



The Clintonization of the SBC

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The Founders Journal



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The Clintonization of the SBC

Thomas Ascol

Most Southern Baptists are rightfully distressed if not outright embarrassed by the public policies and moral equivocations of the President of the United States. Bill Clinton assumed leadership of our nation last year with expressions of commitment to religious values that were shaped in Southern Baptist church life. He is, by his own testimony, a Christian and a member in good standing of a local Southern Baptist church.

The frustration which many Southern Baptists have with President Clinton was expressed by Charles Stanley at the Pastors' Conference prior to the annual SBC meeting in Orlando last June. Without mentioning the Clintons by name, Dr. Stanley cited the parallels between the current administration and ancient Israel under the reign of Ahab. To underscore his point, he read 1 Kings 21:25, "There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up."

During his campaign Mr. Clinton made no apologies for his advocacy of abortion as a fundamental right of every woman and girl. In fact, he won much sympathy from his opponents when he described the process by which he came to his convictions. Only after extensive Scripture study under the tutelage of his now deceased, conservative Southern Baptist pastor did he conclude that the Bible is simply silent on the issue and therefore allows a "pro-choice" position.

Though strongly disagreeing with him, many Southern Baptists took some comfort in the fact that soon-to-be-President Clinton at least made an appeal to the Bible. God's Word, though misconstrued, was at least being consulted for guidance on ethical issues.

Perhaps this appeal to the Scriptures gave some Christians reason to hope that President Clinton's policies and agenda would be less radical than what his critics warned. Such illusions are surely by now completely erased. Within the first few weeks of his inauguration President Clinton demonstrated that his administration will openly promote immorality in unprecedented fashion.

The disjunction of profession and practice in our President has provoked the ire of many evangelicals-especially Southern Baptists. How can a man be a member in good standing of a Southern Baptist church and yet promote anti-Christ lifestyles and agendas? The outrage boiled so hot at the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention that one messenger made a motion to discipline Mr. Clinton's church in Little Rock, Arkansas because they allowed him to continue as a member.

There is a tragic irony in the righteous indignation that has been directed toward the President by his fellow Southern Baptists. President Clinton is in many ways a product of modern Southern Baptist theology and ecclesiology. This is not to suggest that his spiritual formation can be attributed exclusively to Southern Baptist influences. He is, after all, married to a Methodist, a graduate of Roman Catholic Georgetown University, and appreciative of Arkansas Pentecostal revival meetings. And there are doubtless many factors in addition to these which have helped shaped his faith.

Nevertheless, the President is and has been for most of his life a Southern Baptist. How he relates his faith (what he professes) to his practice (what he does) ought to raise serious questions in the minds of his fellow Southern Baptists. As hard as it may be to accept, Bill Clinton's religion is symptomatic of a shallow Christianity which has grown to

epidemic proportions throughout our convention. His high profile has simply given prominence to serious problems which have existed for the last two generations in the SBC.

His faith has been nurtured in a context which, for the last 75 years, has accommodated if not encouraged easy-believism. He has come of age during an era when man-centered evangelism and experience-based Christianity has dominated our churches. Do not misunderstand, man certainly has a place in evangelism, but he does not belong center-stage. That place belongs to God alone, whose gospel it is and whose love, holiness and wisdom have ordained it. Similarly, experience has an important, necessary place in real Christianity. But that place is not at the foundation. The basis of life is truth. Doctrine-right belief-must always undergird experience and practice.

When the primacy of God and the priority of truth are given up, the kind of Christianity which results is inevitably anemic, disjointed and ineffectual. It is more cultural than biblical. Instead of transforming life it, at best, adds a "spiritual dimension" to one's life. Thus the adherents to this pseudo-Christianity can talk very easily and fervently about their private religion while unapologetically clinging to their self-centered, sin-dominated lifestyles. In their view even though one's faith does not transform one's life it still can be regarded as meaningful and important.

President Clinton's Christianity appears to be of this sort. Because he has such a high profile we are forced to see it in all of its shallowness. But is our President's religion all that different from a significant portion of our Southern Baptist church members? Is it the character of his faith or its public profile that makes us react so strongly against it? How many of our other members have a similarly disjointed, ineffective faith?

The sad reality is that Bill Clinton typifies millions of professing Christians whose names are on our church rolls. It is a well-known fact that, of the 15 million members which we claim, over 7.5 million are inactive or non-resident. A significant number of the remaining active ones are only marginally so. How many spiritual Bill Clintons are there among these numbers? How many of our members give no evidence of any spiritual life at all? How many of our churches continue to grant full membership to men, women and young people who practice fornication, adultery, drunkenness, and other scandalous sins?

Are not these and other sinful lifestyles too often tolerated in our churches? Where is the righteous indignation against these Southern Baptists? Is their dead faith more tolerable because they are less visible? Is it overlooked in the name of love? Proverbs says the father who refuses to discipline his son actually hates him (13:24). The same can be said for the pastor and church that refuse to confront and seek to rescue wayward members. Certainly it is easier to bash a politician than it is to recover an erring brother. But it is the latter and not the former to which Christ has called us.

It is time for us to face the fact that our nation has elected a man to the presidency who is nothing other than a reflection of millions of our fellow Southern Baptists. Though saying it this way may be a little anachronistic, the Southern Baptist Convention has been Clintonized. Our churches have been ravaged for most of this century with a cheap grace gospel. We have added millions of unconverted members to our rolls. They have the label but not the reality. They are strangers to saving grace.

Now more than ever we need a reformation of our theology and practice. We need to rediscover the old gospel, the one that the Bible reveals which exalts God, humbles man, honors Christ and transforms lives. We must reclaim the doctrine of regeneration as that powerful, heart changing work of the Sovereign Spirit. We must reassert that justification comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as His righteousness is imputed to us. Furthermore, we must resurrect the biblical teaching that where justification truly exists, sanctification also resides. Without holiness no man will see the Lord.

Along the same line we must labor to return biblical order to our churches. Membership must become meaningful once again. Mutual care, oversight, and discipline must be reincorporated into our congregations. The church that refuses to discipline immorality in its ranks forfeits its moral authority to decry unrighteousness in our political leaders. The Word of God must be given its rightful place of preeminence in our worship and evangelism. We need to rekindle our confidence in both its authority and sufficiency.

If theological and spiritual reformation does not come then many of our churches are destined to remain breeding grounds for empty professions of faith and incubators for unconverted religionists. We cannot afford to continue on this course. The glory of our God and the souls of our friends and loved ones are at stake.

May we learn the incriminating lessons which our President's faith has to teach us. And rather than self-righteously castigating him as an easy target, may we repent of our own sin and be found faithful in the glorious work of reformation.



Paul's Gospel Curse in Galatians 1:8-9

Timothy George

The following is taken from *Galatians: The New American Commentary* published by Broadman and Holman. This new commentary, due to be released in July 1994, will be a great aid in preparation for the SBC January Bible Study of 1995.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Galatians 1:8-9

In these verses Paul intensified the antithesis between himself and his Galatian opponents by pronouncing a solemn curse upon anyone who proclaimed a counterfeit gospel. The fact that Paul issued this condemnation in the strongest words possible and then repeated it for emphasis makes this one of the harshest statements in the entire New Testament. It does not set well on modern ears accustomed to tolerance at any price and a doctrine of God devoid of the notions of judgment and wrath. Yet here it stands, stubbornly and ominously, at the forefront of Paul's concern. How are we to understand this anathema?

In the first place, it is important to see that, hypothetically at least, Paul brought himself under his own curse. "But even if we . . . should preach a gospel other than." Here Paul showed once and for all that the issue at stake in Galatia was not the messenger but the message. Later in the history of the church, during the time of Augustine, a great dispute arose concerning the sacraments, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and ordination. The question was whether these religious rites were valid and effective when performed by a minister who was morally impure. One party in the dispute, the Donatists, argued that they were not. Their efficacy was tied to the spiritual and moral condition of the presiding minister. Augustine and the majority of others in the church took the opposite view. The sacraments, they said, were *ex opere operato*, that is, they were effective by virtue of the power invested in them by Christ himself and the promise of his Word. At the time of the Reformation, both of these views were subjected to a fresh biblical critique, but the essential point of the Augustinian position was recognized as valid: the true touchstone of doctrinal and spiritual authenticity is God himself, what he has irrevocably done in Christ and infallibly vouchsafed to us in Holy Scripture, and not the qualifications, charisma, or even theology of any human leader.^[1]

Of course, how our message is received is directly related to the way we live. Paul elsewhere recognized the importance of high moral standards and a good reputation for those who assume leadership posts in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-13). His point in Galatians was that none of these traits, significant as they are, can ever compete with the gospel itself as the ultimate criterion for both sound doctrine and holy living. Paul did not ask the Galatians to be loyal to him but rather to the unchanging message of Christ, Christ alone, that he had preached to them.

