



Historic Southern Baptist Principles

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Historic Southern Baptist Principles

Tom Ascol

This journal is committed to historic Southern Baptist principles. This means that we are sensitive to and in agreement with the theological and spiritual impulses which led to the formation and early development of the Southern Baptist Convention in the last century. Inherent to this rich heritage are two principles which served our forefathers well as they united their efforts in the service of Christ's Kingdom. Simply stated, those early Southern Baptist statesmen on whose shoulders we stand believed that truth matters, and that evangelism is a great priority.

This second point has been loudly and repeatedly asserted by modern denominational pundits in the wake of the protracted convention controversy. We have been regularly reminded that evangelism is the great work which binds Southern Baptists together.

Only in the last several years, however, has the importance of truth been given a hearing. Amidst charges of creedalism and thought control the point has been successfully (if not finally) made to those within and without SBC borders that truth once again matters to Southern Baptists.

Both of these points are important and both are firmly rooted in our convention's heritage.

The Priority of Evangelism

There can be no doubt that evangelism has always been a top priority in our denomination. It was a missionary impulse which gave rise to the organization of the convention in 1845. In the Preamble to the Constitution of the SBC it is stated that the original "delegates" met together for the purpose of "organizing a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the Gospel."

During this inaugural meeting, as one of its first official actions, the SBC adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Convention appoint a Board of Managers for Foreign Missions, and also one for Domestic Missions, and that a committee be appointed to nominate the members for such boards.

W.B. Johnson, the first President of the Convention, in his published address explaining the rationale for the new organization, made impassioned pleas for help in the great work of evangelism. Citing the great spiritual need of "poor, perishing and precious souls," Johnson said, "Our language to all America, and to all christendom, if they will hear us, is *"come over,"* and for *these* objects, as ye love souls, and the divine Saviour of souls, *"help us."*

Even a cursory examination of the modern scene reveals that evangelism and missions remain a top priority for Southern Baptists 147 years later. At the end of 1991 there were more than 4700 missionaries serving under the Home Mission Board and more than 3850 serving under the Foreign Mission Board.

Amidst all of the distractions which call for our attention, we must never lose sight of our indebtedness to a lost world. The One who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" has entrusted to us His Gospel, and has

commissioned us to make disciple of the whole world. Herein lies a principle to which all who name the name of Christ must be committed.

The Importance of Truth

But, contrary to much modern misconception, this emphasis on evangelism in our heritage is not found in isolation from genuine concern for doctrinal integrity. Those early Southern Baptist statesmen who labored diligently to see the Gospel spread around the world were men to whom the truth of God's Word was sacred.

Clear evidence of this is found in this issue of the *Founders Journal*. F.H. Kerfoot, a Systematic Theology Professor, was chosen to serve as corresponding secretary for the Home Mission Board in 1899. As the article on page 27 demonstrates, he influenced the convention as one who maintained evangelism as a great priority while recognizing the need for confessional orthodoxy.

The name, Luther Rice, is synonymous with missionary zeal. Though he labored before the actual formation of the SBC, his influence in its early years loomed large. As the article on page 10 makes clear, he is another whose life demonstrates that evangelistic fervor and love for the truth are most productive when found within the same breast. The Baptist Convention of South Carolina memorialized this quality of his life by having the following testimony inscribed on his tombstone: "Perhaps no American has done more for the great Missionary Enterprise....As a theologian he was orthodox."

Lottie Moon, whose name has become the denominational motto for foreign missions, was a woman whose love for and commitment to God's truth caused her to break off an engagement to be married to Crawford Toy, a brilliant Old Testament Professor at Southern Seminary. Upon careful examination of Toy's writings and books which he recommended, the missionary determined that her allegiance to Christ and His truth could not coexist with marriage to one whose views on the inspiration and authority of Scripture were steadily degenerating. Lottie Moon refused to "toy" with liberalism.

Toy's removal from Southern Seminary provides one of the clearest examples that Southern Baptists have historically believed that truth matters. After making a promising start as a Professor at the seminary, he became convinced of Darwin's theory of evolution and its application to Old Testament history by Wellhausen and other German Higher Critics (according to whom the whole Old Testament had to be reconstructed along rationalist guidelines which disregard the divine inspiration of the text). As Toy's classroom teaching began to reflect his newly embraced heterodox views, it became obvious that either his convictions must change, or he must go. Unable to do the former he tendered his resignation for the trustees in May, 1879.

One of the most touching scenes in our denomination's heritage of doctrinal integrity comes from this tragic chapter in our history. John Broadus and James Boyce, his colleagues and friends at the seminary, accompanied Toy to the Louisville railway station. As Broadus describes it, "The three happened to stand for a little while alone in a waiting-room; and throwing his left arm around Toy's neck, Dr. Boyce lifted up the right arm before him, and said, in passion and grief, 'Oh, Toy, I would freely give that arm to be cut off if you could be where you were five years ago, and stay there.'"

The belief that truth is important will necessarily lead one into disagreement and perhaps even confrontation with those who are judged to be deviating from important doctrinal standards. It goes hand-in-hand with contending for the faith (Jude 3) and defending the Gospel (Philip. 1:7).

Such concern need not (indeed should not) be expressed in a hostile or contentious manner. But it should be expressed. Ernest Reisinger's critique of deviation on the right (page 4) and timothy George's analysis of deviation on the left (page 17) are exemplary in this regard. They stand in a long line of Southern Baptists for whom truth matters.

Truth and evangelism. There can be no God-honoring commitment to one without equal commitment to the other. Without truth we have no evangel-no good news-to proclaim. Yet, an unproclaimed Gospel is a contradiction in terms.

No one is safe living in a house that has a shaky foundation. No matter how impressive the superstructure, it simply cannot stand for very long. But a foundation by itself is hardly livable. Its purpose is to support a building. Until it does, it serves little practical use. In the same way truth and evangelism go together.

May God help us build a mighty evangelistic house on the strong foundation of His truth.



A History of Dispensationalism in America

Ernest Reisinger

In our last study we considered the vital relationship of Dispensationalism to the Lordship controversy. Dispensationalism is the theological mother of non-Lordship teaching.

In this study I wish to give a very brief history of dispensationalism in the U.S.A. This is not meant to be an exhaustive study. It is just a little parenthesis in our studies on the Lordship controversy.

I am taking this little diversion because many, if no, most, of those carrying Scofield Bibles, who sit under Dispensational teachers, know very little about the system and its history. They do not know how the Dispensational theological system differs from the Reformational, historical theology in general, and covenant, Reformed Theology in particular. This is true not only of those in the pews but also, in many instances, the preachers themselves have never seriously compared Dispensationalism with covenant theology as it is most clearly expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. Covenant Theology is the archrival of Dispensationalism.

It is my conviction that many who are presently disposed toward Dispensationalism would not be victims of the system if they were better acquainted and informed about the system and its history-its theological roots and the doctrinal errors it has spawned.

Dispensationalism has its roots in the Plymouth Brethren movement which began in the United Kingdom. Writers do not all agree as to the time and place of the Brethren's origin. The first "breaking of bread service" that I can find a record of was in 1827 in Dublin. The preponderance of the information would show that John Nelson Darby was in a real sense a key person and early teacher of the Brethren movement. Other names are very early identified with the movement; such as A.N. Groves; B.W. Newton; W.H. Dorman; E. Cronin; and J.G. Bullett. All of these men were early leaders in places like Dublin, Plymouth and Bristol. It would be generally agreed that John Nelson Darby was the energizing and guiding spirit in its beginning. These men had many differences and divisions among themselves in the early days and ever after. This is not a critique of the Plymouth Brethren movement in the U.K. I mention it to show approximately when and where the Dispensational roots first appeared in history.

