustworthy guides in the vital quest for authentic Christianity.

In this book on the Lordship debate, Smith sides very decidedly with those who rightly contend that salvation consists of nothing less than receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord. The argument is set forth in a clear and engaging style with an ample number of anecdotes and helpful illustrations. Despite an occasional theological imprecision (such as the relationship of regeneration to faith, p. 44), this book can be commended for use among those who need an easily read presentation on the Lordship of Christ.

It is really wonderful to see Broadman Press publishing Boyce, Dagg, Spurgeon, et al. "Thank you" to Bailey Smith for making it happen.

The Doctrine of the Bible by David Dockery; 1991, 155 pp. Convention Press, \$4.95

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

Anyone who takes up the challenge to write a book on the authority of the Bible for Southern Baptists at this stage in denominational history must have generous amounts of both courage and diplomacy. The former is needed because the politically charged atmosphere guarantees that many will automatically discount such an effort based upon which "side" the book appears to be advocating. The latter is required to gain a hearing from those who are skeptical about the centrality of biblical authority to the political struggles in the SBC over the last 13 years.

David Dockery passes muster on both counts. The new Dean of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has produced a book that receives high marks from outspoken proponents of both the "conservative" and "moderate" ends of the spectrum. It is the study course book for the 1992 SBC doctrinal study.

Determined to avoid technical discussions, Dockery writes for the church member in the pew. It is far from light reading, however, and some parts may be a real challenge for those accustomed to typical study course fare.

Revelation, inspiration, interpretation and canonicity are all treated. He identifies 6 views of inerrancy: naive, absolute, balanced, limited, functional, and "errant but authoritative" (pp. 86-87). Dockery dismisses the first and sixth and warns against dangers connected with the second, fourth and fifth. Who can blame him for calling his own view (that the Bible is true in all it affirms, "to the degree of precision intended by the writer" [p. 86]) "balanced"?

Among the books cited in the footnotes and bibliography there is an unfortunate oversight of the watershed writings

of Warfield as well as the significant book by Southern Baptists Bush and Nettles (*Baptists and the Bible*). Early SBC leader Basil Manly (*The Doctrine of Inspiration*), however, is mentioned along with J. P. Boyce, J. A. Broadus, B. H. Carroll, A. T. Robertson, George Truett and J. M. Frost as historic Southern Baptists who affirmed inerrancy.



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