In the second place, Paul brought even the angels within the purview of his anathema. As Luther quaintly put it: "Here Paul is breathing fire. His zeal is so fervent that he almost begins to curse the angels themselves."^[2] This is the first of three references to angels in Galatians. In 3:19 Paul referred to the belief that the law was ordained through the mediation of angels, and in 4:14 he reminded the Galatians that they initially welcomed him as an angel of God, perhaps a reference to the incident at Lystra recorded in Acts 14. But why did Paul raise the specter of an angel preaching an apostate gospel? If we identify the Galatian error with what Paul confronted at Colosse, then we may assume that the kind of angelic adulation that prevailed in that setting was also a part of the "higher spirituality" brought to Galatia by the anti-Pauline missionaries (cf. Col. 2:16-18).^[3]

Paul's opponents also may have cited the role of the angels in the giving of the law (Gal. 3:19) to give a supernatural

enhancement to their own proclamation of a law-observant gospel. In that case, Paul wanted to make clear that even if an angel, even an exalted angel such as Gabriel or Michael, were to preach a different gospel, the curse of God would be upon him. Early Christian preaching was aware of just such an angelic apostasy when the angels who rebelled with Satan "abandoned their own home" (Jude 6) for the change of darkness and eventual condemnation on the day of judgment. Moreover, Paul was aware that Satan himself could masquerade as an angel of light. Indeed, by this cunning he had led astray many sincere believers by their pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3-15).

What is the fate of one who thus perverts the gospel of Christ, be it Paul, any other human teacher, or even a messenger straight from heaven itself? The answer is given in two words: *anathema esto*, "let him be accursed!" Originally the word *anathema*, which literally means "something that is placed up," referred to any object set aside for divine purposes, whether an offering in the temple set aside for divine blessing or the captured booty of Achan reserved for divine cursing (Josh. 7:11-12). In time the negative sense of the word prevailed, and *anathema* became synonymous with anything or anyone under the "ban" (Hebrew, *herem*) and hence delivered over to God's wrath for the final judgment. Later in church history *anathema sit!* became the standard postscript pronounced by the church on a notorious heretic. This is a derivative use of the word since, at best, the church's decision can only be a ratification of the pronouncement of God's own excluding wrath.

To be anathematized then means far more than to be excommunicated.^[4] It means nothing less than to suffer the eternal retribution and judgment of God. The GNB comes close to capturing the essence of Paul's tone in this passage, "Let him be condemned to hell!" We can gauge something of what this curse must have meant to Paul's readers by looking at a curse in one of the documents found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here it is said that the

"Levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Satan saying: `Be cursed because of all your guilty wickedness! May He deliver you up for torture at the hands of the vengeful Avengers! May He visit you with destruction by the hands of all the Wreakers of Revenge! Be cursed without mercy because of the darkness of your deeds! Be damned in the shadowy place of everlasting fire! May God not heed when you call on him, nor pardon you by blotting out your sin! May he raise his angry face toward you for vengeance!'"^[5]

Paul did not pronounce this tremendous condemnation lightly. But neither did he hesitate to unleash the full fury of his righteous indignation when he was convinced that the integrity of the gospel was at stake.

Why did Paul repeat the apostolic curse in 1:9, introducing the second version with the words, "As we have already said, so now I say again"? It is possible that Paul was referring here to his utterance of the original anathema during his recent preaching mission in Galatia. Perhaps he anticipated the problems his opponents would bring and tried in this way to forewarn the Galatians against heeding their erroneous teaching (thus Schmithals, Ebeling, Longenecker). Most commentators, however, believe that Paul repeated the anathema in order to emphasize its severity and further impress upon the Galatians the utter folly of their flirtation with false doctrine (thus Bruce, Fung, Lightfoot). There is one important stylistic difference between vv. 8 and 9. Although the expression, "Let him be eternally condemned!," is identical in both, the if-clauses are given in two different moods. In v. 8 the if-clause is followed by a subjective verb, "should preach," because what is being contemplated is a highly improbable, though not impossible, situation. However, in v. 9, the if-clause is followed by the indicative mood, "is preaching," indicating the ongoing crisis unfolding in Galatia even as Paul wrote. Also in v. 9, Paul reminds the Galatians that they had in fact embraced the true gospel when he had preached it to them. A solid foundation had been laid in the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas. Paul now reminds them, as later he would warn the Corinthians as well, that "no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). In the first ten verses of Galatians, Paul telegraphed in advance the major themes he would deal with throughout the letter. It is a turbulent overture presaging the stormy weather to come. Paul began by asserting his apostolic authority, which evidently had come under attack in Galatia. He anchored his vocation in a confessional affirmation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. His doxology is followed immediately by a statement of astonishment and rebuke. He attributed the confusion to his adversaries, whose agitation among the churches of Galatia amounted to nothing less than the perversion of the gospel of Christ. The state of affairs calls for the strongest

condemnation possible, a curse or imprecation to damnation for anyone--Paul, angels, whomever--who preached a false gospel.



¹On the significance of the Donatist controversy in the history of Christian thought, see J. Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 307-18.

² *Luther's Works*, 26. 55.

³On the worship of angels in the Colossian heresy, see R. R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 32:269-72.

⁴Thus the rendering of the NEB, "Let him be outcast!," is far too weak to do justice to the gravity of Paul's language. As R. Y. K. Fung (*Galatians* , 47) observes: "it thus more likely means being delivered up and devoted to the judicial wrath of God." Cf. C. Jordan's colloquial rendering: "Now get this straight: Even if we or an angel fresh out of heaven preaches to you any other message that the one we preached to you--to hell with him!" (*The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles* [New York: Association, 1968], 94)

⁵IQS 2.5-17 in G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 63.



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⁵IQS 2.5-17 in G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 63.



The Lordship Controversy and the Carnal Christian Teaching (Part 2)

[Ernest Reisinger](#)

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Let me give a short review of our last study on the Carnal Christian teaching:

- The "Carnal Christian" teaching is primarily based on an erroneous interpretation of a single passage of Scripture (1 Cor. 3:1-4).
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching perverts many other doctrines of the Christian faith.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching separates the two main doctrines of the Christian faith--justification and sanctification.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching separates the new covenant by making the act of submission to Christ optional--what God has joined together let no man or teaching put asunder.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching makes holiness, obedience and discipleship optional. See John 10:26-28; 14:21-23; 15:10; 1 Pet. 1:15,16; Heb. 12:14; Titus 2:10-14.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching breeds antinomianism and gives a false standard of what a Christian really is.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching is the mother of many of the second-work-of-grace errors.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching actually teaches two ways to heaven: one, the carnal-Christian way and two, the spiritual-Christian way--whichever you prefer.
- The "Carnal Christian" teachers ignore the biblical distinction between the grounds of salvation and the grounds of assurance.
- The "Carnal Christian" teaching breeds a false spirituality and Pharisaism in the so-called "spiritual Christians" who have measured up to some man-made standard of spirituality. There ought to be no professed "spiritual Christians," much less "super-spiritual" ones! George Whitefield, a man who lived very close to his Savior, prayed all his days, "Let me begin to be a Christian." And another Christian has truly said, "In the life of the most perfect Christian there is every day renewed occasion for self-abhorrence, for repentance, for renewed application to the blood of Christ, for application of the rekindling of the Holy Spirit."

Many are comfortable living sinful lives while hiding behind a teaching that is not biblical, comfortably going to hell on a false teaching.

It is one thing to speak and teach that Christians have carnal out-breaks, which is biblical, but it is another thing altogether to make a third class or category of men--"Carnal Christians."

The Bible teaches only one church. From the human side it is the visible church made up of both professors and possessors. But from the divine side it is made up only of possessors. Since we are on the human side we should take three lessons from Matthew 3:12, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." John the Baptist is speaking about our Lord and the three things the text teaches are very applicable.

1. There will be a separation between the real and the spurious--the true and the false--possessors and professors.
2. The time of this separation is not now.
3. The winnowing fan is not in our hands.

We do not always know who has been born again. Therefore, when speaking of a back-slider two errors must be avoided: (1) to say unequivocally he is not a Christian; (2) to say unequivocally that he is a Christian. We do not know, we cannot know. It is not a sin not to know.

This is another reason this "Carnal Christian" doctrine is so dangerous, deceiving and damning. How do you know such a person's profession was genuine? How do you know it was not genuine? You don't!