There are some Dispensationalists who do not agree with this assessment of their historical beginning. Their arguments, however, will not survive historical examination. Dispensationalism is a development of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

Dispensationalism is a theological system which developed from a twisted, theological interpretation of Scripture that dates from the late nineteenth century. Before that time it was not know as a theological system. The first record of Dispensationalism in the USA is 1864-65, when J.N. Darby twice visited the country. Through these two visits the 16th and Walnut Avenue Presbyterian Church in St. Louis (then pastored by Dr. James H. Brooks) became the principal center of Dispensationalism in America. How could it be!?! This is like trying to mix oil with water! A Presbyterian Church promoting Dispensationalism? Dr. Brooks became Darby's most prominent supporter and has been call the father of Dispensationalism in the U.S.

Dr. Brooks, the most influential exponent of Dispensationalism, propagated it by his own Bible studies with young men. His best known student was C.I. Scofield. Dr. Brooks also published many books and pamphlets (this should

teach us the power of literature) as well as editing a magazine called *The Truth*. The chronology follows this order: Darby to Scofield; Scofield to Chafer; Chafer to Dallas Theological Seminary.

Before proceeding from Dr. Brooks it may be wise and helpful to call attention to conditions in the mainline denominations in the U.S. during this time. In the early twentieth century liberalism was beginning to rear its ugly head in these denominations. The sad condition of the churches had a profound effect of the success and inroads of Dispensationalism.

I will not mention the history in each denomination, but rather, use the Presbyterian Church which was more influenced by Dispensationalism than any other denomination.

Princeton Seminary, which was once the great stronghold of Biblical Christianity, was one of the first places where liberalism was exposed. One of the first open signs of this liberalism appeared in 1914 when J. Ross Stevenson became president of the Seminary. Dr. Stevenson was more interested in ecumenical goals than in the theology of the Westminster Standards.

In the General Assembly in 1923 the brewing storm came to a head. After this meeting a group of spiritual and theological giants followed J. Gresham Machen to found a new seminary. On September 25, 1929 Westminster Seminary, with fifty students and a choice faculty, was opened. There has never been a faculty like it since.

The faculty consisted of articulate, Reformed theologians and they were fighting for the fundamentals of the faith; namely, the inspiration of the Scriptures; the virgin birth of Christ; the bodily resurrection of Christ; the miracle of Christ; and the substitutionary atonement. Their fight was against liberalism, and this same battle was being fought in most, if not all, the mainline denominations. Those who rejected liberalism and held to the five fundamentals just mentioned were labeled "Fundamentalists." This fundamentalism must not be confused with the present day Dispensational fundamentalism.

Let me explain precisely what I mean. The five fundamentals mentioned are beliefs which are essential to historic Christianity. In this sense, every true Christian who holds these truths is a fundamentalist. The present day Dispensational fundamentalists, though they hold to the five essential truths, often attack many other important fundamental of the faith which Reformed people have always cherished and have shed their blood to maintain.

Scofield Dispensationalism brought a new kind of fundamentalism into many churches. This new dispensationalism in its unscriptural, unreformed, and uncalvinistic teaching came on the religious scene to fill a vacuum—a vacuum which existed because of liberalism. The churches had drifted away from the doctrinal roots expressed in the old confessions and creeds. Many of the best schools and seminaries had been taken over by liberals and modernists—beginning in the colleges and seminaries and spreading to the pulpits and the pews. Bible-believing Christians turned to those churches where the bible was believed and taught.

This vacuum which Liberalism created in the churches provided a prime opportunity for the establishment and spread of the new Dispensational teaching.

This resulted in the independent church movement, the independent Bible conference movement and the Bible school movement. Those who participated in them were almost all carrying Scofield Bibles and their leaders were predominantly Dispensational in their views.

The major training center for evangelical and Bible-believing churches became Dallas Theological Seminary, founded in 1924. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was the first president. Keep in mind these were days when the crucial battle between modernism and historic Christianity was in progress.

In that desperate hour sincere, Bible-believing people turned to Dallas Seminary, the mecca of Dispensationalism, for teaching on God's Word.

Many Dispensational Bible schools and colleges were born during this period, and they all were brought forth unreformed.

The late Robert King Churchill, a respected Presbyterian minister, wrote a little paperback entitled, *Lest We Forget*. It consists of his reflections on his fifty year history in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Mr. Churchill confirms what I have said about Dispensationalism getting into the Presbyterian Church. He tells of his personal experience in two specific churches: First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma, Washington, where he was converted, baptized and called to the ministry, and another located in Seattle, Washington. He tells how, in these two great churches, the notes in the Scofield Reference Bible became more and more prominent in the preaching. Churchill said, "These notes and the interpretation of Scripture upon which they were based, were contrary to our Presbyterian and Reformed heritage."

He tells of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer delivering a series of lectures on the subject of "Grace" (the same material now appears in Chafer's book by the same title). Hear Mr. Churchill's own words:

But Chafer's treatment of the subject of grace never arrives at the right view of the law of God. According to Dr. Chafer, the law was a condition of salvation placed upon the people of God in the Old Testament during a special and limited time period-the Dispensation of Law. This condition, Chafer contended, no longer has application to the New Testament believer since we relate to God under a new dispensation, the Dispensation of Grace. Since, as he put it, "we are no longer under law, but under grace," Chafer argued that there is no necessary relationship between law and grace. Here is law without grace, and grace without law. Always and in every sense, law and grace are opposed to each other.

This teaching appears to be scriptural, but in reality it was the ancient error of Antinomianism (anti-law) which denies that the law has application to the Christian. Chafer defended this view by means of a radical reinterpretation of the Scriptures (p. 31).

Dispensationalism is also a frontal attack on Covenantal Theology and the doctrine of the unity of the covenant of grace, which have been held since the time of the Reformation.

How could Dispensationalism be welcomed and embraced in strong Presbyterian churches whose confession teaches Reformed, Calvinistic, Covenant Theology? Though there is not a simple answer one thing is certain: the churches which were infected with Dispensationalism were those which had ceased teaching in any vital way the doctrinal distinctives of their own confession.

All honest Dispensationalists would agree that the Dispensational system of theology has a different view of the grace of God, the law of God, the church of God, the interpretation of the Word of God and the salvation of God. That is, its teaching are different from tested, respected historic creeds and confessions.

Dispensationalism has a different view of living the Christian life-of sanctification and, more specifically, how justification and sanctification are inseparably joined together in the application of God's salvation.

This is a Southern Baptist journal, therefore, I must say something about Dispensationalism in Southern Baptist churches. Historically, the Southern Baptist churches were not Dispensational in theology. None of our leading seminaries or colleges ever taught Dispensationalism and to the present day they do not teach Dispensationalism.

I believe I am safe in saying that Dr. Wally Amos Criswell has been the most influential and articulate Southern Baptist Dispensationalists. Dr. Criswell is one of the great, esteemed and respected leaders of our denomination and every Southern Baptist is deeply indebted to him as a defender of the Bible and conservative Christianity. Where and how this great leader got his Dispensationalism I do not know. I do know that he did not get it at Baylor in his college days. He did not get it at Southern in his seminary days, and he did not get it from his great predecessor, George W. Truett, who pastored the First Baptist Church in Dallas, for 47 years before Dr. Criswell. George W. Truett was a postmillennialist.

There are other good men in the Southern Baptist Convention who have Dispensational views, but they did not get these views in our schools or seminaries. They did not get them from our Baptist fathers or from our Baptist historical roots.

We cannot overlook the accomplishments of Dispensationalism. It has given rise to Bible colleges and independent churches all over the land. It has spawned numerous independent missions, independent preachers and missionaries.

If we apply the pragmatic test and ask the question, "Does it work?" The answer is, "yes."

If we apply the same test and ask the same question to:

Jehovah's Witnesses, the answer would be yes.

The Mormons, the answer would be yes, it works.

The Roman Catholic Church-yes, it works.

The Charismatic movement-yes, it works.

