



Do Doctrines Really Lead to Dunghill?

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The Founders Journal

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Do Doctrines Really Lead to Dunghill?

Tom Ascol

Dr. William R. Estep's article which appeared in the March 26 *Baptist Standard* (entitled, "Doctrines Lead to `Dunghill' Prof Warns" and subsequently reprinted in other papers) is tragically flawed and bound to leave unsuspecting readers with serious misunderstandings about our Baptist heritage, former Baptist leaders, and the theological renewal which has begun to take hold in many Southern Baptist churches. Neither the arguments set forth nor the manner in which they are presented are worthy of a Christian scholar and minister of Dr. Estep's standing. I thank the Lord for his many years of faithful service to Southern Baptists and count it a privilege to have been his student.

The article does not measure up to the standards of research which I learned in his classroom. I would never have been allowed to quote secondary and even tertiary sources when primary ones are available. Yet, this is precisely what he does when he attributes some very doubtful statements to Spurgeon. It has long been popular to misquote Spurgeon, a fact which the London preacher himself recognized when he warned the readers of his autobiography, "Not one in a hundred of the sayings that are fathered upon me are mine at all."^[1]

To suggest that the great evangelist Charles Haddon Spurgeon was not a thorough-going Calvinist is like suggesting that the Pope is less than Roman Catholic. Anyone who has read Spurgeon's sermons or his autobiography (one chapter of which is entitled, "A Defence of Calvinism") will immediately see through Dr. Estep's attempt to characterize him otherwise. Unfortunately, not everyone has had an opportunity to read Spurgeon, and it is such people who may well be misled by Dr. Estep's misrepresentation.

The premise of Dr. Estep's article is without foundation. I have never met anyone who seeks to "promote a 19th century version of Calvinism among Southern Baptists as a return to the original theology of the first English Baptists." As he later notes, the first English Baptists were Arminian. Perhaps he is referring to the discovery among a growing number of Southern Baptists that the founders of the SBC were convinced Calvinists. Great men of God like Boyce, Broadus, Manly, Mell, Howell, Johnson, Mallery were all evangelical Calvinists. Even the founder of Dr. Estep's seminary, B.H. Carroll, was not ashamed to be so designated. Now, the fact that the founders of our denomination believed in the doctrines of grace does not mean that those doctrines are true. But, if that which our 19th century forebears believed was true in their day, then it is still true today, because God has not changed, truth has not changed and the Bible has not changed.

The real question is, "Does the Bible teach salvation by the sovereign grace of God (or what has been historically nicknamed, Calvinism)?" This is a question which every Bible believing Southern Baptist ought to be willing to entertain. Surely we can talk about the biblical doctrine of salvation without resorting to misrepresentations, name calling, and caricature. It is hard to understand how anyone, especially a historian, could suggest that the Southern Baptist Convention should not be willing to have within its ranks those who believe precisely what the founders of the convention believed about salvation.

It is incredibly condescending to declare that "most of the ardent advocates of this movement have only a slight knowledge of Calvin or his system as set forth in his Institutes of the Christian Religion." Dr. Estep further betrays an elitist mentality by charging contemporary Calvinists--along with James Boyce--of embracing a theological system "without adequate research." It is not just distinguished professors of history who read primary source material from our evangelical and Baptist heritage. In fact, one could wish that Dr. Estep had relied more on the actual writings of the men he cited and not so much on undocumented secondary opinions.