It is therefore very dangerous to classify people as carnal Christians who give no evidence of being born again. There are always two possibilities: they may be true Christians in a back-slidden condition, or they were never savingly united to Christ. Only God knows and it would be well if we would say, "I don't know," rather than squeeze out of some text of Scripture a meaning that the Holy Spirit never put there by making a category of men that the Bible knows nothing about.

1 Corinthians 2:14-4:15

Let us consider the passages that the "Carnal Christian" teaching is based on. What is the teaching of 1 Corinthians 2:14-4:15?

This is the most important point in our argument, namely, what is the interpretation and application of the single passage of Scripture on which the three categories of men is based. I think a quotation from one of the church fathers is very apropos: "If you only have one Scripture on which to base an important doctrine or teaching you are most likely to find, on close examination, that you have none." This is precisely what we have with the three-category theory. We must remember that 1 Corinthians is not particularly a doctrinal epistle. Though, like all Scriptures, it contains doctrine it was not written to lay a doctrinal foundation. This epistle was primarily written to deal with practical problems in this young church which was not yet 100 years old. The particular position of the letter which we are considering is dealing with just one of the many problems in the church at Corinth. Specifically this issue is namely, schism over the ministers.

Consider the context of 1 Cor. 3:1-4., "For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 1:11, 12).

"For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:4-6).

"Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come - all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now these things, brethren, I

have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (1 Cor. 4:1, 6).

It is very important to see that this whole section of 1 Cor. 2:14-4:15 is dealing principally with one problem--schism. And like all the other problems in this letter, such as, defrauding one another, the disorder at the Lord's Table, etc., it is the result of carnality, or more accurately, a result of the remaining principle of sin in all believers. These problems illustrate Paul's teaching in Rom. 7:21-23. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

First, we must note in chapter one that the Corinthians got off to a good start. Paul says they were sanctified in Christ Jesus (v.1); they were recipients of the grace of God, (v.4); they were enriched by Christ in all utterance and knowledge (v.4); the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them (v.6); and, they came behind in no gifts (v.7).

Some of the Corinthian Christians had attached themselves to one of the great Christian teachers or preachers and some attached themselves to another, thus setting up rival leaders of opposing parties. Some would follow Paul, some admired Apollos, and others extolled Peter.

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 1:12).

"For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (1 Cor. 3:4). "Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21, 22, cf. 1:12; 3:4, 21, 22).

They were all making idols out of secondary causes and forgetting the first Cause where the glory should lie. Instead of saying, "We are Christ's disciples" and uniting together in Christ they made parties and said, "We are Paul's--he founded the church." "But Apollos is more eloquent than the Apostle and he edifies us more. We have gone beyond Paul, therefore, we are of Apollos." And a third party said, "We are of Peter." Ah, but they were forgetting that these were men and only laborers in God's farm and they all labored together with God. This was causing "envying, strife and division" (3:3). They were carnal, they were acting like the unregenerate; therefore, in this area of their lives they were carnal.

The carnality evidenced itself in their factions over the different servants of Christ (cf. 1:11, 12; 3:3-5, 21, 22). In 3:1-4 Paul charges them for their carnality and division. He then instructs them on how to correct that which was wrong.

1. Their ministers were only ministers (3:5).
2. All these ministers carried on the same design and purpose (3:6-10).
3. The ministers were building on the same foundation (3:11-15).
4. The great apostle exhorts them not to glory in particular ministers because they should have an equal interest in all true ministers. "All are yours and you are Christ's" (3:22, 23).

In 1 Cor. 3, the Apostle resumes the subject of contention mentioned in 1:11-13. Chapter 3 is a transition from the defense of his mode of preaching (chapter 2) to the subject of their divisions (3:1-5). The true relationship of ministers to the church is as servants and not party leaders.

Their dissensions and divisions were in reference to their religious teachers. The Apostle tried to correct this by

showing the true place of the ministerial office.

- Ministers were servants without any authority or power of their own. One may plant, another may water BUT ONLY GOD can give the increase (3:5-7).
- Ministers are one - they have one master, one work - just different departments in the great work - like fellow laborers on the same farm or fellow-builders building the same temple (3:8, 9).
- In discharging their duty they have a great responsibility as to how they build and what they build (3:10-15).
- Because the church of God is the temple of God ministers will be held accountable for the doctrine they teach and preach in executing their duties (3:16, 17).
- No minister should deceive himself. He cannot preach a higher wisdom than the wisdom of God, and to learn that wisdom he must renounce his own (3:18-20).

The Apostle is not setting up three categories of men. He knows only two classes of men--natural and spiritual. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Under the term "natural" the great Apostle includes all those persons who are not partakers of the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God has not given to them a new and higher nature than they ever possessed by their natural birth, he puts them in one class of natural men.

Those who are "spiritual" may be but babes in grace and babes in knowledge. Their faith may be weak. Their love may be in its early bud; their spiritual senses may be little exercised; their faults may be in excess of their virtues, but if the root of the matter is in them they have passed from death unto life--passed out of the region of nature into that which is beyond nature--then Paul puts them in another class--all of them are spiritual men. In 1 Cor. 2:14-16 he does not make THREE categories. The difference is that the spiritual receive the things of the Spirit, embrace them with delight, and feed upon them with intense satisfaction.

These Christians were imperfectly sanctified, as are all Christians. Paul is not setting up a third group that is characterized by carnality in every area of their lives, who demonstrate that the bent of their lives is not Christian.

The Scripture knows only two places--heaven and hell; two ways--the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction; two principles of walk--the Spirit principle and the flesh principle. 1 Cor. 3:1-4 is not expounding a general doctrine but reproofing a specific out-cropping of carnality in a certain place. Therefore, we must be true to Scripture and not misinterpret and misapply certain texts to accommodate miserable human performance. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). This is a biblical description of a Christian: the essence of a Christian, "in Christ;" the effects of being in Christ, "a new creature;" the evidence of being in Christ, "old things pass away and all things become new." There is no place here for two categories of Christians.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 We will now consider 1 Cor. 3:10-15. There are a few passages of Scripture to which more numerous and more contradictory explanations have been given than this passage (1 Cor. 3:10-15). In 1 Cor. 2 the great apostle is defending his apostleship; the whole context from 1 Cor. 2:1 to 4:15, however, has to do with ministers and how they are meant to build the church. In 3:7 he makes it very clear that the real cause of gospel success is not the instruments (preachers or teachers) "but God [who] gives the increase." In 3:10 and 4:15 he points out that he did the most important part on the human side--he laid the foundation, but he is quick to warn them not to glory in men (3:21-23).

1 Cor. 3:10-15 is one of the passages that the Roman Catholic Church uses to support their doctrine of purgatory. They make the foundation to be the orthodox doctrines of the gospel (as they understand them). They make the various builders in v.12 to be Christians and the gold, silver and precious stones to be good works, super-added to faith. The wood, hay and stubble are regarded venial sins committed by Christians, and the fire which burns up or purges these sins to be the fiery punishments of purgatory. The Christians who have added these venial sins are represented in v.15 as getting to heaven only after passing through the purgatorial fires. Thus this passage is interpreted to teach purgatory.

Now this interpretation is too bald and crude to satisfy all Catholic divines. Thus, men like Cardinal Bellarmine, who was a most learned and able Roman Catholic theologian, refute this ridiculous interpretation. He properly holds that the context of the whole chapter clearly teaches that the builders are the several ministers.

The Scripture knows only two places--heaven and hell; two ways--the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction; two principles of walk; the Spirit principle and the flesh principle.

The great Cardinal's view is more subtle but leads to the same error of purgatory. He says the foundation consists of the doctrines of Christ. The builders are legitimate ordained church teachers. The gold, silver and precious stones, which are super-added to the foundation are the correct Catholic doctrines.

The wood, hay and stubble are incorrect details of doctrine--not totally heretical, (for then they would have sent teachers straight to hell) but just partly perverted, therefore, the teachers must be chastised. If true Catholics, they shall reach heaven eventually after passing through purgatory.

Some fine and respected Protestant theologians agree with Bellarmine but disagree on what these foundational doctrines are. They do, however, believe it is the preaching of God's ministers that will be strictly tested by the penetrating and holy judgment of God's fire which represents the Holy Ghost as in Acts 2:3.

And by the Holy Ghost the hearts and teaching of the ministers will be searched. But if these ministers have truly embraced and preached Jesus Christ they will be saved in spite of some errors in their teaching and preaching. This explanation avoids the unbiblical and superstitious error of purgatory but is still short of Paul's true intent and the rich instructions found in this passage.