They all have many converts and followers. They build schools, churches and have missionaries and great accomplishments-but, there is another, more important question that needs to be asked. Is it true, is it Biblical? This question will bring a different answer.

The issue before us is not a few minor differences or disagreements between those who hold basically the same position. It is not just a difference in eschatology. It is the whole system of theology that touches every major doctrine of Christianity. What is at stake is the saving gospel of Jesus Christ and the sinner's assurance that he is living according to God's plan for history.

There are many being rescued from the errors of Dispensationalism and I pray that God will use these studies to awaken many more to ask the right question.

In our next study we will return to the Lordship controversy.

Recommended Books on Dispensationalism

Wrongly Dividing The Word of Truth, by John Gerstner (Wolgemuth & Hyatt)

Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow, by Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Guinn, III (Footstool Publications)

Understanding Dispensationalism, by Vern S. Poythress (Zondervan Publishing House)

Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, by Clarence B. Bass (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company)



Hope for the Present Age

Surely we shall not wish to measure the saving work of God by what has already been accomplished in these unripe days in which our lot is cast. The sands of time have not yet run out. And before us stretch, not merely the reaches of the ages, but the infinitely resourceful reaches of the promise of God. Are not the saints to inherit the earth? Is not the re-created earth theirs? Are not the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of God? Is not the knowledge of the glory of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea? Shall not the day dawn when no man need say to his neighbour, "Know the Lord," for all shall know Him from the least to the greatest? Oh, raise your eyes, raise your eyes, I beseech you, to the far horizon: let them rest nowhere short of the extreme limit of the divine purpose of grace. And tell me what you see there. Is it not the supreme, the glorious, issue of that love of God which loved, not one here and there only in the world, but the world in its organic completeness; and gave His Son, not to judge the world, but that the world through Him should be saved?

-B.B. Warfield



Luther Rice on God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

James B. Taylor

[Editor's note: Luther Rice was an appointed Congregational missionary, who like his contemporary Adoniram Judson, became a convinced Baptist after leaving America. On March 15, 1813, five months after his baptism in Calcutta, Rice set sail back to America for the purpose of gathering support for the mission effort among Baptists. Though it was his intention to return to India as soon as possible, this was never to be. The rest of his life was spent in what was supposed to have been a short-term project: promoting missions among Baptists in America. He died September 25, 1836, at the age of 53.

The following article is adapted from chapter 16 of the James Taylor's Memoir of Rev. Luther Rice: One of the First American Missionaries to the East, originally published in 1841. Taylor later became the first Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC. His Memoir of Rice was reprinted by Broadman Press in 1937.]

He was a decided believer in the doctrine of divine sovereignty. God was contemplated as working all things after the counsel of his own will. It was to him a truth full of interest, that those who are recognized as the heirs of eternal life, have been called according to God's "eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus, before the world began." That "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son; and whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also glorified." This doctrine, so fully taught in the scriptures, he often referred to as furnishing in his own experience and occasion of deep humility and grateful praise. Referring to the subject in a letter to a friend, he observes:

"This you are aware is not only an item in my creed, but enters into the very ground-work of the hope of immortality and glory, that has become established in my bosom; and constitutes the basis of the submission and joyfulness found in my religious experience....Why should it not be the very joy of our bosoms, that he 'has foreordained whatsoever come to pass?' What can real benevolence desire, but that every thing *should 'come to pass,'* in the wisest and best manner, to the wisest and best ultimate end? Could not an infinitely wise and good God ordain everything to come to pass in this very way, and to this very end? Such, too, being the fact, is it not evidently the duty and happiness of every one to give up himself in absolute submission to the will of God; and to be pleased that all things are at the disposal and under the control of this infinitely wise and good Being.

"Nor is this at all incompatible with all those exhortations to watchfulness and diligence: admonitions to beware of any of the least departures from the right ways of the Lord, and encouragements *to walk circumspectly to redeem the time; to follow holiness,* which abound in the sacred Scriptures. If my recollection rightly informs me, you once suggested in conversation, *that our happiness depends very much on ourselves.* This, in perfect harmony too, in my apprehension, with the full conviction, that *all things are of God, that of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; whose we are, and whose are all our ways; and who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;* is most unequivocally in my judgement, correct.

"And it clearly follows, it appears to me, that in securing our happiness, a main and leading object must be, to form correct views of God, and of the system of truth contained in the holy Scriptures. To this end, nothing is more important than a dutiful child-like disposition. *'If any man will do his will, HE SHALL KNOW OF THE DOCTRINE.'* To obtain correct views of truth, humility, an obedient heart, and sincere and fervent prayer are of

essential importance, and will insure success. If these are neglected, the fault must be our own; the failure in the case will be fairly, however sadly, imputable to ourselves. In reference, then, to the solemn and exceedingly important fact, of possessing a stable and permanent basis of peace, of hope, and of ample consolation, which can be found in correct views of the truth of God, in the very sense of your remark; it depends upon ourselves and should therefore call forth our serious attention, and diligent effort.

"But in addition to a correct and enlarged view of the truth of God, systematically apprehended as ascertained in the sacred Scriptures, to the attainment of which a right state of heart is so exceedingly important, it is also exceedingly important to our daily practical comfort, to be decided and prompt in the path of duty and holiness. I am persuaded that we lose much through hesitancy and indecision. *'If ye love me, keep my commandments,'* said the precious Redeemer.

"This allows not of indecision--but requires promptness and ready action. Is it not, therefore, necessary, that our minds be made up definitely as to the line of conduct to be pursued, touching the main occasions of business, conversations, and incidents of daily occurrence; and when so made up, that we follow out promptly, and without question, the dictates of duty through all the particulars? Is it not also necessary, that our opinions should be definitely formed, on the points of obligation incident to the circumstances in which we are placed, and that we should act decisively, and without hesitation, in accordance with those opinions?

"I am persuaded that we lose much, very much, of the comforts in religion, which we might otherwise enjoy, by our very negligence in these respects. To be decided Christians--to live for heaven daily, hourly--to be constant, and undeviating, and prompt in the path of duty--*to keep a conscience void of offense towards God and towards man;* this, this is the way, I doubt not, to *let our light shine to glorify God,* to enjoy comfort ourselves, and to do good to others. If we fail of this, the fault must be our own. By sincere watchfulness, by serious and attentive consideration, by earnest prayer, and by careful circumspection and diligence, this elevated and happy condition may undoubtedly be attained.

"God grant that while I write these things--hoping they may prove acceptable, and perhaps in some degree, even beneficial to you--my own course, and conduct, and conversation, may be, by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, in view of these things, modified more and more by the stamp of truth and goodness: *'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.'* May I be assisted by the grace and good spirit of the Lord, evermore to 'think on these things.' How happy, how impressively excellent, must be the character that is modified, and molded, and constantly governed, by the enlightening and purifying influence of *'the glorious gospel of the blessed God.'*"

From the above extract, it will be perceived that he did not hold the truth in unrighteousness. The doctrine of divine decrees has often in various respects, suffered injury. By its enemies, it has been caricatured. Presented in a distorted shape, and arrayed in tattered garments, its true loveliness has been concealed from the eye. All have turned away from the sight with disgust. By some of its avowed friends, also, it has been much abused; its legitimate tendencies, if not misunderstood, have been unfelt.

While the truth that believers are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world has been maintained, they seem to have forgotten the practical design, that they might be holy, and without blame before him in love. What God has joined together they have put asunder. In an eminent degree did the subject of this biography delight to contemplate the harmony of the Scriptures, and their practical influence in promoting the good of men and the glory of God.

In another communication, he thus refers to this doctrine:

"How many proofs have we of the truth of what God says: 'That he will work, and none shall let it.' The conduct of his providence is wonderful; it evinces his sovereignty and his inscrutable wisdom, as well as his boundless benevolence. In one place, we may behold the people deeply anxious about eternal concerns, while the inhabitants of neighboring places are warped up in careless, profound stupidity. Here a faithful minister of Christ preaches the gospel with cleanness and energy, but apparently without success, or, at least, with very partial and limited effect; there, the people become anxious, even where the gospel is not preached in purity, or where the minister himself is opposed to an awakening.

