



# Troubling Waters of Baptism

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# The Founders Journal



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# Troubling Waters of Baptism

*Thomas Ascol*

Southern Baptists are wading through troubled waters according to a recent Home Mission Board study. Last year the research department and evangelism division surveyed 1350 adults (18 years and older) who had been baptized in Southern Baptist churches. What they discovered ought to make all who love the souls of men and women stop and reflect on our practice of baptism and evangelism.

According to an April 13, 1995, Baptist Press report, the 1350 newly baptized participants in the survey were asked to tell why they had been baptized. Before giving the responses, let me quote from Chapter 7 of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in the final resurrection of the dead.

If Baptists should be clear on anything it is on the ordinance from which we take our name. Our Lord said "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing *them* [ie. those who have been made disciples] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). At the heart of our most visible distinctive is this understanding that a person should be baptized because he or she has been converted. Yet, according to the Home Mission Board study, that is not the reason which was given by half of all the adults who were plunged under baptismal waters in Southern Baptist churches during 1992-93.

When given multiple choices with which to answer, only 40.5% of those surveyed said that they had been baptized because they had been converted. "Rededication" was the answer selected by 40.4%. According to BP reporter, Sarah Zimmerman, "If the survey results represent the 150,000 adults baptized in 1993, then only 60,000 baptisms represented conversions of the lost to Christ." What a commentary!

These figures become even more alarming when two other facts are taken into consideration. First, the question was asked only of *adults* who had been baptized. It is safe to assume that they would be in a better position to understand the point and purpose of baptism than are the young people and children who were baptized that year (including more than 3000 who were 5 years old or younger).

Secondly, the 840 churches who participated in the survey admitted that they had lost complete contact with more than one-third of those whom they had baptized the previous year. These people were baptized into oblivion. They have been relegated to the denominational black hole known of inactive and non-resident church membership.

This is not quite as bad as the Colorado Springs (Independent) Baptist Church who "accidentally" baptized a Jewish boy last February. The mother, Audrey Ausgotharp, gave specific instructions to the bus ministry workers that her children were not to be baptized while visiting the church. Two women who accompanied the children home that Sunday told her that her seven year old son had been baptized "by mistake."

This is the latest chapter in what appears to be a pattern. The church is being sued by three other families whose

children were mistakenly baptized in 1993. If "serial dunking" were a crime, this church would have been closed down a long time ago.

These "drive-by-baptisms" not only cheapen the ordinance from which Baptists take their name, they also leave widespread spiritual carnage in their wake. Think how confused and disillusioned those must be who have been mistakenly baptized! At the very least their case reveals a frightening disjunction between faith and practice. It is much more likely that this simply illustrates a lack of biblical instruction in many areas.

Believer's baptism dramatically portrays the gospel of Jesus Christ. Three ingredients are absolutely essential for this to be true: 1) Right mode--dipping beneath the water; 2) Right candidate--a previously unbaptized believer in Jesus Christ; 3) Right meaning--it is a testimony of faith, symbolizing the believer's participation in Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

Baptists throughout history have been severely persecuted--even to the point of death--for their distinctive convictions on baptism. How ironic that modern Baptists seem to be giving up through shoddy theology that which our forefathers would not relinquish despite the threat of the sword!

The Home Mission Board survey highlights the greatest need in the Southern Baptist Convention today. Southern Baptists need a renewal in theology--including the theology of baptism and church membership. In the 1830s Jacob Knapp introduced the practice of instant baptism and membership to Baptist churches in the northern United States. Prior to this it was common for professed converts to be examined by church officers or a church committee before they would be admitted to baptism and membership.[\[1\]](#)

John Dagg, Southern Baptists' first writing systematic theologian, warned his denomination of this unsound practice. In his *Treatise on Church Order* he wrote,

In order that the church may judge whether a candidate is duly qualified for membership, they should hear his profession of faith. He is duly bound to let his light shine before all men, to the glory of God; and it is specially needful that they should see it, with whom he is to be associated in fellowship as a child of light. . . .

Churches are not infallible judges, being unable to search the heart; but they owe it to the cause of Christ, and to the candidate himself, to exercise the best judgment of which they are capable. To receive any one on a mere profession of words, without any effort to ascertain whether he understands and feels what he professes, is unfaithfulness to his interests, and the interests of religion.[\[2\]](#)

What would happen if Southern Baptist churches began to exercise such care in the practice of baptism and church membership? How much spiritual confusion would be avoided? How much disillusionment would be spared? How much stronger would the testimony of baptism become in our churches and in our world?

Southern Baptists have much for which to be thankful as we move toward the third millennium. We have seen a clear reaffirmation of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. We are witnessing substantive positive changes in seminary education. A renewed commitment to missions and evangelism seems to be spreading. However, unless we see a thorough renewal of our theology--including our ecclesiology--all of these gains will be short-lived. If the doctrinal foundations and structures of our churches are not renewed according to biblical principles, within thirty years Southern Baptists will once again find themselves faced with the subtle inroads of liberalism.

May the Lord grant us renewed vigor to deal faithfully with the souls of men, women, boys and girls who are entrusted to our care.



<sup>1</sup>See the *Autobiography of the Elder Jacob Knapp* (New York, 1868), pp. 100ff. For a brief discussion of Knapp's practice see Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism, the Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), pp. 312-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Treatise on Church Order* (The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; reprint edition, Gano Books, 1982), pp. 268-69.



# Basil Manly: Fire From Light

## The Transforming Power of Theological Preaching --Part 2--

[\*Tom J. Nettles\*](#)

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### Confessional

Not only is Manly's theology and preaching accurately classified as Calvinism, it was intentionally confessional. Doctrinal unity was among the greatest of goods that a church, or a group of churches in association, could seek. He defended the associational confessions under which he ministered and felt it inappropriate for churches to be non-confessional. His was a clear and unalloyed affirmation of the Confession of Faith of the Charleston Baptist Association. In a series of resolutions at the 1833 South Carolina Baptist Convention concerning the management of funds, the convention discussed a fund established by the "Charleston Juvenile Female Education and Missionary Society." Authority to disburse the money of this fund, when sufficient to support a beneficiary, was granted to the Society including the power to designate a church that would have the privilege to name the benefiting individual "provided the church they may designate do hold and continue to hold the Confession of Faith now acknowledged in the Charleston Baptist Association."[\[1\]](#)

Manly found that Alabama Baptists shared his confessional convictions. The dominating presence of the commitment to common faith as a foundation for their unity and mission caused a thorough investigation of any churches that would apply for membership in the association. Only when such applying churches were examined and "found orderly and orthodox" were they received. This commitment to the disciplinary use of confessions also gave rise to a stern warning against any attempt to create growth in the churches by minimizing doctrinal truth. In 1844, the associational gathering for which Manly wrote the circular letter on the doctrine of Election, advised the churches:

We would call on the members of our Churches, individually, to take pains to acquire just and thorough views of the doctrines which are most surely believed among us; we call on the Churches to insist on these views in the reception of members; and to recollect that no addition or fulness of numbers is desirable from among persons, who, either are willing to remain ignorant of the great doctrines of the Gospel, or who doubt or disbelieve them.[\[2\]](#)

At this same meeting a query concerning doctrinal uniformity was considered: "Is it consistent and proper for a Church in this Association to call a minister to the care of her, who openly declares his disbelief of the doctrines set forth in our Abstract of Principles, and preaches contrary to them in important particulars." The answer given by the association was one simple word: "No."[\[3\]](#)

A controversy between the Tuscaloosa and North River Associations reached resolution in 1849 when the North River Association adopted "such articles as generally may be assented to by the denomination." Manly stated in his diary: "The North River people abandon their heresy and errors; so far as we can judge of men's real sentiments by

their words."[\[4\]](#) During this controversy, however, Salem church, a member of the Tuscaloosa Association, voted out her articles of faith and received a reprimand from the Association.

While the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only authoritative standard of doctrine, and rule of duty, it is still deemed expedient to have summary statements or abstracts of principles, for the sake of distinctness; and we disapprove of the conduct of the Salem church in voting out her articles of faith.[\[5\]](#)

Manly rightly believed that the shorter confessions used by many Baptist associations in the South were distilled versions of the Philadelphia confession, that is also the Charleston Confession. His circular letter of 1844 demonstrates this in the exposition of article 7 which stated "We believe that God's elect shall be called, regenerated, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost." Manly condensed his discussion and sought to seal his argument that the doctrinal subject of his letter was at the heart of Baptist soteriology in the following manner. "What we have yet to say, shall be in the words of a confession adopted by many congregations of Christians in England, baptized on profession of their faith, in 1689; adopted, also, by the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1742, and by the Charleston Baptist Association in 1767."

Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Christ yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

All the Scripture proofs were printed in full.

## Theological

To describe our subject's preaching as theological is not a redundancy, but a necessary nuance. One may be a Calvinist and yet not have thought through the connections of those truths with other doctrines. Doctrinal preaching in this case may be sterile and abstract, larded with fragmented and amputated parts. It should be lively and whole, full of spiritual knowledge that is essential to our understanding the things freely given to us by God.

Preaching may even be confessional and yet not expressive of the symbiotic relationship which unifies the doctrinal categories in which we necessarily speak of divine truth. But with Manly all of these realities appeared before his mind as one truth--each part necessarily interconnected with all other parts. Part of this close theological reasoning came from the discipline of reading Manly had acquired. He was skeptical about reading anything other than proven works. In advising his son Basil concerning a course in German, he conceded that it might be of some benefit for "polite learning" and to a philologist it might be useful, "but as to theology, where you find one sound evangelical Divine among them you find a hundred, either of disguised infidels or of crazy transcendentalists & enthusiasts. The possible benefit therefore, to me, appears scanty."[\[6\]](#)

His sermons were filled with doctrine, scripture proofs and application. If he had one doctrinal theme in mind it would suggest to him several others vitally related to his subject. The necessary and supportive aspects of those contiguous doctrines Manly would explain and apply to his subject with brilliance and pertinence. This element is

not absent from any of his extant manuscripts and outlines.

In his sermon "Sanctification through the Truth," Manly defines sanctification as "that change by the Spirit of God upon us which imparts a holy tendency to our powers--gives spiritual affections--conforms us to the mind and image of God--and peculiarly sets us apart, consecrates, and devotes us to his service." He then distinguishes sanctification from justification on the one hand and regeneration on the other. "This is a distinct grace," notes Manly. "Although never found but in connection with justification, it is to be distinguished from it." He then parenthesizes two words which are fully nine months pregnant: "(Show how)." It is in the "show how" for which Manly was so famous with his contemporaries who heard him preach that many of his most memorable passages were executed.

He has been observed occasionally to leave the most elaborately prepared notes,...and abandon himself to a "side thought," apparently picked up by the way--on which his conceptions were so vivid, so impassioned, so unctuous, as to enchain and thrill an audience with the richness and pathos of his utterances. It seems to have come up as with a pleased surprise from the great depths of his soul, like a fountain suddenly struck by the shaft of an artesian well. He has been known to devote perhaps half the time of an ordinary service to one of these unexpected "rills of thought." When I say unexpected, I do not mean to affirm that it was altogether, on his part, unpremeditated--for in such instances he had at least familiarized himself with the main thought,--but I mean to say that in the expansion of that thought he left himself an indefinite margin in the pulpit. This peculiarity showed the rapidity with which his mind acted in grasping and happily expressing the most profound truths both in doctrinal and practical Christianity, and it may serve to show the importance of every minister's cultivating the habit of extemporary speaking.[\[7\]](#)

Manly continued his discussion of doctrinal relationships. Sanctification is "distinguished from Regeneration chiefly by its *progressiveness*--Regeneration is making *new*, and is instantaneous--In sanctification, we are made holy, as being `changed into the same image, [etc.]" We are sanctified in Christ as our covenant head who is not only the pattern but the principle of sanctification. "It is impossible to be holy without being in Him," Manly said, "And it is impossible to be in Him without being holy."

In "Christ Pleading the Completion of his Work" Manly argues initially for an inherent right of Christ to glory because of his eternal pre-existence sharing a glory peculiar to the Godhead. No voluntary concealment of that glory could forfeit the intrinsic right to the glory. While on earth in his body, he was still in heaven in his deity; the nature of the union also rendered it impossible for Christ to sin or do anything wrong. The resumption, however, of his former glorious state he plead for on the ground of his completed work. This completed work came as a mediator, one who is both God and man, who "can lay his hand upon us both." He must be man to take man's place "to obey, suffer &c--He must be God, because nothing less wd. present that natural exemption from legal demands which wd. allow of his merits being transferred to the benefits of others." But we must not think that the necessity of such a mediator meant that God the Father was unwilling until the Son's condescension moved him. No, "It was a work his Father had given." The Father and Son were one "in counsel, will, and design." The covenant between Father and Son "is often adverted to in the Scriptures--the father as free to send as the son to go--and all divinely consentaneous."

Manly also preached the intricacies of the distinctions between things God wills by mandate and those that he wills and accomplishes efficaciously. The consistency of natural freedom with moral bondage, the perfect compatibility between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, the certain purposes of God necessitating the historical means by which those purposes come to pass, the justice of God in the discriminatory grace of Christ's atoning work[\[8\]](#) -- Manly shied away from none of these but treated them clearly, scripturally, and always with the conviction that his auditory would benefit from the truth if he applied it with wisdom and they responded in grace; or perhaps they

would intensify their own destruction if they turned the grace of God into lasciviousness.

A. E. Taliaferro remembered accompanying Manly on a preaching tour through Talledega and Calhoun counties in Alabama. He wrote to Charles Manly, "What a feast I enjoyed from the pulpit, and in private conversation!" He called it a "traveling theological course, the lessons of which I shall never forget."

I rarely ever heard him preach without pain. My anxiety to get every thought caused me to severely tax the faculty of attention, and his thoughts were so mighty, and my effort of mind so great to grasp and retain them, that it greatly excited and worried my mind and an intense head ache was the result. But I cared nothing for the painful tarrif I paid and would go again and again.[\[9\]](#)

The average audience would experience much greater pain and would probably be much less willing to invest such a high tarrif.

## Edwardsean

Manly could also be classified as an Edwardsean, not in the sense of the early nineteenth century New England theologians by that name, but in the real sense of Jonathan Edwards. Baptists in the South followed the teachings of Jonathan Edwards much more closely than did Jonathan Edwards, Jr., Timothy Dwight, and Samuel Hopkins. Mell, Mallary, Mercer, W. B. Johnson, John L. Dagg and others found a coherent framework for their theology in the mighty thoughts of the great theologian of the First Great Awakening. Three prominent ideas stated in a distinctive Edwardsean style were (1) the definition of freedom as it relates to the so-called will; (2) the necessity of distinguishing between natural ability (or inability) and moral ability (or inability); and (3) that personal religion consists most prominently in sanctified religious affections.

In Manly's preaching, these ideas are not exceptional and clandestine, but characteristic and clear. While these same thoughts could be the result of conversance with the writings of Andrew Fuller, since many Baptists in the South read him, in Manly's case his acquaintance with Edwards was direct. In Feb., 1830, Thomas Screven gave Manly a gift of books from the library of Oliver Hart, a former pastor of the Charleston church, the father of the Charleston Association, and Screven's maternal grandfather. Among the volumes Manly retained (the others were sent to Furman Academy) were volumes by John Owen, Richard Baxter, John Gill [*The Cause of God and Truth*], John Brine, Isaac Backus, one entitled *Anti-paedo Rantism* by Abel Morgan, and one he lists simply as "Edwards Against Chauncy." In this polemic with Chauncy, Edwards developed his view of religious affections. In the climax of one of Manly's "reflections," he parenthetically noted "(President Edwards' meditation)." Probably he would either read, summarize, or extemporize one of Edwards' lovely meditations concerning the complacency of God's love for the Son and the Son for the Father. In 1844, writing to Basil Manly, Jr., he remarked "Edwards on the Nature of Virtue I have laid by to read."

His familiarity with Edwards on the will can be clearly deduced from the following:

What is moral freedom of will? We can give no better definition, than that a man is always at liberty to do that which he thinks, on the whole, to be best. That a man should be just as capable of doing, and as free to do, what he thinks not best, is no notion of freedom at all. It is an absurdity. It is necessary that he should be inclined, by his constitution, to do that which, (all things taken together,) seems to him, at the moment of choice, best; and, if not,--he would not be a free moral agent.[\[10\]](#)

Manly's absorption of Edwards' view of the relation of the affections to true knowledge and faith governs the entire structure of the sermon "To know God is Eternal Life" preached in July, 1831, just more than a year after he added "Edwards against Chauncy" to his library. Spiritual knowledge implies "light in understanding and approbation in the heart." And more particularly to know the true God "is to know him so as to approve, choose, love, and obey Him--to perceive all those qualities of moral excellence and beauty in Him, which gain the assent of the will, & of the affections."