Paul's Teaching on 1 Cor. 3:10-15

Paul points out that he is a wise master-builder (v.10). Others coming after him would be inferior to his apostolic rank. There would be no more apostles.

The foundation on which all builders (ministers, teachers, and leaders) build is Jesus Christ, that is, the fundamental doctrines which set forth the Christ of the Scriptures--Christ crucified as our salvation (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6; Mt. 21:42).

The building built on this foundation by various hands is the Church of Jesus Christ (vv.5-9, 12). "Any man" refers to

ministers. Paul is concerned with the work of ministers, teachers and leaders in building the church on the one foundation.

What about the material used? There are two kinds: gold, silver and precious stones--all that will stand the final test; and wood, hay and stubble--that which does not stand the test (cf. Mt. 3:12; 7:24-27; 13:24-30).

The passage itself expressly asserts that Jesus Christ is the foundation. What is He the foundation of? In Mt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:4-6; Eph. 2:20-22. the building that is resting on the foundation is the church and the Christians are the stones united to that sure foundation.

The context of the passage should settle the meaning. The strife and contention is over ministers (1:11,12; 3:4-6,21,22). The apostle is rebuking these divisions by showing that the foundation is one.

Paul uses two figures--husbandman and builders. In v.9 Paul is saying to the members of the church: "ye are God's husbandry. In v.16, "ye are the temple of God."

On this basis alone we can support the interpretation that the different constituents (gold, silver precious stones and wood, hay and stubble) are the different classes of church members. One class does not stand the test of reality and the other passes the test. We see the same principle in the parables of the wheat and the tares (Mt. 13:24-32); the two foundations--one sand, another rock (Mt. 7:24-27); the ten virgins half were real and half were spurious (Mt. 25:1-12).

Summary of 1 Cor. 3:10-15

As the "wise master builder" Paul refers to the ministers who are not apostles as those who will come and build after him. The foundation which he laid is that blessed cluster of fundamental doctrines which set forth Christ crucified as our salvation. The building reared on this foundation by various hands is the church of Jesus Christ, and the gold, silver and precious stones, are genuine and regenerate persons introduced into the church by the labors of wise and faithful ministers, while the wood, hay and stubble, represent spurious converts, and unconverted professors of religion, introduced into the church by less judicious laborers. When the day of judgment comes, this church universal, thus variously built, shall be tested by the holy, searching

"Too often modern evangelicalism has substituted a 'decision' in the place of repentance and saving faith. Forgiveness is preached without the equally important truth that the Spirit of God must change the heart. As a result decisions are treated as conversions even though there is no evidence of a supernatural work of God in the life."

and penetrating inquest of God the judge, even as a material building would be by having the torch applied to it. In such a building, the living rock on which it is founded, and the imperishable stones and precious metals, would remain after the conflagration; but the perishable materials would be utterly consumed. So, nominal Christians, spurious converts, whose faith is a dead faith, however connected with a genuine and orthodox church of Christ, will be cast into hell, and forever consumed by God's wrath; while true Christians will remain uninjured. In the judgment day, those ministers who by their soundness, prudence and fidelity have added genuine converts to Christ's church, will receive a reward from the free, undeserved grace of their Lord. These ransomed souls, having stood the test of the judgment day, will shine as stars in their crowns. But this gracious reward will be lost by those injudicious and rash ministers who introduced unsound professors into the church. If the ministers are themselves built on the Rock

Christ Jesus, they will indeed be saved; but they will see the unregenerate members whom they have brought into God's house sink to hell under His strict judgment, and will wear in heaven a crown stripped of its jewels.

(I strongly recommend Dr. Robert L. Dabney's comments on 1 Cor. 3:10-15; *Discussions*, Vol. 1, pp. 551ff.)

Conclusion

The effect of believing the truth set out in this study on the "Carnal Christian" theory ought to be the longing to see more true evangelism.

The "Carnal Christian" teaching is, after all, the consequence of a shallow, man-centered evangelism in which decisions are sought at any price and with any methods. When those pronounced to be converts do not act like Christians, do not love what Christians love and hate what Christians hate, and do not willingly serve Christ in his church, some explanation must be found other than calling them carnal Christians and asking them to make yet another decision. They have already done that and have already been pronounced, by the preacher or personal worker, to be "Christians." But when they don't act like Christians something is wrong. What is it? The teaching I have sought to expose says that the trouble is that they are just carnal Christians; they have not made Christ "Lord" of their lives; they have not let Him occupy the throne of their hearts. Once this explanation is seen to be unscriptural it will also be seen to be closely connected with an initial error of evangelism itself. Too often modern evangelism has substituted a "decision" in the place of repentance and saving faith. Forgiveness is preached without the equally important truth that the Spirit of God must change the heart. As a result decisions are treated as conversions even though there is no evidence of a supernatural work of God in the life.

Surely the best way to end this evil is to pray and labor for the restoration of New Testament evangelism! Whenever such evangelism exists it is certain that men will learn that it is not enough to profess to be a Christian, and not enough to call Jesus "Lord, Lord" (Luke 6:46). The gospel preached in awakening power will summon men not to rest without biblical evidence that they are born of God. It will disturb those who, without good reason, have believed that they are already Christians. It will arouse backsliders by telling them that as long as they remain in that condition the possibility exists that they never were genuine believers at all. And to understand this will bring new depths of compassion and urgency to the hearts of God's people in this fallen world.

One of the greatest hindrances to the recovery of such preaching is the theory we have considered. To reject that theory is to be brought back to a new starting-point in evangelism and in the understanding of the Christian life. It is to bring God's work into the center of our thinking. It is to see afresh that there are only two alternatives--the natural life or the spiritual life, the broad way or the narrow way, the gospel "in word only" or the gospel "in power and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:5), the house on the sand or the house on the rock.

There is no surer certainty than the fact that an unchanged heart and a worldly life will bring men to hell. "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6).

It is not only in the world today that evangelism is needed. It is needed in the church.

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Missions And Creeds (Part 1)

[Tom Nettles](#)

A decade and a half of tensions in Southern Baptist life have called forth several historical analyses seeking to discover, communicate, and perpetuate the true genius of Southern Baptist "success." Recent works from Walter Shurden, Grady Cothen, Bill J. Leonard, and even Ralph Elliott have taken a stab at describing the change of contour in the Southern Baptist profile.^[1] Much of the emphasis has been placed on the supposed diversity and theological tolerance that gave Southern Baptists warmth and power in its first several decades. According to these analyses, recent attempts at achieving a higher degree of theological unity are *ipso facto* un-baptistic.

For example, Bill Leonard views the genius of Southern Baptist organization as a "Grand Compromise" of various theological and ecclesiological options. He contends, "They hesitated to define dogma too narrowly lest they alienate large segments of the constituency, thereby increasing the possibility of fragmentation or schism."^[2] The tolerance of these mid-nineteenth century Baptists of the South is pictured as broad indeed in these halcyon days of the infant denomination. In his conclusion of a chapter entitled "Southern Baptist Theology," Leonard appears to be summarizing the theological conditions present "from the beginning of the convention." His fifth conclusion states, "Within this delicate balance there existed a wide variety of theological attitudes, and interpretations with roots in Calvinist, modified Arminian, and even occasional Arminian, Landmarkist, fundamentalist, neoorthodox, evangelical, charismatic, and social gospel interpretations of Christianity."^[3]

The spectrum of diversity asserted here developed eventually within the Convention, but such wide variety was not present from the beginning. Most of those options, historically defined, did not even exist when the Convention was formed. That particular spread of theological ideas stretches any confessional pattern far beyond its ability to withstand the pressure. Greater diversity exists now even within what Leonard calls the fundamentalist group than existed for the first 75 years of organized convention life.^[4]

An ironic duality is created by this genre of doctrinal historiography. First, such delicacy is imputed to freedom that its life supposedly can not be sustained in the midst of a critical appraisal of theology, particularly if the appraisal concludes that two viewpoints are incompatible with an overall mission goal. Second, such elasticity is imputed to evangelism that supposedly the theological latitude demanded by freedom will make no substantial change in the overall outcome. Evangelism, so it seems, is so much at the heart of all the diverse groups that it is virtually oblivious to theological differences and surges forward scoffing at any supposed destructive incongruities.

On the one hand, the moderate^[5] analysis gives the impression, mistakenly, that the effort to cut a confessional silhouette within which all aspects of the Southern Baptist face must fit contradicts the Baptist commitment to freedom. Conservatives conscientious about institutional confessional guidelines are pictured as having forsaken "such classic Baptist doctrines as soul liberty and the priesthood of all believers."^[6] Gary Parker's book *Principles Worth Protecting* is advertised with the following paragraph.