"Here we may observe a minister of superior talents, and of apparently superior piety, diligence, and fidelity, but still his preaching seems to be most only a savor of death unto death; while there, again, we may see a man of scanty abilities blest with effusions of the Holy Spirit among the people of his charge, and is instrumental, apparently, in the hand of God, to the conversion of , many souls.

"What but the glorious sovereignty of Jehovah does all this evince? He will send by the hand of whom he will send. 'He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.' He will bless his faithful servant, to whom he has committed only scanty abilities, rather than the man of eminent endowments, lest his hand should be overlooked, and the attention be directed to the creature, instead of the Creator. Gideon's army must be lessened from many thousands to a mere handful--to only three hundred?--lest Israel should vaunt themselves, and attribute their success and victory to the force of numbers, rather than the power and agency of the Lord of hosts.

"How absurd it is, therefore, to contend against the doctrine of election, or decrees, or divine sovereignty. Let us not, however, become bitter against those who view this matter in a different light, nor treat them in a supercilious manner; rather let us be gentle towards all men. For who has made us to differ from what we once were? Who has removed the scales from our eyes? Or who has disposed us to embrace the truth?

"Why are not we sunk in fatal error? Why not like alas! Too many of our friends and relatives, replying against God, rejecting his mercy, despising his truth, neglecting the Saviour, or stupidly unsolicitous about the welfare of our immortal souls? 'Oh! To grace how great a debtor?' Let us be humble, not only in view of past wickedness, but of daily sins, and short--comings in duty--and let us have pity on our fellow--creatures; surely we cannot be indifferent to their awfully perilous situation--let us pray for them; and as opportunity offers, warn them of the danger, and plead with them by the pains and mercies of our dying, reigning Saviour, to come unto him that they may have life."

That the responsibilities of men are not affected by the purposes of God, Mr. Rice most sincerely believed, and on this particular topic, he very interestingly expatiates in another communication. "An observation you make, that under God our happiness depends on ourselves, appears to me important and valuable. In perfect accordance with this sentiment, is that impressive exhortation of the Apostle Jude: 'But ye, beloved, *building up yourselves* on your most holy faith; *praying* in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

"This is a precept of superior excellence. It connects itself with results, and the contemplation of prospects of the most powerful interest, of amazing majesty and sweetness. It dwells much upon my mind: I trust it dwells with divine influence upon my heart. Would to God I might possess and manifest, more and more of the real savor of godliness it is so well calculated to inspire.

"Now the meditating on such a passage, the bringing of it frequently within the hearty, deliberate, and cherished contemplations of the mind, depends very much on ourselves; on our own proper option--the effect too, cannot fail of being seen in the life, and state of the heart.

"Indeed, this train of thought suggests the very serious and weighty responsibilities of every day, and of every hour; in fact, of every moment! To possess the lively impress of such passages as the one referred to and which depends so very much upon ourselves, the proper action of our own minds and hearts at our own option, in the case, is obviously the way to be happy. It is the way to feel that deep and lively interest in divine things in the cause of God, which is so evidently the very basis and material of our best enjoyments; the very way to realize the truth, and the inexpressible sweetness of the sentiment in the answer to the first question, in that admirable catechism referred to in my former letter: *'To glorify God and enjoy him forever!'*

"And this we cannot but see is in perfect agreement with that solemn declaration of the Apostle Paul, that *'to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'* When such is the condition of the heart, it will be unavoidable manifested in the deportment; for *'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;'* this then is the way, both to *glorify and enjoy God*, and to do good to our fellow sinners, the way, the very way, and the only way to fulfil the very serious and grave responsibilities of our relation to those around us. When the real life and spirituality of true religion thus abound in the heart, so unavoidably as it then cannot but do, to manifest itself in the temper and conversation, it cannot fail to make a beneficial impression on all around; an impression of the truth, excellence, and importance of real godliness."

While these great doctrines of the divine word were highly regarded by Mr. Rice on account of their practical importance, and while he was ready on every suitable occasion to defend and urge them, he was not inclined to indulge in mere metaphysical distinctions, or to pronounce harshly on those who might in some slight particulars, differ from him. He believed that what the apostle called "vain jangling," was too prevalent among the disciples of Christ, and deeply deplored it.

It was his wish to see the truth maintained, not for the purpose of promoting a denominational theory, but because it had been taught by the great Teacher, and when it was brought distinctly to view, he desired to see it in connection with the great design of its author, the sanctification and salvation of men. "It has seemed to me," he observed to a friend, to whom he wrote, "that some brethren have dwelt so much upon the exhortations of the bible, the invitations of the Saviour, and the obligation of sinners, that they have much omitted, not say almost forgotten, that Jesus Christ said, *'no man can come to me except the Father draw him'*; and that when they asked, *'who then can be saved?'* he distinctly replied: *'with men it is impossible,'* etc.

"On the other hand, some would seem to have dwelt so almost exclusively, or at least, so constantly and earnestly on the plan, and purposes, and power of the Lord Jesus, and the necessity of the agency of the Holy Spirit to work salvation in the soul; as to have seemingly forgot, or much to have omitted the consideration, that *'God now commands all men everywhere to repent.'* The Apostle Paul urged, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;* Christ himself distinctly said, *'repent ye and believe the gospel,'* and that the very commission left with the apostles, was to that effect: *'that repentance,'* as well as *'remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.'*

"And so on the one side, they call the others Arminians, and these again pronounce those to be Antinomians, I think it would be much better if both these words were disused, and that brethren holding the same vital truths, instead of getting as far apart as they can, on account of some points not absolutely vital, should come as near together as possible; and as the Holy Ghost commands, should *'love as brethren'* and also be *'courteous.'* *'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'*"

Speaking of the obligations of ministers to be faithful in teaching the whole truth, in reply to one who seemed afraid to hear the decrees of God adverted to in the pulpit, he says: "Does the brother mean to imply that *'purposes and*

decrees' and not found in the Bible, and do not, therefore, constitute any part of '*the gospel*?' If found here, why should they not be preached? Ought not every preacher of the gospel be able to say with Paul: '*For I have not shunned to declare unto you ALL the counsel of God,*' and if so, must he not, '**PREACH PURPOSES?**' or, would our brother object to the preaching of 'such purposes' as the following: 'That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promises in Christ by the gospel, according to the eternal **PURPOSE**, which he **PURPOSED** in Christ Jesus our Lord. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he had **PURPOSED** in himself. In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the **PURPOSE** of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.'

"By *decrees*,' does he mean any thing different from *predestination*? If not, could he be displeased with *the preaching* of such as: 'Having **PREDESTINATED** us unto the adoption of children of Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. For whom he did foreknow, he also did **PREDESTINATE** to be conformed to the image of his Son. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained; (is not here a blessed *decree*, and one that should be preached?) that we should walk in them.'

"Similar passages are numerous, and surely the 'good minister of Jesus Christ' cannot excuse himself, or be approved in it by his master, if he shuns to declare this part of *the counsel* of God, while he certainly ought to press the obligation of 'all men every where to repent,' and to 'believe the gospel;' in short, to urge 'repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,' as the immediate duty of all, and earnestly to 'assert the claims of Messiah upon every mortal.'"



Properly Presenting the Gospel

We have all heard the gospel presented as God's triumphant answer to human problems--problems of man's relation with himself and his fellows and his environment. Well, there is no doubt that the gospel does bring us solutions to these problems, but it does so by first solving a deeper problem--the deepest of all human problems, the problem of man's relation with his Maker; and unless we make it plain that the solution of these former problems depends on the settling of this latter one, we are misrepresenting the message and becoming false witnesses of God--for a half truth presented as if it were the whole truth becomes something of a falsehood by that very fact.