Manly's employment of the Edwardsean distinction between the "natural" and "moral" aspects of human nature pop up many places in his sermons and addresses. In a discussion on reprobation Manly argues,

But objectors forget that this is the sense in which they suppose God has reprobated all mankind, themselves included; i.e. determined to leave them to their own free choice. There is no other reprobation taught in the Scriptures; none which destroys human liberty or impairs the sinner's natural power, which limits the offers of mercy or bars the gates of Heaven against any man who is disposed to enter; and there is no impediment to salvation, of any kind, but the want of a right inclination.[\[11\]](#)

This concept he employed in preaching. Reflecting at the close of one of his sermons Manly implores, "Let none think to insure himself from the guilt of neglecting the present case of his soul, on the ground that he may not be embraced in the special prayer of XT." After an expository and theological enforcement of that thought, Manly continues, "And what does conscience testify? Has not God oft striven with thee? Hast thou not resisted? Though some who have resisted have afterward been conquered and overcome, you are not sure it will fare thus with you. But you are sure that coming now in obedience to the drawings of the spirit you will find a welcome and be safe. Why do you not come? Is it not plainly, because you like it not."[\[12\]](#)

Manly even gave precise definition to the aspects of one's natural capacities which established true moral agency. "We are left...in full possession of all that is necessary to moral agency." "These three things," he continues, "are the essentials to moral agency; understanding, to comprehend the nature of the action; conscience, to appreciate its moral quality; and will, to apprehend motives and choose freely." To Manly it was clear that none of these was taken away or hindered by God's operation of grace and thus "the agent is fully a moral agent."[\[13\]](#)

## Practice

Manly's theology, along with that of all his contemporaries was experiential and evangelistic. Boyce reminds us of this when he writes, "The holding these doctrines of grace has been thought by many inconsistent with the preaching of the gospel to all men. Certainly Dr. Manly felt no such inconsistency; on the contrary no one could preach the Gospel more freely than he. No one ever urged sinners more earnestly and successfully to believe in Christ as their Savior. No one felt more than he the duty to give to every man a message, as sent from God to him."[\[14\]](#) Samuel Henderson makes the same observation:

Those who are accustomed to urge the trite objection to these doctrines, that they paralyze Christian activity and lead to licentiousness, we can triumphantly point to the ministerial usefulness and personal piety of him whose memory is so dear to us all, for its refutation. Profoundly as he had investigated these high questions, (and certainly he was as competent to look into them as any of his brethren,) he saw nothing in them but what served to fire his zeal and stimulate the growth of piety in his own soul. It was *because* God had said that His "word should not return unto Him void," that he was encouraged to preach it--it was *because* "God worketh in him to will and to do," that he was

encouraged to "work out his own salvation"--it was *because* "the increase was of God," that he was encouraged to "plant" and to "water" the heavenly seed.[\[15\]](#)

Manly himself is very specific in applying the principle that God's decree determines that the appropriate means be used. In the same way that knowledge, though not piety itself, is necessary for the growth of piety, and truth, though not efficacious for sanctification in its bare presentation, is, nevertheless, a fitting and necessary means in the hands of the Spirit for sanctification, even so, though human activity is not efficacious in the conversion of sinners the preaching of the gospel is both fitting and necessary for the conversion of sinners. In his sermon on "Christ's Prayer that the Saints be Kept," Manly argues, "His cause requires the labour of our hands. The salvation of a world hangs instrumentally on us." The world does not know this and may be "disgusted with [Christians],...hate them...and if it should conclude it could spare them, would perish in the privation." He continues to enforce this point:

The Lord might have employed angels or the spirits of the just in this work--but he has chosen his people, his living disciples only for it. If they do it not it will never be done. The Lord has gone into heaven and they must now go everywhere preaching.

Manly's style of preaching bulges with this interpenetration of doctrine with experience. While engaged in even the most involved and delicate doctrinal peroration, his passion centered on application of the teaching to the experience of the hearer. Each sermon closed with a series of "Reflections." Each of these reflections reconstituted some element of the argument within an applicatory framework. Usually some encouragements and admonitions were given to Christians, some doctrinal idea was set within its transcendent context to push the hearer beyond the boundaries of time and creation into the presence of the eternally blessed God. Even the ordering of the "Reflections" was designed to leave his congregation considering the claims of the message of their hearts.

At the close of his message "Christ Pleading the Completion of His Work", Manly lists reflection number three: "It is finished--God is glorified--O Sinner! thou mayst be saved." The manuscript leaves us to imagine how Manly would extemporize on such a magnificent reality. Perhaps this was one of those "bubbling fountains of more than ordinary interest and promise" which Manly would not exhaust in his study. He would "cork up" the thought and, when he came to his sermon would "uncork it and just let the fountain flow."[\[16\]](#)

Not just in sermon but in life were these applications made. If Christ could plead with his Father with such pastoral solicitation for the fulfillment of a thing certain to be, then Manly certainly must plead in prayer to the Father. Manly's deep pastoral sensitivity received particular note from Thomas Summers, a Methodist Episcopal pastor in Charleston who had met with Manly for prayer on several occasions. Manly's prayers were like a man talking with his friend, or rather like a child to his father. There was a "wonderful simplicity, and fulness, and variety, and pathos, and power" in his prayers. At the funeral of Summers' daughter Manly prayed "Such a prayer I never heard before or since." It was "marvelously full of sympathy, and submission, and faith, and hope, singularly adapted to the mournful occasion and very soothing to the stricken heart."[\[17\]](#) His loss of two children, a boy a few months old and a girl still-born at four months, doubtless increased his sympathy on this occasion.

Manly's pastoral and evangelistic concerns would not allow him to join in the increasing tendency he detected in his day to use "new measures" in evangelism. When Manly engaged in evangelistic exhortation following a sermon by James Furman, "It was agreed immediately to go home and spend time in our closets."[\[18\]](#) Another entry into his diary paints this scene: "As many as felt disposed remained behind after dismissal according to an intimation from the pulpit to that effect--And it was a most solemn season. We have since learned that during prayer one young man (James Du Pres, Jr.) seems to have emerged into the light and liberty of God's children." On a Tuesday afternoon, "A meeting for inquirers was appointed...at my house." And this, "When the congregation was dismissed many staid

behind and engaged in prayer & conversation." An inquirers meeting in the lecture room Manly describes this way:

Tuesday evening--One of the most solemn meetings I have ever seen was held in our lecture Room by our own people--being our stated service there. Toward the close of the meeting, when the feeling of the Assembly was peculiarly solemn, they were called on to decide whether they would make the subject of religion their immediate concern or whether they would put it off longer & run the hazard involved in a hateful refusal of Xt.--A few moments were given them for deliberation, during which the brethren and sisters fell on their knees & silently wrestled with God a short time. After that, I prayed. When risen from our knees, the question was put in a solemn manner, & those who had come to the resolution to begin at once the work of returning to God, were called on to rise.

Several rose--and those who had not risen, were affectionately exhorted to beg of God to allow them to reconsider their fatal decision.

This resolution was not mistaken for an act of repentance and faith but a recognition of the need to pursue God if they were to find him. This was Manly's practice of the Puritan doctrine of seeking.

In 1822 Manly baptized 146 at Edgefield Court House. At the close of a wedding he performed in November of that year he records that "eternal things had taken hold of their minds. Even the bride wept profusely." Then as he was looking for an appropriate hymn with which to close a number of young people, "all dressed in their finest for the wedding, rushed up as if unable longer to restrain, and, in a flood of grief, *fell down* before me, and begged me to pray for them."[\[19\]](#)

During his days in Charleston, however, Manly began to observe the intrusion of "new measures" caused by the shift in evangelistic theology and methodology under the powerful influence of Charles Finney. Manly's first reaction to this was cautious but grew into alarm and a persevering warning against the utilization of those methods. His great desire for purity in evangelism can be seen in the unusual contact he had in Charleston with Asahel Nettleton. Nettleton, one of the best known and most effective evangelists in New England during the first three decades of the nineteenth century ("the respected promoter of revivals in the northern states" as Manly called him) had been involved in an ongoing dispute with Finney over the use of new measures. In 1830 he came to Charleston and Manly sought to visit with him, but due to schedule conflicts was unable to do so.[\[20\]](#) Manly summarizes the reports he received of Nettleton: "His methods are peculiar and it is said that tho' he takes a great deal of pains to disclaim the idea of being able to do anything, there seems to be an affectation of singularity for the sake of effect, and an air of self-sufficiency about him." With this information, Manly felt free to observe, "I believe that an unbiased and discerning mind would not fail to be impressed that those motives & sentiments lurk in his bosom, perhaps unknown in some measure to himself." If Manly were so careful about even Asahel Nettleton, it is no wonder that he recoiled at what he saw when he began to observe the legacy of C.G. Finney.