Southern Baptists have historically cherished a number of theological "babies," birthed to us by our scriptures and our history. We have held a number of beloved principles close to our hearts and called them our children. Now, however, our children face genuine danger. They face the danger of living in a house controlled by new parents. Some of the new parents love other principles more than the old ones. In some cases, the parents actually despise the children they were bequeathed. As a result, our principles face threats to their survival.^[7]

Among the principles stressed are liberty of conscience, priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church, the nature of Scripture, separation of church and state, unity in diversity, and a chapter entitled "No Lord but Christ, No Creed

but the Bible."[\[8\]](#)

Stan Hastey has written that "prevailing fundamentalists have succeeded in the systematic tearing down of what arguably are Baptists' three most distinctive theological contributions--the priesthood of all believers, autonomy of the local church, and separation of church and state." Later he indicates that soul freedom is "unquestionably Baptists' primary theological distinctive."[\[9\]](#)

Conservatives do not believe that the quest for unity in the more classical theological categories violates the historic application of what Hastey calls our "primary theological distinctive." They are convinced that theology and mission are vitally connected and that theological harmony both biblically and pragmatically serves the cause of missions. Moderates present this quest as antithetical to Baptist freedoms.

On the other hand, moderate historiography minimizes the connection between theology and evangelism and functions as if that assumption of disconnectedness was shared by the framers of early SBC life. Walter Shurden summarized this tendency when he wrote, "The synthesis of the convention was missionary, not doctrinal, in nature." Bill Leonard has made steps toward a correction of this misperception with his observation that the convention's synthesis was "both missionary *and* doctrinal." He submits the idea that "most Southern Baptists perceived themselves, rightly or wrongly, as doctrinally united and theologically homogeneous."[\[10\]](#) But Leonard still represents the theological diversity as not hindering agreement on "the need to win souls and send out missionaries in some form or another."[\[11\]](#)

These treatments of Baptist history give insufficient latitude to the power of theological and even confessional commitment within denominational life, including missionary theology and practice in early Southern Baptist life.

Creeds

Creedless Unity

Significant diversity because of doctrinal imprecision, particularly at the institutional level, has not been deemed a strength or virtue. Baptists have rejected creedalism, and rightly so, since that word implies the elevation of a human document to the detriment of biblical authority. Moreover, a wide variety of opinion concerning the place of confessions in achieving unity is scattered throughout Baptist history. Though early New England Baptists such as John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and Isaac Backus wrote personal confessions of faith, nineteenth-century New England Baptist leaders tended to discount the value of confessions, particularly at any point beyond the local church. "We think a creed worth nothing if it is not supported by scriptural authority," wrote Thomas Armitage. He continues, "And if the creed is founded on the word of God, we do not see why we should not rest on that word which props up the creed."[\[12\]](#)

Francis Wayland surmised that this very "absence of any established creed is in itself the cause of our unity." His appeal, like that of Armitage, was that the study of Scripture was superior to the learning of a confession.

If the Bible be a book designed for every individual man, and intended to be understood by every man, then the greatest amount of unity attainable among men of diversified character, will be produced by allowing every one to look at it and study it for himself. Here is an inspired record allowed to be pure truth. The nearer the opinions of men approach to its teachings, the nearer they approach to each other. Here is a solid and definite basis of unity.[\[13\]](#)

Two conditions informed the pristinism of Armitage and Wayland. First, Baptists enjoyed a high degree of doctrinal unity. Notice, they were not applauding the great theological diversity of Baptists, but were noting the remarkable doctrinal unity. This was seen to be the result of faithful preaching and the personal Bible study of the laity without any overarching confession serving as a governor.[\[14\]](#) Second, they saw confessional denominations declining, fracturing, and lacking

fervency and zeal in pulpit and pew. Why should they be envied or emulated?

Both these leaders, however, underestimated the cohesive power of the New Hampshire Confession during the decades following its introduction in 1833; they also somehow managed to overlook the unitive effect of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith adopted by nearly all of the original Baptist associations, including the Warren Association in Rhode Island. The doctrinal formulations of those confessions had inspired the preaching themes of the earlier generations and had been passed to posterity. But without the strong reminders of doctrine presented by a confession, this kind of system tends toward degeneration and the heightening of personal idiosyncrasies. In his classic work *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*, David Benedict noticed this very trend and commented, "In the business of ordinations, how little scrutiny is made of candidates as to their belief in the strong points of our system, compared with ages past."[\[15\]](#)

In addition, the historic value of creeds, and in large part the Baptist dependence on them, was not carefully considered by Wayland and Armitage. Had there been no Nicea to ward off the Arian error, no Chalcedon to guard against the Nestorian and Eutychian misunderstandings, and no Augsburg Confession to stand by the doctrine of Justification by Faith even when threatened by death, even self-professed non-confessional Baptists would be the poorer for it. Historically, creeds define biblical truth against the subtlety of error so that believers affirm the distinctives of Christian faith as opposed to misleading, non-biblical views. Could it be possible that Wayland and Armitage were unaware of the blessings that were theirs from the confessional history of Christian polemics?

Their view also loses the pedagogic and corrective advantage of a confession. It is not necessary for each generation to reinvent the wheel. A confession helps the current generation benefit from the insights and struggles of the past. An enormously significant biblical theology is dumped in our collective laps, wrapped up as a gift inviting us to open and enjoy. It serves as a handle to help us pick up the Bible and make it our own; it projects a pattern to give the shape of what a revived and reforming church will believe, teach, and confess. Those important and beloved New England brethren seemed to overlook blessings that they themselves had received and minimized the usefulness of the "standard of sound words" which had been entrusted to them. In the subsequent period of decline, a healthy affection for the creed (or confession) would have served as a point of conviction to those who departed and as welcome ballast to a faltering and normless connection of churches.[\[16\]](#)

Creed-protected Unity

In the South, the institutional affirmation of a creed, (i.e., a doctrinal formulation which highlights, conforms to, and insinuates biblical authority) was not perceived as a threat to biblical knowledge or one's submission to its teachings. Creedalism posed so little threat that J. P. Boyce, founder and first president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, did not hesitate to use the term creed. Nor did he hesitate to use such a document for "the declaration of faith and the testing of its existence in others."[\[17\]](#) Especially did he insist on subscription to the declaration of doctrine for the teacher of prospective ministers. The basis of this "test of faith" is Scripture, Boyce claimed, which cannot possibly err.

His [the professor's] agreement with the standard should be exact. His declaration of it should be based on no mental reservation, upon no private understanding with those who immediately invest him into office. . . . No professor should be allowed to enter upon such duties as are there undertaken, with the understanding that he is at liberty to modify the truth, which he has been placed there to inculcate. He . . . must be . . . upon every point in accordance with the truth we believe to be taught in the Scriptures.[\[18\]](#)

This position of Boyce, which accurately reflects the theological commitments of his Baptist constituency, lends a peculiar cast to Leonard's historical interpretation that "During the twentieth century, Southern Baptists have moved steadily, albeit reluctantly, toward creedalism, all the time insisting that it was not really happening."[\[19\]](#) His historical discussion of the use of confessions in the twentieth century is interesting and his conclusion is particularly striking: "If Southern Baptists ever really were a non-creedal people, they are not any longer."[\[20\]](#) Leonard believes the evidence points to an SBC becoming increasingly creedal.

I see the evidence in a different way. Instead of a creeping creedalism, we have witnessed an increasing number of apologies and disclaimers and nervousness about the strength of our confessional past. The kind of punctilious adherence to all the doctrines of the confession commended by Boyce, has not been publicly endorsed by a conservative leader.[\[21\]](#) The current concentration on the issue of inerrancy shows a selectivity in application of confessional integrity not nearly as comprehensive as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[\[22\]](#)

E. Y. Mullins served as pastor in Newton Center, Massachusetts, before accepting the presidency of Southern Seminary. While there, he absorbed some of the New England reticence about creeds. His confrontation, however, with a more doctrinally strict group of Southern Baptists and, at the same time, the genuine threat of liberalism to historic Christianity made even Mullins advocate adherence to a simply-, but clearly-, stated set of doctrines. During the evolution controversy, while he was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mullins himself spoke publicly of the necessity of a clear declaration of pivotal Christian truths. In his 1923 presidential address Mullins unequivocally affirmed the revelatory nature and authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, the sinless miracle-working life of Christ, his vicarious atonement, his bodily resurrection and appearances, his ascension, and his second coming. Following that he stated:

We believe that adherence to the above truths and facts is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist schools. . . . Teachers in our schools should be careful to free themselves from disloyalty on this point.[\[23\]](#)

B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was committed to creeds, not just as a measure to be adopted in a crisis, but as a principle of Christian profession. Establishing Southwestern as a "permanent breakwater against this invading tide of practical infidelity," he endorsed Boyce's plan for theological education and insisted that faculty and trustee alike sign a theological statement. Rather than shy away from tests of faith Carroll welcomed them and rejoiced in them.