J. I. Packer



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The Subtle Lure of Liberalism

Timothy George

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It has been a long time since I met an authentic, bold-faced liberal, one willing to claim that one word as a badge of identity. Many evangelical Christians believe, of course, that such creatures did, in fact, once exist. In the far-distant past, these theological dinosaurs roamed the ecclesiastical landscape, devouring your seminarians, disrupting the life of the church, defrauding simple believers of the faith of their fathers. Now, it is argued, we live in a different age. The climate of civility and the proclivity for pluralism have rendered liberalism obsolete. To be sure, dinosaur bones are still interesting to examine on a rainy Saturday afternoon in the museum. But no one gets carried away by such relics from the past. Not any more.

It was very different in 1923 when J. Gresham Machen first published *Christianity and Liberalism*, a book which Walter Lippmann, no friend of conservatives, referred to as a "cool and stringent defense of orthodox Protestantism." Back then the lines were clearly drawn. Machen presented "the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity" over against a "totally diverse type of religious belief," a nonredemptive religion of recent vintage known variously as modernism or liberalism. While recognizing great diversity within modern liberal religion, Machen traced its root cause to its antisupernaturalist bias: a view of revelation and Christian faith which excluded the creative power of the very God whose love it claimed to extol.

For many years it appeared that the liberalism against which Machen fought had won the day. The Scopes Trial, fissiparous fundamentalism, and snake-handling revivalism relegated conservative Christianity to the backwaters of American church life. Now, with the precipitous decline of the mainline Protestant establishment, liberals are harder to find. Those who advocate a broader, more accommodated form of Christianity are likely to designate their position as progressive, advanced, tolerant, enlightened, or what has been called the all-time favorite among weasel words--moderate.

Where have all the liberals gone? Could it be that what once appeared as a blatant form of compromised Christianity now poses as a more refined, sleeker version of the real thing? During the Middle Ages there was a popular story which circulated about Martin of Tours, the saint for whom Martin Luther was named. It was said that Satan once appeared to St. Martin in the guise of the Savior himself. St. Martin was ready to fall to his feet and worship this resplendent being of glory and light. Then, suddenly, he looked up into the palms of his hands and asked, "Where are the nail prints?" Whereupon the apparition vanished.

Where are the nail prints? This is the test by which every theological system, every seminary curriculum, and every ministry which claims to be faithful to the Gospel (the root meaning of *evangelical*) must be gauged. Never before in the history of the church has the necessity of discerning the times and testing the spirits fallen with greater urgency on the people of God.

Today subtle forms of unbelief masquerade as seemingly virtues or keys to a successful ministry or secular justifications of otherwise embarrassing truth-claims. Satan is less concerned with those ministers who openly deny the deity of Christ, the truthfulness of Holy Scripture, and the supernatural reality of the Gospel. Their apostasy is secure. His chief aim is to corrupt the rising generation of evangelical church leaders by subverting their biblical values and theological conviction until, by osmosis, they have forfeited their birthright and know not that it is gone. Every

young minister will face this temptation on at least three fronts.

The Ideology of Indifference

In recent years a new mythology of Christian identity has emerged which runs something like this: "Christians are not essentially a doctrinal people. The Bible means whatever you want it to mean. The basic criterion of theology is individual experience. The right of private judgement in religious matters overrules fixed norms of doctrine." The upshot of such radical subjectivism is seen in the way candidates for the ministry are casually admitted to the ordained ministry: A sweet smile and a pious declaration of "Jesus in my heart" will often satisfy the well-wishing examination committee. More and more this stance is also reflected in the way theological educators interpret their primary mission as essentially therapeutic: to help troubled seekers come to grips with their own sense of self rather than to train a cadre of Christian heralds to preach, evangelize, shepherd, lead and serve.

Many evangelicals, seduced by the cult of pragmatism, have bought the liberal line that the way to peace and success in the church is to define the smallest number of doctrines possible, and to hold them as lightly as one can. When, in the sixteenth century, Erasmus proposed something similar, Luther replied that there could be no Christianity without assertions. By assertions he meant "a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, maintaining, an invincible persevering...in those things which have been divinely transmitted to us in the sacred writings."

What passes as theology in many seminaries and divinity schools today is noticeable devoid of assertions. "Thus said the Lord" has been replaced by "It seems to me." The decline of doctrinal teaching in the seminary bears fruit in the absence of doctrinal preaching in the pulpit. When is the last time you've heard a sermon on the Trinity, the second coming of Christ, on heaven and hell? What the old liberalism accomplished by frontal assault, the ideology of indifference now achieves by benign neglect--not out of a sense of proper humility for the deep things of God, but rather from a failure of nerve.

I once had a teacher who said he would rather his students be passionately wrong than disinterestedly right. Without pushing that idea too far, it is clear that Christianity makes claims about God, the human condition, and the life to come which cannot be studied with detached neutrality. Doctrine matters. Luther was right to get upset with Zwingli over the Lord's Supper at the Colloquy of Marburg (1529), even though, as I believe, he was defending a defective view of the Eucharist. A Luther who would have said at Marburg, "Oh, our differences are not important. Let's shake hands, be friends, and forget the whole thing," would never have had the courage to say at Worms, "Here I stand, God help me. Amen."

Only when we take seriously the content of Christian belief can we distinguish properly those evangelical essentials which orthodox believers of various traditions affirm from those second-order theological concerns about which we disagree. The early fundamentalist coalition was led by an interdenominational, international team of church leaders who faced a common enemy in modern unbelieving theology. They differed widely on many matters: church governance, the sacraments, the nature of sanctification, and the details of eschatology. But they stood shoulder to shoulder in proclaiming the Gospel of the triune God who reveals Himself in a truth-telling Bible, the God who redeems lost human beings through the substitutionary atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. Now, as then, the renewal of theology must issue in a holistic, ecumenical orthodoxy which, quickened by the Holy Spirit, will build up the church amidst the anxieties of the times.

The User-Friendly God

Since Friedrich Schleiermacher and the "turn to the subject" in theology, the primary datum of theological liberalism

has been the religious self-consciousness of human beings. The fatal temptation of the liberal experiment has always been to turn theology into anthropology, to reduce propositions about God to statements about man. Today this tendency is rampant in the faddish theologies which thrive among the educational and bureaucratic elites within many of the old-line Protestant denominations ranging from liberation theologies of various political hues to Jungian analysis and the cult of self-esteem.

Even more disturbing is the loss of a transcendent referent in the way many evangelical Christians do church. Pastors have become skilled salesmen hawking a product to a self-seeking public. The Gospel is "dumped down" to its lowest common denominator, repentance is no longer a priority, and the work of the Holy Spirit is reduced to a pious platitude. Where indeed are the nail prints?

The sizing-down of God greatly affects the way we study the Bible. Liberal exegesis and evangelical hedonism share a common approach to the Scriptures: both want to make the Bible "relevant" to modern men and women. Yet the Bible is not in the first instance a record of human thoughts about God; it is rather the revelation of God's judgement on fallen humanity. The role of the exegete and preacher is not to make the Bible relevant to the modern world. It is to show how *irrelevant* the modern world and we ourselves have become in our rebellion against God.

Karl Barth, who himself conceded too much to the liberal theology he was seeking to overcome, was nonetheless on target when he wrote: "The Bible does not tell us how we should speak about God but what God says to us; not how we may find the way to Him but how He sought and found the way to us; not what is the proper relation in which we must stand to Him but what is the covenant He has made with all who in faith are the children of Abraham, and that He has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ."

Jesus and Buddha, Too

Liberal Christianity arose in the nineteenth century in response to the intellectual challenge of the Enlightenment. That problem may prove minor, however, when compared to the challenge of religious pluralism in the twenty-first century. The liberal view of world religions has led to a watering down of traditional Christian affirmations about the uniquely divine nature of Jesus Christ and the necessity of conversion. For example, a former Muslim reported that when he walked into a Protestant mission station in Gambia and declared that he wished to become a Christian, the pastor tried to talk him out of it!