When the new measures were used in a meeting in the Episcopal church, Manly's review was mixed. One of the preachers he considered to be "a man of very common means" who would "settle down among the common herd" once the "edge of novelty wears away." In another he found "much to approve" but some things in the "manner of stating truth to condemn." He queried, "How would you like his stating that the obstinate sinner drove the Almighty away from him grieved, *disappointed, defeated!*" The result of the new measures would be to split the Episcopalians, Manly surmised.

In 1844, when Manly became aware that a protracted meeting had resulted in the reception to membership of a man who "had been twice excommunicated for gross immorality" and only a few days before he was admitted he was at

the meeting "drunk, cursing the church, & old Mr. Hood!!," he could only remark painfully, "It is easy to see whither these things tend."[\[21\]](#)

The previous year Manly had warned of this dangerous procedure. "Great care should be taken in ascertaining that a real change of heart has been effected, and that the feelings of the candidates do not arise from some high wrought excitement which will pass off and leave them worse than before," he warned. The lust for great numbers and making a great show and "parade of converts which *we* have made" creates such carelessness and has the tendency to make the church "a harlot" by "opening the door of admission so wide as to allow unbelievers, unconverted, and graceless persons to crowd into it without restraint." This will end in harming the living members, compromising the purity of the church, and creating a group who joined under "transient excitements" but during a time of winnowing will tread the Son of God under foot, and become so hardened in conscience that no voice will reach them. "How much these remarks apply," Manly continued, "to the mode of admitting members common among us in seasons of excitement, let the churches judge."[\[22\]](#)

The methods designed to create such excitements Manly found both disturbing and unbiblical. Applying 1 Corinthians 14 directly to what he observed, he felt that the simultaneous practice of singing, praying, and exhortation (sometimes more than one) violated the plain letter of Scripture. "Such proceeding are not calculated to convert souls, endowed with *reason and understanding*, to Christ," Manly wrote. "It would seem rather as if we were, not ministers of Christ, but *exorcists*, and endeavoring to drive out the devil by magical incantations and strange noises." It is impossible to create understanding with one exhorting, another singing, and yet another praying, and all at the top of their voices.[\[23\]](#)

A greater trial, even, than observation of this came for Manly when his brethren sought to induce him to engage in it. In September, 1846, Manly preached in the churches and was urged to participate in the camp meetings in Talledega county, Alabama. His preaching awakened serious concern and inquiry in the churches but people "do not move from their seats." That, however, was the "criterion of good effects these days." He observed that preachers who would not "say as much of heart awakening and instruction in truth in a whole sermon" as Manly would say "in five sentences," and not even so clearly or pungently as to manner, would nevertheless raise a "perfect storm of passions" and have people around them in heaps apparently under conviction of sin.

Haunted by thoughts that he had outlived his age (and this 22 years before he died), or that the Lord was to lay him aside as a useless laborer, Manly resolutely determined that he "could not fall in with" their methods, though fellow preachers urged him; and even if he were sure that people would be brought to the front by an urgent appeal of his, he would "be little inclined to make such appeals, for such a purpose." He had experienced spontaneous movements of people to come to the front for counsel and prayer, which he called a "blessed season of tenderness and grace." In allowing this he explained fully what inquirers could expect from such an act but he "never stood urging--nor used any artifice...in my whole life."

Even with this conscientious resistance to the developing artifices of the day, Manly had no desire to be a hindrance to the earnest efforts of others. "You tell me," he wrote his wife, "that I have a chilling and repressive look and manner when I am not pleased." He was not aware of this but supposed that it must be so. "I desire not to offend against the generation of God's children. I would absent myself sooner than hinder the least particle of good to anyone." Those with whom he disagreed in method "have been earnestly seeking the favor and blessing God, for the meeting, and they look for a great work." Manly added his desire, "The Lord grant it may be so!--A revival of pure religion and undefiled."[\[24\]](#)

## Conclusion

It is my prayer that we may find encouragement in such an example: That we follow him where he followed Christ and the truth, that we catch the passion of his vision for a God-honoring, truth-honoring, gospel-centered, theological education loyal to the faith once delivered to the saints, and add our prayer to his, that in the midst of confusion and change we might pray for a revival of pure religion and undefiled. "The Lord grant it may be so!"



<sup>1</sup>*Minutes of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1833*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>*Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Session of the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, 1844*. (Tuscaloosa: Printed by M. D. J. Slade, 1844) p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Basil Manly, Sr., *Diary*, April 11, 1849.

<sup>5</sup>"Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity: Notes of a Sermon Delivered by Rev. Basil Manly, D. D." (Tuscaloosa: Printed by M. D. J. Slade, 1849), p. 5. This quote is not from the body of the sermon itself but from the "Prefatory Remarks, Proceedings, &c."

<sup>6</sup>Basil Manly, Letter to Basil Manly, Jr., n.d.

<sup>7</sup>Henderson, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>8</sup>On this point see Manly's 1844 "Election," p. 11. He says,

If the atonement of Christ had not been sufficient for all, in case of their repentance, none could complain; since he was not under obligation to provide salvation for any. Sinners lying under just condemnation, have no claim to redemption. That the atonement is sufficient for all who repent and believe is a matter of mere grace. God has thus shown to all a disposition to be reconciled, none having the least claim; if now, he chooses to be more urgent with some than with others, does that excuse the enmity, the persevering rebellion and opposition, of any?

It is worthy of note that Manly first argues that God was under no obligation to provide atonement even for all who might repent. He seems to assume that each sinner's sin has placed him under infinite debt which God has no obligation to forgive under the force of any human contrivance. God cannot be debtor to any human activity which falls short of the perfect righteousness of the law. Even repentance does not earn God's salvific activity; it is, however, a response that is fitting for those who eventually live in the holy presence of God and will without fail be a remarkable part of their spiritual experience. Sin, by its very nature, has rendered salvation a matter of mere unalloyed grace at every possible point.

<sup>9</sup>Letter from A. E. Taliaferro, April 13, 1869 to Charles Manly.

<sup>10</sup>Basil Manly, Sr., "Divine Efficiency Consistent With Human Activity", p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Basil Manly, 1844 circular letter on Election, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Basil Manly in "Prayer for Xt People and not for the World" (August 21, 1831).

<sup>13</sup>Basil Manly, "Divine Efficiency", pp. 16, 17.

<sup>14</sup>Boyce, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>Henderson, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>Henderson, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Letter to Charles Manly from Thomas Summers, 1869.

<sup>18</sup>Basil Manly, *Diary*, May 5, 1831.

<sup>19</sup>Letter of Basil Manly printed in *Christian Index*, Nov. 28, 1867, p. 149. The letter was found by W.T. Brantley, Jr. as he rummaged around in some old manuscripts of his father. At Manly's own wedding, preached by Brantley, Sr., "religious services were preferred by the company to the entertainments common to such occasions."

<sup>20</sup>From Manly's account, it appears that Mr. Nettleton refused to visit with him when Manly paid him a call. In addition, Manly's church was involved in revival services at the same time that Nettleton was preaching in the evening, so Manly could not hear him preach. This is a profound irony since their purpose and content in preaching were so similar and their concerns about generating spurious professions coincided precisely. Manly records that Nettleton was upset that no one had attempted to call on him, the very thing that Manly had attempted, and publicly "said that there was no religion in Charleston - intimated strongly that ministers and people were all in fault - and as I have understood from several has now left the city in disgust - **AMEN** - say I. And so may all leave it, who behave like him."

<sup>21</sup>Basil Manly, Letter to Basil Manly, Jr., Oct 15, 1844.

<sup>22</sup>Basil Manly, Sr., "Discipline," p. 180.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 180, 181.

<sup>24</sup>Basil Manly, Letter to his wife, Sept. 4, 1846.



# On Coming to Christ

## --Part 2--

*Ernest Reisinger*

In our last study I began to address the expression "Coming to Christ." What does the preacher mean when he says "Come to Christ"?

I pointed out four things that coming to Christ is not:

- Coming to Christ is not a physical act.
- Coming to Christ is not purely a mental act.
- Coming to Christ is not some mystical act unfounded on biblical truth.
- Coming to Christ is not merely a volitional act, such as casting a vote. Jesus does not need any votes, He is already on the throne.

## What Is Coming to Christ?

What, then, does "Coming to Christ" mean? The best way to answer this question is to state what is involved in coming to Christ:

The **first** thing involved in coming to Christ is the *recognition of a spiritual need*. This is clearly seen in some of the gracious invitations in the Bible:

Matthew 11:28, 29: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Notice the invitation is to those who are weary and heavy laden, indicating that they have a need. Jesus is not offering a literal yoke, He is offering soul rest--"you will find rest for your souls"--a spiritual need.