The modern cry: "Less creed and more liberty," is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish . . . and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy -- it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly.[\[24\]](#)

Later Carroll insisted that "we are entitled to no liberty in these matters." To "magnify liberty at the expense of doctrine" is a sin, according to Carroll. Throughout this discussion he affirms that the "standard [for this doctrinal statement] is the holy Scriptures" which he defends as infallible in the original manuscripts.

The founders of Southern Baptists' first two theological seminaries believed in the disciplinary use of creeds. They expected each professor to sign a statement of faith, or creed, and to believe and teach in precise agreement with it. It cannot be un-Baptistic to abide by the principles of the founders and those Baptists who first supported such schools.

J. B. Gambrell, arguably one of the most influential and perceptive Baptist statesmen ever to live, served Southern Baptist life as pastor, denominational executive, newspaper editor, college president, seminary teacher, and convention president from 1872 through 1921. His unusual article in the *Baptist Standard*, "Questions in Baptist Rights," I have used other places, but it is nonetheless appropriate here. Gambrell said, "So far as we know, Baptists stand for perfect liberty of conscience and liberty of speech. We would not deny to any one, even an infidel, the right to preach his doctrines." This freedom, however does not include the right to use a church to "propagate other and contradictory doctrines." Those who "do not preach the accepted doctrines of the Baptists, have no right in Baptist pulpits, and it is no abridgment of their rights nor any persecution to keep them out." That principle applies to schools also. When one thinks that the doctrines of the denomination are wrong or outworn he cannot claim "the right to use an institution, its money, prestige and opportunities to overthrow the faith which the institution was founded to build up." When he does so, he "passes the bounds of liberty and enters the realm of arrogant license."[\[25\]](#) Gambrell saw no contradiction between the Baptist principle of freedom and the application of doctrine in a disciplinary and discriminating fashion.

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¹One publisher, Smyth & Helwys, includes the following titles in its Fall 1993 catalogue. *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention?* by Grady Cothen; *The Baptist Identity, The Priesthood of All Believers, The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, all edited or written by Walter Shurden; *Amidst Babel, Speak the Truth* edited by Robert U. Ferguson; *Our Baptist Tradition* edited by William Tuck; *Principles Worth Protecting* by Gary E. Parker. Ralph Elliott published a first-hand historical overview of the controversy that bears his name in *The "Genesis Controversy"*. It includes his reflections on subsequent events including the current theological climate of the SBC. It is a 1992 publication of Mercer University Press in Macon, Ga.

²Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 68.

³*Ibid.*, 98, 99.

⁴The basic pattern of early uniformity in doctrine to a progressive diversification is documented in *Has Our Theology Changed? Southern Baptist Thought Since 1845*, ed. Paul Basden. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. Examples of statements made throughout the book: "Although Southern Baptists consciously adhered to Calvinism for their first sixty or seventy years, their most recent theologians have rejected it in favor of an Arminian approach to predestination" (p. 71); "Southern Baptist understanding of the atonement has moved from the Calvinistic formulation of Boyce" (110); "We have seen that the Southern Baptist Convention initially adhered to a view of perseverance of the saints in keeping with a moderate Calvinism. . . . [S]ome . . . believe that Moody's interpretation of apostasy is biblical. . . . For the majority of Southern Baptists, who believe in perseverance of the saints, there are several options" (133). Basden indicates that the approach of the book was "to trace the development of those doctrines which Southern Baptists have seen change in the last century and a half" (2). Basden also says quite candidly "Southern Baptists have significantly changed their beliefs on many of the doctrines related to the Calvinist-Arminian debate" (3). Pertaining to that, two realities worthy of remark are, first, how unacquainted the last two generations of Southern Baptist laity have been about their strong "Calvinist" roots, and second, how tactfully this truth was ignored in theological education for two generations. Even though the book does not advocate a return to the theology of our founders, I am glad the book has pointed out the departure.

⁵ I do not use the term "moderate" pejoratively but in accordance with a stated desire to be called such. Robert Ferguson writes, "Now that the battle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention is over it is high time that we Moderates, as we prefer to be called, define ourselves." This is in a publicity statement for his *Amidst Babel, Speak the Truth* advertised in the Smyth & Helwys, fall 1993, catalogue.

⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

⁷*Fall Catalogue, 1993: Smyth & Helwys* issued by Smyth & Helwys, Macon, Ga., p. 6. The advertisement is taken from Parker's first chapter. Gary E. Parker, *Principles Worth Protecting* (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993), p. 2.

⁸Parker pushes the non-creedal theory to new extremes in his chapter on the autonomy of the local church. In a paragraph amazingly divorced from the whole nature of biblical theology and the strategically foundational place of apostolic teaching in God's formation of the church, Parker writes, "In his letters to the churches, Paul never expected conformity, and he never advocated coercion. Each congregation experienced individual problems and celebrated individual victories. Paul never tried to create a set of guidelines that each church should use as it lived out its worship and ministry life. He didn't try to impose a uniform style of worship, doctrine, or structure upon local congregations. He recognized and respected the right of the local church to govern itself as it believed the Lord Jesus had commanded." *Ibid.*, p. 35. How this wild assertion can survive in the face of the following texts is a mystery: 1 Corinthians 14:37, 38; 15:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; 12:19-21 and 13:10; Galatians 1:6-10; 5:7-12; Philippians 3:17-19; 1 Timothy 3; et al. That Paul "never expected conformity" to his apostolic admonitions is an idea so absurd that one must think its writer is either joking, has ignored massive portions of the Pauline material, or wrote it when he was very tired.

⁹Stan Hastey, "The SBC, 1979-1993: What Happened and Why," in *Baptist History and Heritage*, October 1993, p. 20.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 37. Leonard has a commendably candid discussion of the missions/theological unity issue on pages 37-39. Hopefully it can serve for some future helpful dialogue. He reiterates, "Clearly, Southern Baptists understood themselves in terms of both a missionary *and* doctrinal identity" (38). He includes a discussion of Boyce's defense of the *Abstract of Principles* in this section. His discussion, I think, contains two flaws which leave him room to develop his picture of extensive theological diversity in early SBC life. First, he explains Boyce's idea of the "fundamental doctrines of grace" as the "great evangelical doctrines of the Christian faith." While that phrase asserts nothing positively erroneous, it does justice neither to Boyce's true intention nor his personal perception of the doctrinal unity of Southern Baptists. Boyce was speaking of a specifically Calvinist soteriology, not a broadly evangelical one. The topics of the *Abstract* and Boyce's own theological textbook indicate this. In addition, he did not think there would be any serious divergence from this among his Southern Baptist constituents. In his view, Baptists would be happy to send those preparing for ministry to a school where every teacher believed and inculcated a Calvinist understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Second, Leonard understands the provision "Upon no point, upon which the denomination is divided, should the Convention, and through it, the seminary, take any position" to include and permit more diversity than Boyce had in mind. Boyce recalled that the meeting ("convention") in which the *Abstract* was adopted was dominated by non-Landmark people. They were not willing, though they could easily have done so, to exclude those advocating "Landmarkism" from either the support of or participation in the life of the seminary. Nothing like the diversity Leonard describes elsewhere (65 - 99; esp. 68, 69, 99) even seemed possible to J. P. Boyce in his view of unity. More on this below.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 66.

¹²Thomas Armitage, "Baptist Faith and Practice" in C. A. Jenkyns, ed. *Baptist Doctrines* (St. Louis: Chancy R. Barns, 1882), p. 34.

¹³Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Watertown, Wisconsin: Baptist Heritage Press, 1988; reprint of original publication, New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1857) p. 15.

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¹⁷J. P. Boyce, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions* (Greenville, SC: C. J. Elford's Book and Job Press, 1856), p. 41.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 35.

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¹One publisher, Smyth & Helwys, includes the following titles in its Fall 1993 catalogue. *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention?* by Grady Cothen; *The Baptist Identity, The Priesthood of All Believers, The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, all edited or written by Walter Shurden; *Amidst Babel, Speak the Truth* edited by Robert U. Ferguson; *Our Baptist Tradition* edited by William Tuck; *Principles Worth Protecting* by Gary E. Parker. Ralph Elliott published a first-hand historical overview of the controversy that bears his name in *The "Genesis Controversy"*. It includes his reflections on subsequent events including the current theological climate of the SBC. It is a 1992 publication of Mercer University Press in Macon, Ga.

²Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 68.

³*Ibid.*, 98, 99.

⁴The basic pattern of early uniformity in doctrine to a progressive diversification is documented in *Has Our Theology Changed? Southern Baptist Thought Since 1845*, ed. Paul Basden. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. Examples of statements made throughout the book: "Although Southern Baptists consciously adhered to Calvinism for their first sixty or seventy years, their most recent theologians have rejected it in favor of an Arminian approach to predestination" (p. 71); "Southern Baptist understanding of the atonement has moved from the Calvinistic formulation of Boyce" (110); "We have seen that the Southern Baptist Convention initially adhered to a view of perseverance of the saints in keeping with a moderate Calvinism. . . . [S]ome . . . believe that Moody's interpretation of apostasy is biblical. . . . For the majority of Southern Baptists, who believe in perseverance of the saints, there are several options" (133). Basden indicates that the approach of the book was "to trace the development of those doctrines which Southern Baptists have seen change in the last century and a half" (2). Basden also says quite candidly "Southern Baptists have significantly changed their beliefs on many of the doctrines related to the Calvinist-Arminian debate" (3). Pertaining to that, two realities worthy of remark are, first, how unacquainted the last two generations of Southern Baptist laity have been about their strong "Calvinist" roots, and second, how tactfully this truth was ignored in theological education for two generations. Even though the book does not advocate a return to the theology of our founders, I am glad the book has pointed out the departure.

⁵ I do not use the term "moderate" pejoratively but in accordance with a stated desire to be called such. Robert Ferguson writes, "Now that the battle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention is over it is high time that we Moderates, as we prefer to be called, define ourselves." This is in a publicity statement for his *Amidst Babel, Speak the Truth* advertised in the Smyth & Helwys, fall 1993, catalogue.

⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

⁷*Fall Catalogue, 1993: Smyth & Helwys* issued by Smyth & Helwys, Macon, Ga., p. 6. The advertisement is taken from Parker's first chapter. Gary E. Parker, *Principles Worth Protecting* (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993), p. 2.

⁸Parker pushes the non-creedal theory to new extremes in his chapter on the autonomy of the local church. In a paragraph amazingly divorced from the whole nature of biblical theology and the strategically foundational place of apostolic teaching in God's formation of the church, Parker writes, "In his letters to the churches, Paul never expected conformity, and he never advocated coercion. Each congregation experienced individual problems and celebrated individual victories. Paul never tried to create a set of guidelines that each church should use as it lived out its worship and ministry life. He didn't try to impose a uniform style of worship, doctrine, or structure upon local congregations. He recognized and respected the right of the local church to govern itself as it believed the Lord Jesus had commanded." *Ibid.*, p. 35. How this wild assertion can survive in the face of the following texts is a mystery: 1

Corinthians 14:37, 38; 15:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; 12:19-21 and 13:10; Galatians 1:6-10; 5:7-12; Philippians 3:17-19; 1 Timothy 3; et al. That Paul "never expected conformity" to his apostolic admonitions is an idea so absurd that one must think its writer is either joking, has ignored massive portions of the Pauline material, or wrote it when he was very tired.

⁹Stan Hasteley, "The SBC, 1979-1993: What Happened and Why," in *Baptist History and Heritage*, October 1993, p. 20.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 37. Leonard has a commendably candid discussion of the missions/theological unity issue on pages 37-39. Hopefully it can serve for some future helpful dialogue. He reiterates, "Clearly, Southern Baptists understood themselves in terms of both a missionary *and* doctrinal identity" (38). He includes a discussion of Boyce's defense of the *Abstract of Principles* in this section. His discussion, I think, contains two flaws which leave him room to develop his picture of extensive theological diversity in early SBC life. First, he explains Boyce's idea of the "fundamental doctrines of grace" as the "great evangelical doctrines of the Christian faith." While that phrase asserts nothing positively erroneous, it does justice neither to Boyce's true intention nor his personal perception of the doctrinal unity of Southern Baptists. Boyce was speaking of a specifically Calvinist soteriology, not a broadly evangelical one. The topics of the *Abstract* and Boyce's own theological textbook indicate this. In addition, he did not think there would be any serious divergence from this among his Southern Baptist constituents. In his view, Baptists would be happy to send those preparing for ministry to a school where every teacher believed and inculcated a Calvinist understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Second, Leonard understands the provision "Upon no point, upon which the denomination is divided, should the Convention, and through it, the seminary, take any position" to include and permit more diversity than Boyce had in mind. Boyce recalled that the meeting ("convention") in which the *Abstract* was adopted was dominated by non-Landmark people. They were not willing, though they could easily have done so, to exclude those advocating "Landmarkism" from either the support of or participation in the life of the seminary. Nothing like the diversity Leonard describes elsewhere (65 - 99; esp. 68, 69, 99) even seemed possible to J. P. Boyce in his view of unity. More on this below.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 66.

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Evangelicals and Catholics Together

[Geoff Thomas](#)

Reprinted from *Evangelical Times*, June 1994

Evangelicals and Catholics together: the Christian mission in the third millennium is the title of the twenty-five-page document which has been brought out and signed by a group of Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians in the USA. The evangelical signatories include Bill Bright of Campus Crusade, Os Guinness of the Trinity Forum, Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary, Mark Noll of Wheaton College, James I Packer of Regent University, Charles Colson of Prison Fellowship, Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Richard Land of the Christian Life Commission, Jesse Miranda of the Assemblies of God, and John White of Geneva College.

Like the English document *Growing into union*, of twenty-five years ago, there is an almost girlish delight in their 'discovery' of one another and a commitment on the part of both evangelicals and Roman Catholics to the affirmations of this statement. It says such things as: 'All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ However imperfect our communion with one another, we recognize that there is one church of Christ As evangelicals and Catholics we pray that our unity in the love of Christ will become ever more evident as a sign to the world of God's reconciling power We thank God for the discovery of one another in contending for a common cause. Much more important, we thank God for the discovery of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ We promise one another that we will work to deepen, build upon, and expand this pattern of convergence and co-operation.

"Today, in this country and elsewhere, evangelicals and Catholics attempt to win 'converts' from one another's folds. In some ways, this is perfectly understandable and perhaps inevitable. In many instances, however, such efforts at recruitment undermine the Christian mission by which we are bound by God's Word and to which we have recommitted ourselves in this statement In considering the many corruptions of Christian witness, we, evangelicals and Catholics, confess that we have sinned against one another and against God. We most earnestly ask the forgiveness of God and one another, and pray for the grace to amend our own lives and that of our communities."

Let it be affirmed that this document was not needed to affirm that evangelicals and Roman Catholics can live together in peace and harmony. Even in Northern Ireland this happens all the time, we are friends, we respect each other, and we have many of the same opinions and goals. But our understanding of the gospel of Christ and the way of salvation are poles apart.

One example of this is the institution of papacy. This document has these two slim references to the pope: (1) "Mutually respectful conversation between Muslims and Christians should be encouraged in the hope that more of the world will, in the oft-repeated words of John Paul II, 'open the door to Christ.'" And (2) "We rejoice together that the Roman Catholic Church--as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council and boldly exemplified in the ministry of John Paul II--is strongly committed to religious freedom."

Yet Rome without the papacy is like a wheel without a hub. Imagine an old Polish bachelor beginning to attend your Baptist church. You learn that his name is Mr. Wjotyła. He has a fine noble face. He tells you that Jesus Christ is his Savior and the Son of God. He abhors abortion and even birth control. He has no time for women priests. In time Mr.

Wjotyła applies for membership and the elders are impressed with this cultured kindly man and his love of Jesus. "Anything else you want to tell us?" you ask him. "Well, just this," he says, "I am the head of the church and Christ's special representative and spokesman in this world. There are certain occasions when I speak on his behalf--not very often--and then you've got to believe what I say, because the message comes directly from Jesus."

You smile embarrassingly at this joke, not in very good taste. He does not. You ask him what he means, and you discover he means exactly what he says. This old Pole thinks that he is the head of the church worldwide, believing that he has been given that authority by Christ himself, and, warming to his conviction, he pronounces an anathema on any of the elders who dare to disagree.

He says, "If anyone says that the Roman Pontiff has only the office of inspection or direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church, not only in matters that pertain to faith and morals, but also to matters that pertain to the discipline and government of the church throughout the whole world; or if anyone says he has only a more important part and not the complete fullness of the supreme power; or if anyone says that this power is not ordinary or immediate over each and every faithful shepherd or member, let him be anathema."