Evangelicals are not exempt from the temptation to equate sincerity with salvation nor the implicit universalism which claims that Christ came not so much to redeem lost persons from sin and eternal damnation as to enhance the religious dimension that is innate to the human soul. At a recent missions conference attended by thousands of evangelical students, only one third of the participants indicated their belief that "a person who does not hear the Gospel is eternally lost." Had William Cary, who launched the modern missionary movement two hundred years ago, accepted the premise of much contemporary missiological thinking, he would never have gone to India in the first place; or, had he done so, he would have embraced there the indigenous Hindu belief that all religions are equally valid paths to the one unknowable god.

The sovereignty of God, the authority of Holy Scripture, and the finality of Jesus Christ are the bedrock convictions from which no true minister of the Gospel can afford to slide. Machen's words written more than three quarters of a century ago are still valid today: "If the Word of God be heeded, the Christian battle will be fought both with love and with faithfulness. Party passions and personal animosities will be put away, but on the other hand, even angels from heaven will be rejected if they preach a Gospel different from the blessed Gospel of the Cross. Every man must decide upon which side he will stand. God grant that we may decide aright!"



The Old Gospel

Never lose heart in the power of the gospel. Do not believe that there exists any man, much less any race of men, for whom the gospel is not fitted.

If God does not save men by the truth, he certainly does not save them by lies. And if the old gospel is not competent to work a revival, then we will do without the revival.

-- Charles Spurgeon



Charles Finney's Assault Upon Biblical Preaching

Don Strickland

On October 11, 1821, the day after the young lawyer's dramatic conversion to Christianity, Charles Finney told a client, "I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead your."^[1] With this statement, modern evangelism was born. Although his theology had not yet been fully formulated, in that one utterance, Charles Finney had just encapsulated modern revivalism's message. For the courtroom scene was to be changed in the American mind from sinners being the accused with Christ as our advocate and God as the judge, to Christ as the accused with the Christian as His advocate and witness, and the mass of humanity as a hostile jury.^[2] This rejection of Edwardian theology took with it much of what was left of historic Calvinism in the Northern United States and set the stage for the demise of Calvinism as a dominant force in the American church as a whole.

Finney became an enigmatic blend of Pelagianism, pragmatism and mystical Pietism, packaged in biblical garb. His theology was joined to "new measures," or methods, to create a unique message. This message swept across the nation from New England to Ohio. Finney is therefore called the "father of modern revivalism."

He changed evangelicalism's understanding of revival. The Edwardian idea that revival is "prayed down" was replaced by Finney's conviction that it is "worked up" (along the lines of mass evangelism). The former views God as the agent in salvation and the latter sees man as the instrument of his own spiritual birth. William McLoughlin summarized Finney's major contribution to revivalism by saying that,

both he [Finney] and his followers believed it to be the legitimate function of a revivalist to utilize the laws of mind in order to engineer individuals and crowds into making a choice which was ostensible based upon free will.^[3]

The rationale for all that Finney did during revival services was the gaining of converts. The numerical success of his methods was his vindication. As he stated in his *Memoirs*, "Show me the fruits of your ministry and if they so far exceed mine as to give me evidence that you have found a more excellent way, I will adopt your views."^[4] This reasoning prompted Perry Miller to write, "Finney perfected, in his *Memoirs*, the all-powerful answer to such objections...the results justify my methods."^[5]

This factor helped lead later generations of evangelists to adopt Finney's success theme as the barometer of God's blessing. Billy Sunday stated, "theory has got to go into the scrap heap when it comes to experience."^[6] In effect, this statement meant that the historic doctrines of grace could be ignored if not altogether rejected by the evangelist. Indeed, D.L. Moody picked up on this reasoning when he said, "It makes no difference how you get a man to God, provided you get him there."^[7]

Until his conversion, Finney claims to have only heard that type of preaching where the pastor would blandly read his sermon, telling the congregation that they should sit and wait upon God to save them. These memories greatly affected the young convert. He took this style and content of preaching to be the practical outworking of Calvinism. In his view, the passivity of man in salvation brought deadness into the pews. Therefore, his preaching and his methods were designed to catch the sinner's attention, and once caught, to create an emotional outpouring that would result in conviction, which would then result in conversion. Among the "new measures" that Finney employed to do this work were protracted prayers and meetings, the anxious or inquirer's meeting, the anxious bench, public prayers for known sinners, coarse and irreverent language, and women praying in mixed gatherings.

Was this judgment of the Calvinistic pulpit methodology a fair one? After all, had not Jonathan Edwards "blandly" read his

sermons? And yet, his ministry was blessed in the First Great Awakening. The key to this question is not found in methodology, but in theology. The deadness that Finney perceived, was not due to the methods (or lack thereof) which were used in the pulpit, but to the type of response required of the congregation.

The Hopkinsians, who made up a sizable segment of the New England clergy, believed that, of one attempted any exercise to improve his soul's status with God, he would only deepen his guilt and further harden his own heart. The effect of this view upon soteriology was to turn warm, balanced Calvinism into cold, hopeless hyper-Calvinism. This is what Finney saw. It was against this group that Finney reacted.

In contrast to this, Jonathan Edwards and, later, Asahel Nettleton (who was a contemporary of Finney) exhorted their hearers, upon coming under conviction of sin, to go privately before the Lord and plead for their souls. Both of these committed Calvinists witnessed great spiritual awakenings under their ministries.

At issue is Finney's definition of "revival." The debate over methods was, in reality, a debate over the proper means of conversion. Finney, believed that a revival "is not a miracle or dependent on a miracle. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means."^[8] Nettleton, however, agreed with Jonathan Edwards that a revival was a blessing that was sent directly from God. To Finney, if one plants corn, one will get corn. But to Nettleton, if one plants corn, one must then wait for God to send rain.^[9]

Roger Nicole was once asked by a student, "What did Finney have that Pelagius didn't?" He replied, "A revival!"^[10] Did Finney hold the same doctrine of salvation as Pelagius? Or were Finney's similarities with Pelagius superficial and their differences deep? Foundational one's views of salvation are the doctrines of man and sin. Both Pelagius and Finney held to the innate ability of man to do good and thus, to choose God. They argued that there is no justice if man does not have the ability (absolute free will) to obey what God has commanded.^[11] And because neither believed that man has an inherent flaw, they concluded that man possesses the possibility for sinless perfection. Both rejected imputation and guilt from Adam, although Finney did ambiguously state Adam left a tendency in man to sin.^[12]

As one might guess from the preceding discussion, both men also essentially rejected orthodoxy when it came to the doctrine of salvation. Pelagius, understanding that Christ counteracted Adams's bad example, saw Christ as the good example for man to follow. Finney opted for the Governmental Theory of the atonement, which says that through Christ's death, God was showing man that He was serious about judging sin. Thus, for neither man was the atonement a literal payment of a debt.

Salvation then, for both men, essentially becomes a human work. Election is quieted with foreknowledge. After stating that the Holy Spirit, being only an external influence, is not necessary for salvation, Pelagius defined grace as simply man's ability to choose. Thus, he badly referred to "deserving works" (works which deserved a reward). Regeneration, then, is not in any way a constitutional change within man. Grace, for Finney, is also man's God-given ability, but there is also a necessary *external* influence of the Holy Spirit in the conversion experience as well. Even so, Finney asserts that man saves himself, making works the true method of salvation. As he himself has said, "the actual turning, or change, is the sinner's own act...the sinner actually changes and is therefore, himself, in the most proper sense, the author of the change."^[13] Regeneration, again not being a constitutional change, is merely a change of choice or intention.

Looking at the comparison of the two systems, one can see that, though there are differences, the similarities are more substantial. The cornerstone of Pelagian theology, absolute free will (moral ability), is accepted by Finney without qualification, leading both to conclude that man is the author of his own salvation.