Isaiah 55:1: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Here the invitation is to thirsty souls--which indicates the recognition of a spiritual need.

Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

The last invitation in the Bible is to those who want water, that is, thirsty people--people who recognize their spiritual need.

The **second** thing involved in coming to Christ is *a revelation of Christ to the heart as the only One suitable to meet that need*. Christ must be revealed to the heart by the Holy Spirit.

I have been asked more than once--What is the greatest problem of Sunday Morning Christianity? My answer is this: "A host of people who gather at the 11 o'clock hour are trying to worship an unrevealed Christ." Christ must be revealed to the heart by the Word and the Spirit.

Let me underscore this with a few biblical texts:

Matthew 16:13-17: "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered; and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not *revealed* this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" Christ had to be revealed supernaturally to Peter.

Galatians 1:15, 16: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to *reveal* His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Christ was revealed to Paul.

Matthew 2:11: "And when they (the wise men) were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him, . . ." Did that little baby, to human eyes, look like a God to be worshipped? Christ had to be revealed to their hearts by the Spirit.

The second thing involved, then, in coming to Christ is: Christ must be revealed by the Holy Spirit. A supernatural revelation--Christianity is a supernatural religion.

The **third** thing involved in coming to Christ is a *commitment to Him without reservation as the only one who can meet that need*. Anything less than that makes one a stranger to Christ and true saving religion.

Ah! But, when one recognizes a spiritual need, and Christ is revealed to the heart as the only one who can meet that need, resulting in a commitment to Christ without reservation, such a one will have (1) something to confess, (2) a desire to confess Him, and (3) joy in confessing Him. This truth should help explain why we must not equate walking an aisle with coming to Christ.

## **Dangers and Errors of the Invitation System**

The "Invitation System" is attended by various dangers and errors. The emphasis of this statement is on the word "System". I did not say an invitation. If preachers do not invite sinners to Christ they should leave the ministry. There is a world of difference between biblical invitations and the *Invitation System*.

1. By failing to make the invitation clear, preachers have unwittingly instituted a *system*, or a condition of salvation which is not only not found in the Bible, neither was such ever practiced or approved by Christ or his apostles. Public confession is not a condition of salvation, but a result of salvation.
2. The call to come forward is not a divine command. It is a man-made command. Many times those who do go forward are led to believe that they did something commendable to God. Coming forward is not something

that God has commanded. I have even heard people being thanked for coming forward, while those who do not go forward are falsely supposed to be disobeying God. But God never commanded such a thing--nor is there any record of it in all the Bible--or in the early church.

This *system* produces false assurance. "Now that I have gone forward I am saved." How many times have I heard this! This is not the biblical ground of assurance. This system also often produces false guilt in those who do not go forward.

3. There is a third danger of equating coming to Christ and coming to the front of the church. It tends to mislead people. One often hears such expressions as: "He went forward to get saved.", or "If they would have sung one more verse I would have responded to the invitation.", or "I could not wait to get back to the meeting the next night to get saved." I have heard this more than once. It is a commentary on what is being conveyed.

I had a deacon tell me that sinners would come to Christ if I would choose a different kind of invitation hymn.

Does the Holy Spirit leave when the last hymn is sung? I hope not! If so, I will give up preaching and Christianity. Spurgeon said, "Go home alone. A wounded stag likes to bleed alone."

I John 2:23 states, "And this is His commandment that you believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." This is not a physical act. You can do that in your seat without moving an eye.

4. The fourth danger of the invitation *system* is the unavoidable confusion of conscience of those who did not go forward when invited to do so by the preacher. They are often left under the impression that they have rebelled against God when in truth they have not rebelled at all.

This false notion of equating coming forward and coming to Christ has produced the greatest record of false statistics that has ever been compiled by church or business! This system is responsible for these false statistics. It falsifies the role of the preacher or the evangelist. "Does he get decisions?" "How many decisions were there in the meeting?"

5. Another error spawned by this *system* is the misrepresentation of faith. Faith is represented as something to be done in order to salvation. I am jealous for "by grace alone," not by some physical act. I want to sing "Amazing Grace," not "Amazing Decision" (to go forward)!

Who can explain what faith is? This is not the preacher's job. The preacher's aim is to set forth the object of faith which is Jesus Christ. The preacher is not called by God to explain the act of faith.

## **The Example of Jesus Christ**

Let us consider our Lord's first invitation--and I would to God that all preachers and evangelists would pattern after Him.

Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Let me underscore the context of this particular invitation. Jesus Christ was addressing these words to the people of

Capernaum where He had often preached and done mighty works--where He had uttered the mournful woes of the law (as in Matthew 11:23), "And thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." Jesus was clearly speaking in a place where He and His preaching were rejected (Cf. Matthew 11:20ff). What did He do in this place under these circumstances?? Note three things:

1. (verse 25) *He offered a prayer.* "And at that time Jesus answered and said, `I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.'" Again, note the emphasis on the word revealed. Luke's account says, "He rejoiced in spirit."
2. (verse 27) *He made a tremendous claim regarding the sovereignty of God.* "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."
3. (verses 28-30) *He extended an invitation.* "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." He was not asking for physical response. Please note those words, "learn of Me."

The gospel is often represented as something to be learned. Therefore, sinners must be taught. In our Lord's invitation (Matthew 11:28,29) the great master teacher said, "learn of Me."

Our Lord made this very clear in the great commission. We learn the same thing from His example as we find it in the gospel and in His instructions. Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations. . ."; and again in Matthew 28:20: "*teaching* them. . ." He did not say "decision" them, but "*teach*" them. "He went round the villages, "*teaching*" (Mark 6:6). "And Jesus....was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). What did he do? Call for decisions? No! No! He began to *teach* them. "And Jesus went about all Galilee *teaching* and preaching" (Matthew 4:23).

See our Lord after the resurrection on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24). What did he do? He opened the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27). He opened their understanding (Luke 24:16, 31, 45). From the very first verse in the book of Acts we learn our Lord's method of evangelizing. Acts. 1:1 ". . .all that Jesus began to do and *teach*."

He never made a direct appeal to the emotions or the will before He instructed their minds.

This is a lesson many preachers and evangelists need to learn. The direct appeal must be first to the mind and the understanding. Then, through the *mind* and the *understanding*, we appeal to the *affections* and the *will*. The gospel is a message that contains information and, therefore, must be communicated by definable words. The gospel contains information and needs explanation and application by word and power. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. . ." (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

## **The Sacred Manual of Evangelism**

Now, to Acts, the sacred manual for evangelism, where we find the apostles used the same method:

Acts 5:21: ". . .they entered into the temple early in the morning, and *taught*."

Acts 5:25: We find them standing in the temple evangelizing. What was their method? "*Teaching*

the people."

Acts 5:28: How were they evangelizing Jerusalem? ". . .ye have filled Jerusalem with your *teaching*."

Acts 11:26: Paul and Barnabas were evangelizing Antioch for a whole year. What was their method? "For a whole year at Antioch Paul and Barnabas *taught* much people." (Please note: There is not one mention of decisioning people here or in the whole Book of Acts.)

Acts 14:21: At Derbe they used the same method--preaching and *teaching*--make disciples. (You make disciples by teaching them.)

Acts 15:35: Again, they used the same method--*teaching* and preaching.

Acts 18:11: Paul labored at Corinth for one year and six months evangelizing. How? "And he continued there a year and six months *teaching* the Word of God among them."

Acts 8: We have an example of personal evangelism from the sacred manual of evangelism. Philip was evangelizing the Ethiopian treasurer. Please note his method and the total absence of *decisionism*. Yes, there was a *decision*, but not *decisionism*. Philip *explained* the Scriptures! That was the method our Lord used, Peter used, and Paul used--*teaching*, instructing the mind. Then came the decision to confess by baptism what he had embraced from the heart. His mind was instructed, his affections were moved toward Christ, and his will responded to the truth that came to his mind and heart.

The great apostle told young Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). How did he tell him to do it? Not by going around getting men to decide they know not what. Yes, there is a decision involved. But, Paul told him the God-centered method (2 Timothy 2:2): "And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to *teach* others also."

Timothy knew how he himself had come to salvation: "And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). He was *taught* the Holy Scriptures.

We learn our methods from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19): "Go ye therefore and *teach* all nations. . ." The word *teach* in our King James version is also rendered more accurately *make disciples*, which is more of a reference to the product than the method of producing. However, the method of producing disciples is *teaching*.

My continued appeal is to our Lord's method and the apostolic method as we find it in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. It would be wonderful if all who are engaged in evangelism would just open their Bibles to Acts and study it with some important questions in mind as to its content.