You try again, "You say you are trusting in the merits of Christ's mercy. How do those merits come to sinners?" The old man says, "I believe that the church communicates Christ's mercy to sinners through the mass and the sacraments, and all the prayers and good works of the faithful. It is the church that reconciles sinners to God. The sacraments are necessary for salvation."

You say to him, "If you came to our Lord's Supper how would you understand it? Do you believe in the finished work of Christ?" He quotes easily from the Catechism of the Council of Trent: "The holy sacrifice of the mass is not a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving only, or a mere commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross, but also a truly propitiatory sacrifice, by which God is appeased and rendered propitious to us."

You look with horror at his blazing certainty as he repeats those words, and you know that there is no way that he, holding such delusions, can become a member of your church or come to the Lord's Table. He is terribly confused: he may even be mad; if he seeks to persuade other Christians to believe these things about himself he must be opposed. You fear for his own spiritual condition. What must it be like for any Christian to wake up in the morning with the realization, "I am the special representative of Jesus Christ in the world and speak on his behalf?" You put him under discipline and forbid him to share his notions about himself with anyone in or out of the church. That is the end of union between yourselves and Mr. Wjotyła, and who is to blame?

About this joint document *Evangelicals and Catholics together*, the charismatic leader and U.S. presidential candidate Pat Robertson says, "The time has come when we must lay aside minor points of doctrinal differences and focus on the centralization of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." "Minor doctrinal differences?" We have picked out a few doctrines--concerning who is the head of the church and the finished work of Christ. There are many others. These evangelical men, some of whom we esteem so highly, are trifling with the very word God has revealed to us to take to the world, a message which has been utterly distorted by the Roman Church. This document will be no help to us at all, certainly not to evangelicals, nor to our Catholic friends.



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Another Gospel

The gospel of Satan is not a system of revolutionary principles, nor yet a program of anarchy. It does not promote strife and war, but aims at peace and unity. It seeks not to set the mother against her daughter nor the father against his son, but fosters the fraternal spirit whereby the human race is regarded as one great "brotherhood." It does not seek to drag down the natural man, but to improve and uplift him. It advocates education and cultivation and appeals to "the best that is within us." It aims to make this world such a comfortable and congenial habitat that Christ's absence from it will not be felt and God will not be needed. It endeavors to occupy man so much with this world that he has no time or inclination to think of the world to come. It propagates the principles of self-sacrifice, charity and benevolence, and teaches us to live for the good of others, and to be kind to all. It appeals strongly to the carnal mind and is popular with the masses, because it ignores the solemn facts that by nature man is a fallen creature, alienated from the life of God, and dead in trespasses and sins, and that his only hope lies in being born again.>

--A. W. Pink



News

The 8th Annual Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference convened June 27-July 1 in Panama City Beach, Florida. The theme was, "Discipleship: Who Are You Following?" Dr. Don Whitney spoke four times on the spiritual disciplines. Drawing from his book, *The Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, he effectively encouraged young people to begin early in life the practices of Scripture meditation and prayer. His messages were wonderfully complemented by Mr. Jim Eliff of Christian Communicators Worldwide, who spoke evangelistically each night. Early indications are that several among the 350 attendees were converted. Next year's camp is scheduled for the same venue June 12-16. For more information contact Bill Ascol at (318) 798-7088 or FAX (318) 798-7086.

The first ever Founders Fellowship Breakfast served up great encouragement to the 112 who attended prior to the beginning of the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando. Due to rain damage, the original room which had been booked was unavailable. The room which was substituted was adequate, but did not allow for the sit-down breakfast which had been arranged. The continental buffet made it difficult to get everyone seated in a timely fashion and unfortunately detracted from some of the proceedings. Dr. Tom Nettles gave a wonderful exposition from 2 Tim. 1. He was followed by Dr. Timothy George who gave us 5 encouragements coupled with 5 warnings regarding what we see taking place in our convention. Plans are tentatively being made for a similar effort in Atlanta during next year's SBC annual meeting.

Dr. Al Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is scheduled to preach the convention sermon at the gathering in Atlanta next year. 1995 marks the 150th anniversary of the SBC's birth. Convention planners and organizers have been instructed to permeate all of the sessions with celebratory reminders of our heritage. How appropriate-and gracious of our Lord-that one who knows and loves our theological heritage will be preaching the keynote address! All who love the SBC and long to see her heritage recovered should pray for Dr. Mohler and make an effort to attend the 1995 convention.

On June 28, 1994 Mercer University Trustees voted to begin a School of Theology. It purportedly will be launched in the spirit of the original vision of Jesse Mercer, from whom the university took its name. One of the 10 "founding principles" of the school states that it, "should hold steadfastly to the high and defining traditions of Baptists, including the priesthood of believers, the separation of church and state, the autonomy of the local congregations as the context for mission and ministry, the centrality of Scripture to the life of faith, and the resolve that neither creeds nor human affirmations of faith should stand as tests of orthodoxy." How would this rejection of all creeds and confessions of faith have sounded to Jesse Mercer himself, who was a convinced, decided evangelical Calvinist that was known to weep at the thought of his younger colleagues in the ministry entertaining "Arminian principles?" Two of the first professors at the university in its early days were John Dagg and P. H. Mell. Would they have recognized this rejection of doctrinal definition as a return to the "founding purposes" of Mercer University?



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Book Review

No Place for Truth, or What Ever Happened to Evangelical Theology?

by David F. Wells; 1993, 318 pp. Eerdmans, \$24.99

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

This book ought to be studied by every Southern Baptist pastor. Not read--*studied!* David Wells has provided a penetrating analysis of the evangelical movement in our nation. Os Guinness calls the book a "devastating CAT scan of American evangelicalism." And so it is.

Wells' main thesis is that evangelicals have lost their center and are in danger of losing their very identity because of the subtle yet deadly ravages of modernity. Beginning in the late 19th century, the humanistic forces which had been unleashed during the Enlightenment began coming home to roost in American culture. In the process man replaced God at the center of life and the "noble values" of the Judeo-Christian world view have all been supplanted by relativism.

The spirit of modernity has insinuated itself deeply into the lives of modern evangelicals. Just as with the liberalism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the effects have been devastating to churches. Unlike that earlier movement, which evangelicals readily identified and stood against, modernity has come into our churches largely undetected. One of its chief impacts has been the devaluation of truth within the evangelical ranks.

It is not that truth has been dismissed completely. Rather, it has been removed from its place of central importance and pushed to the borderlands of relevance. Confessions of faith are still nominally affirmed, but the truth which is confessed no longer forms the character and conduct of evangelicals. Nor is it expected to.

This development has consigned theology almost exclusively to the realm of academia. Thus a tremendous gulf has emerged between the academy and the church and between theologians and ministers. Wells addresses this development in a chapter entitled, "Things Fall Apart." In it he contends that the definition of theology has drastically changed because of its restriction to the academy. Today it is often regarded as simply another academic discipline like history or physics "in which the practitioner of learning ought to have no personal involvement" (98).

This is far different from the earlier Protestant (and particularly Puritan) understanding that the work of theology must include a confessional element, reflection on that confession, and the cultivation of virtues that arise out of these. Obviously, this cannot be performed by a detached practitioner in the sterile confines of an ivory tower. Theology, as well as theologians, must be restored to the church.

The chapter on ministers ("The New Disablers&") clearly demonstrates how management and therapeutic models have replaced the view of the minister as truth-broker. Consequently, the ministry is now regarded as a profession rather than a calling. And because this profession focuses primarily on the techniques of ministry it has little place for theology. This is demonstrated by the changes that have occurred in seminary education:

The issue is that theology once pervaded everything that was taught, but now it no longer does; theology was once considered essential to the doing of ministry, but now it no longer is; seminaries were once determined by that theology, but now they no longer are. Now, the great preponderance

of faculty, even in evangelical seminaries, think little of theology, work little with it, and shrug off its importance in their own field (243).

Wells paints a very bleak picture of evangelical life and prospects. Because of the loss of truth, it is dying from the inside out. The machinery is bigger and more impressive than ever before. But the heart and mind have deteriorated. He is not hopeless, however, because he believes in the possibility of reformation and revival.

The greatest weakness of this book is the lack of program for such a reform. He has done a masterful job of diagnosis but left the task prescription to a future book, the publication of which I look forward to with great anticipation.

The value of this book is that it clearly and incisively exposes the deep distress of contemporary evangelicalism. If he is correct in his analysis, and I am absolutely convinced that he is, then David Wells has done us a tremendous service by sounding the alarm for American evangelicals. May our Lord give us the grace and humility to heed it and return to a Christ honoring love for and devotion to His truth.