An analogy may be used to demonstrate the differences and similarities between their views of conversion. Finney sees the "not-yet-Christian" as a disobedient prince locked away in the dungeon of a palace. Suddenly a voice (the Holy Spirit) tells him that he has the key to unlock his cell, if only he would use it. Pelagius, however, understands man as a prince living in that same palace with the Bible as a guidebook to royal etiquette. The major differences are whether man is in a

habitual self-bondage to sin and whether he needs the Holy Spirit to remind him that escape from the dungeon is in his own grasp.[\[14\]](#)

As pastors and congregations accepted Finney's message, they also accepted his theology. In this manner, the Presbyterian Church in the Northern United States was torn asunder by Finney's influence. Other churches were also drawn away from biblical preaching as traveling mass evangelists and Finney's own writings spread his theological poison from church to church and denomination to denomination.[\[15\]](#)

Nettleton had already embarked upon a successful revival career which incorporated, in a Reformed manner, methods that Finney would later successfully use as a Pelagian. But how does one define "success" in this context? Is it getting large numbers of people to make a profession of faith in a meeting? Or is it the number of people who persevere after the evangelist is gone? Since the Bible lays a premium on perseverance and warns against empty professions, salvation is understood as being more than just calling, "Lord, Lord." Thus, one should conclude that he who gains professions that persevere is much more successful than he who acquires professions that do not. Even if the latter number is greater, the destiny of the soul is what matters.

Though no actual numbers are available, it has been repeatedly stated, even by Finney himself, that he had many "converts" who fell away from the Christian life. Whereas, Nettleton had very few converts who did not persevere. Both men called on the people to come to Christ for salvation. Comparatively speaking, Nettleton's ministry was far more successful (as that concept has been defined) than Finney's (although undoubtedly some were truly converted under the latter's preaching).

Nettleton was a Calvinist, who called men to recognize their responsibility to repent. But he called men to repent privately, for repentance is between man and God. As a follower of Edwards, Nettleton knew that the fruit of repentance was the barometer of a profession. False repentance could not be sustained by the memory of a mere momentary act of the will. So, by calling on men to respond to God's sovereign grace (if it may be worded that way) in the non-pressured solitude of his own home and by the repeated warnings of spurious solitude of his own home and by the repeated warnings of spurious conversions, Nettleton avoided many false professions.

Finney also called on man to recognize his responsibility to repent. However, being Pelagian, he based repentance not on God's sovereign grace, but upon man's own efforts. By the use of certain methods, the anxious bench for example, Finney pressured his listeners into a decision that seems to have been many times only emotional in nature (false profession). Thus, many of his converts did not persevere. Without the intervention of God's grace, any who embarked on this works salvation were striving either toward despair or carnal security.

Finney's judgment of the pulpit ministry was skewed. Nettleton's practice reflects a more biblically balanced perspective. The methodology of the latter in preaching and evangelism upheld both man's responsibility *and* God's sovereignty.

Success is not necessarily God's stamp of approval. It is always, however, God's stamp of grace. Doctrine and methods are to be checked by Scripture. For if God could only use perfect instruments, whether men or means, no one would be saved.

Nettleton took up the pen of a "prophet" when he wrote about the "new measures" in 1827:

If the evil be not soon prevented, a generation will arise, inheriting all the obliquities of their leaders, not knowing that a revival ever did or can exist without all those evils. And these evils are destined to be propagated from generation to generation, waxing worse and worse.[\[16\]](#)

And with the excesses of man-centered preaching in churches today, who can say that Nettleton was wrong?



¹ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), p. 24.

² Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 47-48.

³ William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1959) p. 86.

⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, p. 83.

⁵ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 27.

⁶ Quoted in McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 86.

⁷ Quoted in Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," *Church History* 23 (December 1954) pp. 308-309.

⁸ Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, introduction and notes by William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 13

⁹ John D. Hannah, class notes of author in 530 History of Gospel Preaching in America, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1983

¹⁰ Quoted in Richard Lovelace, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Evangelical Awakenings," *Toward a Pentecostal/Charismatic Theology: "Baptism in the Holy Spirit"* (Society for Pentecostal Studies Fourteenth Annual Meeting), p. 24

¹¹ "The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God." Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, abridged, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1976), p. 261.

¹² Finney, *Systematic Theology*, abridged, pp. 16-17, 140-141, and 229

¹³ Quoted in James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History* 38 (1969): 353.

¹⁴ Some have tried to show that Finney, in later years, regretted his overall lack of emphasis on God's part in conversion by quoting a passage from *Reflections on Revival*, written in 1845 (Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivals," *Church History* 45 (June 1976) : 211). Many of the observations here came from his *Systematic Theology*, which was written in 1846. Also, when he had the opportunity to make changes by revising his *Lectures on Revivals* in 1868, he left it "almost unchanged" (McLoughlin, introduction to Finney's *Lectures on Revivals*, p. iii).

¹⁵ Although this theological verdict must be made, it should also be understood that the motives of those believers who follow Finney in this regard are not being impugned.

¹⁶ Bennett Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *The Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton* (Hartford, Ct.: Robbins and Smith, 1844; reprinted by Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 348.



¹ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), p. 24.

² Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 47-48.

³ William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1959) p. 86.

⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, p. 83.

⁵ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 27.

⁶ Quoted in McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 86.

⁷ Quoted in Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," *Church History* 23 (December 1954) pp. 308-309.

⁸ Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, introduction and notes by William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 13

⁹ John D. Hannah, class notes of author in 530 History of Gospel Preaching in America, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1983

¹⁰ Quoted in Richard Lovelace, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Evangelical Awakenings," *Toward a Pentecostal/Charismatic Theology: "Baptism in the Holy Spirit"* (Society for Pentecostal Studies Fourteenth Annual Meeting), p. 24

¹¹ "The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God." Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, abridged, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1976), p. 261.

¹² Finney, *Systematic Theology*, abridged, pp. 16-17, 140-141, and 229

¹³ Quoted in James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History* 38 (1969): 353.

¹⁴ Some have tried to show that Finney, in later years, regretted his overall lack of emphasis on God's part in conversion by quoting a passage from *Reflections on Revival*, written in 1845 (Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivals," *Church History* 45 (June 1976) : 211). Many of the observations here came from his *Systematic Theology*, which was written in 1846. Also, when he had the opportunity to make changes by revising his *Lectures on Revivals* in 1868, he left it "almost unchanged" (McLoughlin, introduction to Finney's *Lectures on Revivals*, p. iii).

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What We Believe According to the Scriptures

F.H. Kerfoot

[Editor's note: The following articles are taken from "Lesson XV" of The New Convention Normal Manual for Sunday School Workers, published by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1913 and 1918. They were written by Kerfoot while serving as Pastor of Eutaw Baptist Church in Baltimore, MD as a part of that church's confession of faith. Many other churches adopted the confession, and the Sunday School Board included it in the Normal Manual that it might be "offered in this permanent form as being helpful in a comparative and discriminating study." Kerfoot succeeded James Boyce as Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary before serving as the corresponding secretary for the Home Mission Board.]

It is enjoined upon Christ's people that they be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason concerning the hope that is in them. (1 Peter 3:15.) And Paul enjoins upon Timothy, not only that he take heed unto himself, but also unto his doctrines. (1 Timothy 4:16.) We herewith append the leading tenets which we hold, in common with all evangelical dominations,....