1. What was the apostles' message ?(Study their sermons and their conversations with the unconverted for the answer.)
2. What was their method in dealing with the unconverted?

An honest man with an open Bible will discover some things regarding the apostles' presentation of Jesus Christ to sinful men. They presented Christ in such a way that through the power of the Holy Spirit sinners might be reconciled to God through Christ. They taught the gospel so that sinners might come to receive Christ as their Savior from sin and its consequences, and to serve Him in the fellowship of his church.

## **Gospel Invitations Are Extended to All**

Gospel invitations, though extended to all, are varied:

1. Men who are enemies of God are invited:  
". . . be ye reconciled to God. . ."
2. Men whose hearts are harder than stone are invited:  
He will "take away their stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh."
3. Men who are dancing gaily, or rushing madly along the way that leads to death are invited:  
He calls them to turn--"Turn ye, turn ye, for why will you die."
4. Men who are sleeping the sleep of death are invited:  
He calls, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead. I will give you life."
5. Men who are hungering with a craving hunger are invited: He tells them of the bread that came down from heaven.  
"Come and eat. . ."
6. Men who are thirsty are invited:  
He calls them to the water of life so that they will never thirst again.

"Come unto Me"--where is He? He is not at some geographical place. Where is He? He is closer to you than the front of a church. He is closer to you than the tip of your fingers. He is at your heart's door--your inner most being. He is wherever there is a tear of repentance, or a sigh of godly sorrow. He is there.

Wherever there is an earnest prayer--He is there. Wherever there is a sincere desire to pray--there is Jesus. He is where you are--ready, able and willing to say "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

## **The Necessity of Coming to Christ Now**

Come, like the poor Syrophenician woman--in humility. All she wanted was crumbs that fell from the table--a picture of humility. He is there.

Come, crying like poor blind Bartimaeus--"Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." They said to him, "Be of good comfort, rise! He calleth for thee." He threw off his cloak so that nothing would hinder him--all he wanted was to receive his sight. And he heard Jesus say, "Go thy way; your faith has made you whole."

I want to invite any and all who read these words to come. Yes, if you have fallen out of the way--I invite you to come. Come to Christ.

I love that word "Come." To me it seems full of grace, mercy and encouragement. "Come now," says the Lord in Isaiah, "and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."

Come is the last word in the Bible to sinners. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." Come is a word of merciful invitation. It seems to say, "I want you to escape the wrath to come. I am not willing that any should perish. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. So, come to Me."

Come is a word of gracious expectation. It seems to say, "I am here waiting for you. I sit on my mercy-seat expecting you to come. I wait to be gracious. So come to Me."

Come is a word of kind encouragement. It seems to say, I have got treasures to bestow if you will only receive them. So come to Me.

My dear friends, I ask you to hear these words and lay them to heart. I plead on behalf of my Master. I am writing as an ambassador. I ask you to come and be reconciled to God.

I ask you to come with all your sins, however many they may be. If you come to Him they will be taken away. If you wait, the opportunity will pass, the door of mercy will be shut, and you will die in your sins. Come now. Come to Jesus Christ now.

You may come to church, and come to the communion table, and come to the minister, and yet never be saved. The one thing needed is the actual coming to the Savior, actual coming to the Fountain, actual washing in the blood of atonement. Except you do this, you will die in your sins. Joseph Hart said it well in this hymn:

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched, Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you, Full of pity joined with power:  
He is able, He is able, He is able,  
He is willing doubt no more.

Come, ye needy, come and welcome, God's free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance, Every grace that brings you nigh,  
Without money, Without money, Without money,  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden, Bruised and broken by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better, You will never come at all:  
Not the righteous, Not the righteous, Not the righteous--  
Sinners, Jesus came to call.

Let not conscience make you linger, Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth Is to feel your need of him;  
This he gives you, This he gives you, This he gives you;  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Lo! th' incarnate God, ascended, Pleads the merit of his blood;  
Venture on him, venture wholly, Let no other trust intrude:  
None but Jesus, None but Jesus, None but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good.



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# Repentance & Faith

We march to heaven on two feet. The one foot is called 'repentance' and the other foot is called 'faith.' Because I believe I repent about a certain sin, habit or attitude. Because I repent I return to learn more for my faith. My faith leads me to do more repentance. Left, right, left, right--one foot forward, then the other--faith and repentance, faith and repentance. This is well illustrated in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In that allegory Christian repented because the City of Destruction was so bad. He thought again and then read his Bible. That led to faith. Then faith led to repentance which this time led him to leave the City of Destruction. With these two feet of repentance and faith Christian marched forward until he came to the cross and had his sins removed. After than he went forward to the heavenly city, repenting and believing all the way.

One major mistake to avoid is the idea that a certain amount of repentance has to be stored up before a person can believe in Christ outright, once and for all, for salvation. No! The warrant of faith for salvation is God's command: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). If you give way to the notion that a certain amount of repentance must be present before you can have saving faith, where will that end? Who can possibly tell whether you have done enough rethinking or whether there is enough sorrow attached to your 'afterthinking' or repentance about sin? If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he is able and willing to forgive you and change you, then that in itself is repentance quite adequate for you to commit yourself to Christ wholly by faith.

--Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation* (England: Evangelical Press, 1986), p. 58.



# News

## 1996 Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference

The dates for the 1996 Founders YOUTH Conference have been changed to Monday, June 17 - Friday, June 21. The venue is once again Panama City Beach. Pastors Bill and Tom Ascol will speak on the theme, "The Holy War." For more information call (318) 798-7088.

## Mission 150 Report

Over 59,000 copies of the special SBC sesquicentennial issue of the *Founders Journal* have been distributed. Baptist Press articles have been written about it, letters to various state papers have discussed it, and it has even been cited in various national and international publications. Churches have ordered extra copies for leadership and members (one Georgia church ordered 100 copies exclusively for the adult Sunday School leadership). Several hundred letters and phone calls have been generated by the journal. Subscriptions have jumped to over 1000. The tremendous response reflects a growing renewal of the doctrinal heritage of Southern Baptists. Pray that God will continue to fan these flames into a widespread reformation and revival within the SBC.

## Midwestern Baptist Seminary Gets New Personnel

Mark Coppenger began his duties as President of Midwestern Baptists Theological Seminary in Kansas City, KS on August 1. He is the third new Southern Baptist seminary president to be elected in the last 2 years (the other two are Al Mohler at Southern and Ken Hemphill at Southwestern). This truly marks a new day for Southern Baptist theological education in general and for Midwestern in particular. In addition to Dr. Coppenger, Don Whitney has just recently been elected to the faculty as professor of spiritual formations. This move greatly strengthens an already strong theology faculty. All Bible believing Southern Baptists will rejoice over the new direction and bright prospects which these moves bring to the seminary in Kansas City. The trustees are to be commended for their foresight.

## Historic Southern Baptist Church Planted in Pensacola

With a strong commitment to the doctrines of grace, a small group of Southern Baptists have recently begun a new work in Pensacola, Florida. "Those of us who desire to see the recovery of biblical truth among Southern Baptists should really give more emphasis to planting new churches," says Bill Lollar, the founding pastor of Grace Heritage Baptist Mission. The church started this past April with eleven persons (two families) and is now reaching twenty-five persons (eight families). What began as a house church has developed into a group whose size is now more easily accommodated by a local motel conference facility.

Grace Heritage Baptist Mission is operating under the official sponsorship of a local SBC church whose pastor shares their doctrinal distinctives. The mission is not currently receiving regular financial support from its sponsoring church or the Florida Baptist Convention. As a bivocational pastor, Pastor Lollar must struggle to divide his time between a 50-hour secular work week, sermon preparation, pastoral ministry, and family life. He also serves as the Graphic Design Editor for the *Founders Journal*.

Pray for Pastor Lollar and this congregation as they move forward in planting a church for God's Glory in Pensacola.

You may contact him via email at [74463.701@compuserve.com](mailto:74463.701@compuserve.com) or by phone at (904) 455-1969. The church mailing address is: P. O. Box 6264, Pensacola, FL 32503.

## 1995 Founders Conference Report

The 1995 Founders Conference was held in Birmingham during the last week of July. Under the theme, *A Heritage for the Future--The SBC, 1845-1995*, attention was given to the sesquicentennial of the convention. An unusually large number of historical addresses were presented, highlighted by Dr. Al Mohler's "Theological Biography of the SBC." The young President of The Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY described the four generations that have shaped Southern Baptist life. His masterful analysis provided a clear call to return to the theological vitality of the denomination's founders. Dr. Mohler also spoke on "James Boyce and Theological Education in the SBC." May Boyce's vision be revived in our day!