Doctrines Which We Hold in Common with Other Denominations

What we believe in common with all evangelical Christians:

1. In one God, Maker and Ruler of heaven and earth, revealed as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection. Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Matthew 28:19; Jude 20-21.
2. In the Holy Scriptures as his infallible word, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. Read 2 Timothy 3:16,17.
3. In the fall of man and his condemnation as a sinner, and God's sovereign grace and love in his redemption.
4. In salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, who was the "Word made flesh," God-man, who obeyed the law, suffered and died for the sins of men, is risen and exalted a Priest and King. Read Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Acts 5:31.
5. In the free offer of eternal life in the gospel to all, and the aggravated guilt of those who reject it. Read Romans 10:11-13; Hebrews 2:3.
6. In the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the repentance toward God, and faith in Christ. Read John 3:5; Acts 20,21.
7. In the justification and adoption of the believer, through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Read Romans 3:23-26.
8. In the sacred observance of the Lord's Day for his worship and his work. Read John 5:17; Revelation 1:10; Acts 20:7.

9. In the present life as man's only day of grace, and that, when this present life ends, man enters at once into conscious blessedness or woe. Read 2 Corinthians 6:2; Luke 16:19-31.

10. In the resurrection of the body; the righteous, to eternal life; the wicked to judgment and eternal punishment. Read John 5:28,29; Matthew 25:46.

Doctrines Which We Hold in Common with Many Other Evangelical Christians

And, in common with a large body of evangelical Christians nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the "doctrines of grace:"

1. The absolute sovereignty and foreknowledge of God.

2. His eternal and unchangeable purposes or decrees.

3. That salvation in its beginning, continuance and completion, is God's free gift.

4. That in Christ, we are elected or chosen, personally or individually, from eternity, saved and called our from the world, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

5. That we are kept by his power from falling away, and will be presented faultless before the presence of his glory. Read Romans 8, 9, 10, 11; Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:4,5; Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 Peter 1:2-5; Jude 24; Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.



News

Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election

Copies of Bob Selph's book by the above title have been mailed out to 22,800 Southern Baptist churches. This has been accomplished by the Miller Valley Baptist Church in Prescott, Arizona (where Mr. Selph is pastor) over the last few years. With the support and cooperation of Pastor Richard Moore and the First Southern Baptist Church in Holtville, California, Miller Valley has a goal of sending a copy of this book to all 40,000 churches in the convention. With each book a letter is included which offers a copy of James Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology* or John Dagg's *Manual of Theology*. To date 850 copies of the former and 44 copies of the latter have been requested by various pastors.

Often a church becomes discouraged and is tempted to think that, due to limited resources and smallness in size, nothing significant can be done to make any difference beyond their local area. This ministry of Miller Valley challenges that faulty thinking and should serve as an encouragement (and perhaps a rebuke) to every church to become more creative and industrious in the larger work of reformation. Small efforts, faithfully executed can bear lasting fruit. Distribution of good literature is an excellent way both to witness to the unconverted and to strengthen believers (including, if not especially, pastors!).

If you would like to assist Miller Valley in their effort contact them at 815 Whipple Street, Prescott, AZ 86031.

Brazilian Seminary President Removed from His Post

Silas Quirino, a Baptist pastor near Rio de Janeiro, was asked by convention officials to resign his position as President of the Baptist Seminary in the city of Campos. A report from Editora Fiel states that the reason of his dismissal is "his stand for the Biblical doctrine of predestination and election." Silas is one of many pastors in the SBC whose missionary efforts in that country trace back more than 100 years. Several of the seminary's professors resigned in protest of the action taken.

Bill Ascol Begins New Ministry

After serving more than 8 years in the First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA, Bill Ascol has accepted the call to become the founding pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport, LA. He will continue his duties in the Southern Baptist Founders Conference, Youth Conference and with the *Founders Journal*. After July 15, his new address will be: 457 Mohican Lane, Shreveport, LA 71106.

John Armstrong Begins Itinerant Ministry

John Armstrong has announced his resignation after 16 years as Pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in Wheaton, IL. He will labor full time in itinerant preaching and teaching, as well as devoting himself to writing as the Director of Reformation and Revival Ministries. He may be reached at 152 Yuma Lane, Carol Stream, IL 60188.



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Book Reviews

The Works of John Bunyan; 3 Vols. Edited by George Offor; 1991, Banner of Truth, \$116.95

Reviewed by [Tom Ascol](#)

Bunyan is best known for his ageless classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His literary genius in this work that people are prone to forget that this tinker from Bedford was first and foremost a Pastor and preacher.

That "Prince of Theologians," John Owen, said this to King Charles in Bunyan's defense: "Could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning."

Banner of Truth has done a great service to the Christian church by making available once again the works of Bunyan. In these 3 volumes are included not only some lesser known, yet valuable allegorical works (*The Holy War*, *Heavenly Footman*, *Life & Death of Mr. Bad Man*), but also many of Bunyan's sermons and expositions.

This set is not inexpensive, but its 2300 pages are bound in the typical high quality, Banner style and its spiritual, doctrinal and devotional content is priceless.

A Journey in Grace: A Theological Novel by Richard P. Belcher; 1990, 154 pp. Crowne Publications, \$8.95

Reviewed by [Donna Ascol](#)

A Journey in Grace, Dr. Belcher's first novel, combines a stimulating story line with a wealth of theology. The story involves a young theological student, Ira Pointer, who is challenged by a pulpit committee with the question, "Young man, are you a Calvinist?" Ignorant of Calvinism, Ira begins a biblical and historical search to discover exactly what the "doctrines of grace" are and how they relate to his life and ministry.

Dr. Belcher has managed to outline and explain the historical and doctrinal aspects of Calvinism while capturing the reader's attention through the captivating events of Ira's life and personal relationships. Though the story is fictional where the characters are concerned many readers may see similarities in their own journeys in grace.

This book not only introduces and expounds the five tenets of Calvinism, but goes on to lay them bare before the scrutiny of the Scripture. An honest reader cannot help but examine his own doctrinal beliefs as well as any preconceived notions he might have concerning the practical outworkings of historical Calvinism.

Through this novel many less-studied readers have been afforded an opportunity to read and understand the theological intricacies of the doctrines of grace. Each chapter is short and concise with the important doctrinal points biblically explained.

A Journey in Grace has been one of the best selling books on our church's book table. It is excellent for new believers as well as for Christians who want to grow in the understanding of their faith. Because it is inoffensive and

enjoyable to read this book is a great way to introduce others to the doctrines of grace.

A Journey in Purity: A Theological Novel by Richard P. Belcher; 1990, 213 pp. Crowne Publications, \$10.95

Reviewed by [Ted Manby](#)

Church discipline. These words bring many different reactions to the average member of a local church. Dr. Belcher's second novel cuts to the heart of the issue as the story of First Baptist Church of Collegetown unfolds in this sequel to *Journey in Grace*. Pastor Ira Pointer accepted the call to this church with deep concern that only sixty of the thousand members were active. While he is faithfully teaching the obedient remnant, the sleeping giant of nine hundred inactive members awakens and tries to swallow both the pastor and the faithful members. Seventy of the inactive members form an opposition party with the ability to draw three hundred other inactives to any business meeting. The struggle for survival is on.

This exciting novel is full of surprises with many twists and turns. Once I began reading it, it was nearly impossible to put down. In the midst of the struggle, Pastor Pointer takes his deacons through an expositional study of a number of New Testament passages on church discipline. Thus, after you have read this book, you will not only enjoy an exciting story and be acquainted with the personal pain carried by all faithful pastors, but you will also be very familiar with biblical church discipline.

This is a book for everyone. Pastors and their wives will devour it and identify with the Pointer family throughout the story. Christians will enjoy it and learn some needed truths. Even older Christians who would be unwilling to read even a pamphlet on church discipline will read this work from cover to cover. Mature Christians will read it with tears of concern over the ruthless tactics of lost church members towards God's people and with tears of joy as they see God, in His sovereign grace, reach down and save sinners who are the least likely candidates to human eyes for grace.

With our local churches being filled with unregenerate and often hostile inactive members, this is a needed book for our undisciplined age. Our churches need to begin and/or continue on their journeys in purity. May God raise up a host of Pastor Pointers who will pay the price to follow the Scriptures in shepherding God's flock.