Dr. Mark Coppenger, newly elected President of Midwestern Baptist Seminary in Kansas City, KS, presented a revealing study of the history of Southern Baptist preaching. His title tells the story in a nutshell: "The Ascent of Man in Southern Baptist Preaching." Through the use of confessions and potent sermon excerpts, Dr. Coppenger portrayed the death of the Augustinian and rise of Pelagian views of man in Southern Baptist life. The resulting portrait was not a pretty sight! If anyone doubts the inroads which humanism has made into Southern Baptist theology, he should listen to the tape of this message.

Bill Ascol, pastor of the Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport, LA, described the theological convictions of several of the early SBC presidents. It is most telling to see the kind of men which early Southern Baptists chose to lead them during the first 50 years of their existence. As Pastor Ascol demonstrated, these men were evangelical Calvinists whose views shaped the early life of the convention.

The conference welcomed back after ten years Mark Dever. Dr Dever recently became pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. after spending several years ministering and earning a Ph.D. at Cambridge. He spoke on "Justification by Faith" and on "The Value of the Puritans." Both subjects were presented in an engaging style that was full of application.

Though all of the messages were of a consistently high caliber, two others deserve special mention. Dr. Don Whitney, former pastor of Glenfield Baptist Church in Glen Ellyn, IL and newly elected professor of spiritual formations at Midwestern Seminary, preached a searching sermon on "The Fields Are White Unto Harvest" (the first time he has ever been asked to speak on only a portion of a verse!) in which he challenged the "not now" mentality that so easily creeps into a church. Today is the day for evangelism.

Tom Nettles followed up on that theme in his message on the "Universality of the Gospel." Drawing on Acts 17, Dr. Nettles, chairman of the history department at Trinity Divinity School in Deerfield, IL, exploded all doubts about the need to preach the gospel to all people. Never has a more powerful sermon been preached on this subject at the conference. The history professor is first and foremost a preacher!

Other speakers include Drs. Timothy George, Walter Johnson, Fred Malone and Tom Ascol. In the opinion of several long-time participants, this year's conference, despite its heavy emphasis on history, was the "best ever." Over 270 registered-including over half who attended for the first time. A large percentage of these were young pastors and ministerial students, a fact which holds great promise for the future.

Next year's conference is scheduled for July 23-26. Geoff Thomas, the Baptist pastor from Aberystwyth, Wales, will be the featured speaker and the topic will be "The Doctrines of Grace" (DV). For more information contact the Founders Conference Secretary at the address in this journal.



# Book Review

*The Openness of God. A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, David Basinger; Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1994. 202 pp. Paperback \$14.99.

Reviewed by [Dr. Roger Nicole](#)

This volume constitutes a frontal attack on the Reformed conception of God as expressed in its confessions of faith and in its orthodox theologians. It also challenges the Lutheran view, particularly Luther's and the Missouri Synod's; the evangelical Arminian position, advocated in multifarious denominations; the traditional Roman Catholic view, notably Augustine's and his followers; the Eastern Orthodox position; not to speak of some non-Christian religions, notably Islam. One could not, therefore, fault the authors for lacking courage, not to speak of audacity.

The attack is carried on a five-fold front as follows:

Richard Rice	Biblical Support
John Sanders	Historical Considerations
Clark Pinnock	Systematic Theology
William Hasker	Philosophical Perspective
David Basinger	Practical Implications

It may be noted that only the first chapter corresponds to the subtitle, "A Biblical Challenge to the traditional understanding of God." After that only Pinnock has some Biblical references (13) in this text, and I discovered none in the footnotes, except one reference of Sanders to Philo's view of Ex. 3:14, which he rejects. The Biblical underpinning of these four chapters and the 309 footnotes that document them is surely paltry.

The basic contention of the book can be best displayed in the form of contrasting columns.

## **Traditional Reformed View**

God is sovereign and controls everything in the created world, including the actions of responsible agents.

God's power embraces the whole universe, yet not so as to do "violence to the will of the creatures."

God's knowledge embraces all things possible, and specifically all that comes to pass. It includes eternal knowledge of the future actions and decisions of free agents.

God has an eternal plan which will surely come to pass. For Him there is no surprise and no disappointment.

## **Openness View**

God's sovereignty has been self-limited by virtue of the creation of free agents.

God's power stops where human will begins and God Himself has established this self-limitation.

God's knowledge is self-limited, because foreknowledge of the actions of free agents would evidence that they are not free.

God's plan has a multitude of blanks due to the unforeseen actions or decisions of free agents, God's greatness is manifest in that He is

Predictive prophecy is based on God's exhaustive knowledge and will certainly be realized.

God's plan is immutable even as God's nature. Therefore expressions that speak of God repenting must be seen as metaphorical.

The power of prayer is viewed as a second cause important in the fulfillment of God's design, even as other second causes are instrumental in this way. Prayer changes things, but it does not change God's mind.

God is impassable in the sense that He is not, as human beings, susceptible to the upheaval of emotions. He is not impassive, for the scripture represents Him as compassionate.

God's love, that marvelous expression of His being, cannot be interpreted in abstraction of other perfections: holiness, justice, holy loathing of sin, Satan and unredeemed rebels.

God's predestination is that gracious provision whereby, out of His goodness and mercy, he has chosen a multitude out of a sinful and rebellious race, and has appointed them to receive and accept the full benefits of His salvation, provided for them in the work of Christ and applied to them in due time by the Holy Spirit.

Those non-elected are inevitably to suffer the consequences of Adam's and their own sinful rebellion and will be forever separated from God.

able to cope with anything that turns up.

Prophecy is based on God's educated guesses as to what will happen, and it is often conditional upon some activities or decisions of free agents. This conditionality is not always expressed in connection with prophecy, promise or warning. Hence, the appearance of nonfulfillment. Cf. the history of Jonah and Nineveh.

God is constantly ready to adjust His plans to circumstances. If plan A fails, He shifts to plan B!!

Prayer is an effectual activity whereby angels and humans can function as God's counselors and change His mind.

God's being is rocked by emotions of joy and sadness. This is essential for His Trinitarian personhood.

God's love is the supreme perfection of God and all other characterizations must be envisioned, and if necessary reinterpreted, in terms of our understanding of that love.

God's predestination does not relate to individuals: it is God's blessing upon those, whoever they might be, who repent and believe on their own initiative. It is also at times God's appointment for service.

God is too merciful to keep any one in eternal torment. Those not saved will simply cease to exist.

The methodology that leads to these conclusions is radically at variance with the Reformed faith—a faith that Professor Pinnock himself embraced some 25 years ago. It may be summed up in two basic premises:

1. Nothing that appears incompatible to our reason can be accepted as true. We have no right to appeal to mystery or antinomies when we are faced with propositions which we cannot harmonize.
2. Taking a firm stand in the notion of human freedom as based on the reality of the possibility of a contrary choice,

we may proceed to understand God and His revelation only insofar as we perceive the compatibility of what we think of Him with our fundamental premise. Anything else must be ruthlessly eliminated.

Church History, of course, gives us warnings as to the impact of this methodology, for this was precisely the path followed by Pelagius and his followers. This is also the premise of the Socinians at the time of the Reformation. This is at the root of the anthropocentrism that is the common feature of liberalism. These examples should have sufficed for giving more restraint to the five authors.

The book has been the object of an interesting reaction by four scholars in the pages of *Christianity Today* (Jan. 9, 1995, pp. 30-33). One of these, Professor Roger Olson appears to me much too supportive, even though he sees a problem in a self-limiting God and in the accuracy of prophecy if God does not know the future. The other three, Prof. Douglas Kelly, Dean Timothy George and Prof. Alistair McGrath are very sharply critical.

Without repeating the strictures they have taken I wish to state the following:

1. This view ruins the reality of prophecy as well as the significance of God's promises. How could God possibly know that Judas would betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, when the payment and acceptance of such a sum were dependent upon unforeseeable decisions of the chief priests and of Judas?
2. This view makes prayer to God for the conversion of sinners to be misdirected. God can do nothing more than He has already done and the matter rests wholly with the sinners.
3. How could God envision the death of Christ before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8) when He presumably did not yet know whether Adam would fall or not?
4. How could God sincerely envision to destroy all Israel except Moses' family, of the tribe of Levi, when He had long decades before announced through Jacob a future for the 12 tribes (Genesis 49) utterly at variance with such a course?
5. How could God foresee what would happen to Jesus on earth, when it was not even certain whether he might sin or not? How could old man Simeon know more than God? Should we not take the statement of the landowner in the parable of the unworthy tenants "They will respect my son" (Mt. 21:37) as indicative of God's expectation? If not, why are we permitted to take this passage metaphorically?
6. In fact, I feel so confident of the clear message of the Bible that I am ready to challenge any one to read the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation within two weeks and then to come up with this idea of a self-limited God! Ps. 115:3 has expressed the impact better than I could do: "Our God is in heaven: he does whatever pleases him."
7. The proper understanding of the Reformed faith does not deny but includes the reality of the responsible decisions of rational agents, angels and humans. The fact that we do not fully comprehend how sovereignty and responsible agency relate to one another does not give us the right to deny either, or to say that one who holds one of these is obliged to deny or circumvent the other.
8. What gives the authors the right to counsel God in their prayers? What do they know that God does not know? (Is. 40:13; Rom. 11:34) Frankly I would sooner abandon the inestimable privilege of prayer than to

think that God may want to consult some people from Rochester, Riverside, Huntington, Hamilton or Bemidji, or even Orlando, in order to determine His actions.

9. While some strongly evangelical authors have at times been quoted, the statements that are supportive of this book's thesis are predominantly gathered from neo-orthodox or liberal writers whose agreement would not necessarily constitute a great asset in the mind of an evangelical reader.
10. It is not very difficult to foresee whether these people will move, if they carry out the logic of their own position. They will soon abandon the Christian doctrine of original sin, because it will be seen as incompatible with the free will of every human being entering this world (cf. Pelagius). The next logical step is to renounce substitutionary penal atonement, as has frequently happened in liberalism and even in Arminianism. When the atonement is gone there is no great need to maintain the deity of Christ, and when that is gone one usually unloads the doctrine of the Trinity. Then one is on an equal footing with Socinianism, which is the last step prior to the total demise of Christianity.

In the other direction, the allurements of Process Theology, which the present authors are eager to ward off, will undoubtedly exercise some power on their minds. When one reads this book one gets the impression time and again that some pages were written by John Hick.

11. I am not so much alarmed by the book *The Openness of God*, or the advocacy of such views by some who were giving signs of heterodoxy for some time as I am by the openness of Intervarsity Press, established to articulate and defend the evangelical faith, in publishing such a work.



# Letters

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Dear Dr. Ascol:

Since my retirement from active construction management, I have been a volunteer construction manager / builder for several church projects. Some of these projects have been in the United States and Canada. One of the most exciting projects now in progress is in Antigua in the West Indies.

In 1993, I volunteered to design and build a conference center for the Central Baptist Church, a Reformed Baptist church in St. Johns, Antigua. This 4,000 square foot project is now almost complete. The church provided the building materials, which were shipped from Miami, Florida. Volunteers from Texas as well as members of the congregation in Antigua participated in the construction.

I want to make you and those who read the *Founders Journal* aware of this project. Perhaps other historic Southern Baptist congregations have volunteers willing to participate in such construction projects. I would also be interested in contacting historic Southern Baptist churches in the United States who may need assistance with building projects.

The current construction schedule for the Central Baptist Church in Antigua is as follows:

1996 (Spring)	Interior wood trim at conference center. Install doors and bunk beds at conference center
1997	Add a two-story addition to pastor's residence
1998	Construct a two-story addition for Sunday School space at the Tyrels Baptist Church (Tyrels is a mission of Central Baptist Church).

If you know of anyone interested in these projects, please have them contact me for more information: Roy Hensley, 150 Forest Oaks, Lake Jackson, TX 77566. Phone: (409) 292-0479.

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This letter has a twofold purpose. First, I express to you and the other editors of the *Founders Journal* my profound and heartfelt appreciation of the publication, and the knowledge that others are zealous for the Reformed theology of our forefathers in Christ! I have been of this persuasion for most of my ministry, but felt that I was practically alone or in at least a small minority. Being a history major in college, I had come to these same conclusions and convictions, but was disheartened and unsure of the future of our denomination. So much, that after college, I was discouraged from attending any of our seminaries, and chose to attend Erskine Theological Seminary (Presbyterian ARP) in SC. It was there that I and other SBC Baptists found grounding for Reformed thinking. During this time, I have been the pastor of my present church for seven years, faithfully proclaiming the Reformed theology and even teaching the Shorter Catechism on Wednesday evenings (Discipleship Training) to all ages. The church has had slow but steady growth (numerically and spiritually). Our missions program has grown also, with our congregation giving 20% to the SBC, 3% to our association, 3% to world hunger, and 1% to local causes. Giving 27% to missions (rank 48 of 1,800 churches in percentage and per capita giving) clearly shows that Reformed thinking is an impetus to missions and not an impediment.

This brings me to my second purpose. I am subscribing to the journal, making plans to attend the Convention breakfast and the Founders Conference. But I need information on two pieces of literature: 1.) Is there a publication/tract of the "Abstract of Principles" for distribution and where may I obtain it?; 2.) Is there a present publication of the Baptist Catechism and Basil Manly, Jr.'s *Little Lessons for Little People*, and where may I obtain these? Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Again, thank you for the stand of the Founders, and the great crucial heritage it seeks to preserve and renew. It is my personal conviction that we need "reformation" before we need "revival". I pray that I might in some small way be a part of this return to "the faith of our fathers."

Your Servant in Christ,  
M. F., a pastor  
Pickens, SC

*A copy of the Abstract of Principles may be obtained from Southern Seminary in Louisville. It has appeared in various publications in recent years, including as an appendix to the reprinted edition of James Boyce's Abstract of Systematic Theology. The Baptist Catechism ("Spurgeon's Catechism," which is essentially the same as "Keach's Catechism") has been reprinted and is available in booklet form. The text may be downloaded free of charge from the Information Library in Forum A of SBCNet. Grace Baptist Church, 204 SW 11th Place, Cape Coral, FL 33991, has combined Scripture, hymns and 3 different Baptist Catechisms into a 3 volume set of Truth and Grace Memory Books, designed for children from the age of 2 years old through High School. Information is available on request.*

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I recently received a publication through the mail of your journal. To my amazement it was not the "typical" file 13 literature. It was so refreshing to read a publication that embraces the "Doctrines of Grace". I am a Southern Baptist minister and am currently pastoring a church in Northern Virginia. It was while I was serving as a young preacher boy in Texas that I was first introduced to the faith of the Reformers. During my early years in the ministry, I found myself more confused than certain concerning my faith and the doctrines embraced by my fellow preachers. While pastoring a rural country church, a good friend gave me a copy of a pamphlet written by Ernest Reisinger. Upon reading and understanding the doctrines "once delivered to the saints" I began to sense a foundation forming under my growing faith. To me, there is no other truth other than is set forth in the views of the early church fathers, that can truly give an understanding to biblical theology as does the views of Calvinism. It was this doctrine that gave me a clear insight into the Baptist doctrine of "once saved . . . always saved". It also made my heart to understand God's true love for me in the doctrine of election. Truly realizing and embracing the thought of my total depravity and His efficacious grace! It was this Reformed faith that made me understand my security in Christ. This doctrine of theology opened the doors to a world of literature of which I possibly never would have known. The writings of men such as Calvin, Luther, Dagg, B. B. Warfield, Loraine Boettner, Ernest Reisinger, Packer, Nettles, and countless others who have helped me understand a passage of scripture far more than the current commentators of this liberal age.

I want to take this time to express my thanks to the Lord of Lords for sending me a copy of your journal and to also send in my new subscription form.

As I mentioned, I am currently pastoring as well as a general manager for a large manufacturing firm in Virginia. I would like to request from you some information on where I might obtain some audio tapes that are products of men

who embrace the reformed faith. . . .

Sincerely,  
J. T.  
Fredericksburg, VA

*Dick Cook of Sound Word Associates has a collection of all the [taped messages](#) from the Southern Baptist Founders Conferences. He may be reached at P.O. Box 2035, Michigan City, IN 46360.*

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We are interested in receiving your publication. In these times when there is so much heat and smoke being generated in Southern Baptist dialogue, we are encouraged when we hear of someone seeking and sharing light. Many of us are unaware of our heritage, and have adopted the attitude that nothing that has occurred in the church since Acts is worthy of knowing.

Two of our sister Southern Baptist churches in our area recently received, as I understand, complimentary copies of your 1995 publication. Would you be so kind as to include us, too? We would like to read it and decide whether to subscribe. . . .

Sincerely yours in Christ's name,  
J. R.,  
Woodbridge, VA

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I didn't know you existed! Praise God! Out with the old and in with the older! We've been in this same tributary with you for the past 15 years but this is the first "voice" I've seen to come out of Baptists.

Please send 20 copies of the special issue with subscription forms for our church families.

I. S., a medical doctor and pastor  
Griffin, GA