Had he done so he would never have perpetuated the myth that John Gill "prided himself on never extending an invitation for a sinner to trust Christ" during his 50-year pastorate. In addition, if Andrew Fuller were allowed to speak for himself we would see that he described himself unashamedly as a strict Calvinist who never opposed "true Calvinism" but only

that "false Calvinism" which denies the duty of sinners to repent and believe the gospel. We would further see that he strongly defended what he called the "discriminating doctrines of grace" and quoted the very words of the Canons of Dort as a precise expression of his own sentiments.[\[2\]](#)

Dr. Estep suggests that Boyce and Basil Manly, Jr., derived their theological vision from Charles Hodge and Princeton Seminary, but he completely overlooks the tremendous influence which Basil Manly, Sr., exerted on them years before they ever became acquainted with Princeton. As pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Charleston, SC, Manly, Sr., was an outspoken and polemic advocate of strict Calvinism. The Charleston Confession of Faith was the Second London Confession of 1689. Boyce and Manly, Jr., cut their spiritual and theological teeth on evangelical Calvinism. When they set forth the Abstract of Principles for the first Southern Baptist Seminary, they were not importing some foreign theology into the Southern Baptist Convention. They were simply summarizing that which was overwhelmingly believed by Southern Baptists in the mid-nineteenth century.

It is disingenuous to suggest that the term "Calvinism" necessarily implies an adherence to everything which John Calvin taught. As Spurgeon said, it is used only for "shortness;" theological shorthand, if you will. The great Southern Baptist leader John Broadus said this: "The people who sneer at what is called Calvinism might as well sneer at Mont Blanc. We are not in the least bound to defend all of Calvin's opinions or actions, but I do not see how any one who really understands the Greek of the Apostle Paul or the Latin of Calvin and Turretin can fail to see that these latter did but interpret and formulate substantially what the former teaches."[\[3\]](#)

Calvinism is a view of salvation, and indeed, of the whole world, which sees God as absolutely sovereign and man as absolutely responsible. It is not embarrassed by biblical words like predestine, elect, and purpose. Nor is it afraid of biblical words like choose, repent and believe. In a humanistic and man-centered age historic, evangelical Calvinism will often meet with strong, emotional opposition, because it insists that God, and God alone sits enthroned as sovereign over creation, providence and salvation. As Spurgeon said in his day, modern religionists hate such teaching.[\[4\]](#)

But Christian brothers and sisters ought to be able to dialogue about these things in the spirit of grace and love. The place of Calvinism in our Baptist heritage is important, but it is not ultimately important. After all, our forefathers may have been wrong about what they believed concerning God's sovereignty in salvation. What is ultimately important is this: Is Calvinism true? Is it biblical? Dr. Estep gratuitously asserts that it is not. But such a dismissive attitude will not satisfy any thoughtful Christian who takes the Bible seriously. Verses like Rom. 9:18 ("Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens") and Eph. 1:4 ("He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world . . ."), to cite only two of numerous such verses, mean something. Should not Bible-believing Christians be able to talk about the meaning of Scripture without resorting to name calling and misrepresentation?

I strongly disagree with Dr. Estep's fear that talking about biblical salvation as understood by Calvinism will be divisive and deadly to our denomination. It is very healthy that Southern Baptists are having such doctrinal discussions again. With the rise of pragmatism in the middle part of this century, theological discourse was relegated almost exclusively to the arena of the academy. But, being clear on what we believe is critical to the life and health of the church. Therefore talking about our beliefs and being challenged biblically to reexamine what we believe should not be seen as divisive, but essential. A cursory glance through denominational newspapers and associational minutes from the last century will show that Southern Baptists formerly had just such an attitude. It is wonderful to see truth becoming important to us once again as we move toward the third millennium.

Dr. Estep's article contains other reckless charges which have been more than adequately addressed throughout history. His claim that "Calvinism's God resembles Allah" more than the God of the Bible borders on blasphemy. This kind of inflammatory language has no place in honest dialogue between Calvinists and Arminians. While his charge may be true of the straw man which he has constructed and called Calvinism, it could not be further from the truth of that historic, evangelical Calvinism in which the Southern Baptist Convention was cradled. Charles Spurgeon responded to this very attack when he spoke at the dedication service of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861. "Calvinism and fatalism," he said, "are two different things." He elaborated:

We believe that God hath predestinated all things from the beginning, but there is a difference between the predestination of an intelligent, all-wise, all-bounteous God, and that blind fatalism which simply says, "It is because it is to be." Between the *predestination* of Scripture and the *fate* of the Koran every sensible man must perceive a difference of the most essential character. We do not deny that the thing is so ordained that it must be, but why is it to be, but that the Father, God, whose name is loved, ordained it.[\[5\]](#)

If, as he claims, "logically Calvinism is anti-missionary" then Dr. Estep must conclude that Calvinists William Carey, Adoniram Judson, John Paton, George Whitefield, to name but a few, were all illogical. The fact is that neither logically nor theologically, neither historically nor practically has true Calvinism been demonstrated to be opposed to missions. The greatest missionaries and evangelists the world has ever seen have been Calvinists. It is true that some, in the name of God's sovereignty, have opposed missionary efforts. But these were *hyper*-Calvinists and not the genuine kind. It was this hyperism (which he called "false Calvinism") which Andrew Fuller worked to overcome. He and his colleague, William Carey, threw off the fetters of hyperism not by becoming Arminian, but by reading the Bible with both eyes open and seeing revealed there that just as God has predestined *whom* would be saved so He has also predestined *how* they will be saved. God's elect will be saved through the evangelistic proclamation of His gospel. God has not only decreed the ends, He has decreed the means whereby those ends will be attained.

Dr. Estep's claim that "historically, Calvinism has been marked by intolerance and a haughty spirit" is at variance with the views of the founder of his own seminary. On this point B.H. Carroll said that "if history is capable of testifying to a fact, if even the enemies of religion can be trusted to speak, though reluctantly, of known facts and characteristics, then the fact is established that the faith of the Calvinists, the men who most believed in salvation by grace through faith, and that not of themselves, but as the gift of God, led them to live the purest moral lives that ever shone on this world."[\[6\]](#) Further, Fisher Humphreys has recently written that "Calvinism is supportive of humility and piety. It is humbling to think that God has chosen you to be his child and that, if he had not, you would not be his child."[\[7\]](#)

When engaged in theological debate we should speak with that virtue which Andrew Fuller identified as "candor." This quality, Fuller said, "as it relates to the treatment of an adversary, is that temper of mind which will induce us to treat him openly, fairly, and ingenuously, granting him every thing that can be granted consistently with truth and entertaining the most favorable opinion of his character and conduct that justice will admit."[\[8\]](#) The cause of God and His revealed truth is not served by making personal attacks against those with whom we disagree.

Dr. Estep's article seriously misrepresents what John A. Broadus called "that exalted system of Pauline truth which is technically called Calvinism."[\[9\]](#) I am sorry that it appeared in its current form. The topic which he addresses is an important one and should be discussed. But such discussion ought to be conducted on a high level, working diligently not to misrepresent those with whom we disagree, seeking not only to be understood but to understand, and with renewed commitment to love the brethren--even those, perhaps I should say especially those, who differ with us theologically.



¹Iain Murray, *Spurgeon's Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), 221.

²*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: American Publication Society, 1845), 2:330, 711-12. Anyone who doubts Fuller's firm commitment to Calvinism should read his *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* and his *Reply to Philanthropos*, both of which are found in volume 2 of the above edition of his works.

³A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1987), 397.

⁴"The modern religionist not only hates the doctrine of sovereign grace, but he raves and rages at the mention of it." *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, (Vol. 37, 1891):49.

⁵*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, (Vol. 7, 1861):300-01.

⁶B. H. Carroll and Robert G. Lee, *River of Pearls* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 140-41.

⁷"Southern Baptists and Calvinism" (*The Theological Educator*, Spring 1997):19. Humphreys is quoted as recently having declared that Calvinism is in direct opposition to missions and evangelism and that when Calvinism is followed "missions are not necessary." ("Beeson Prof Says Calvinism Losing Status" [The Alabama Baptist, May 29, 1997], 13. This point of view is not only theologically untenable but is also historically refutable. Any honest study of the history of missions will put the lie to this charge. An excellent book on the subject is, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey*, by Timothy George (New Hope, 1991)-a book which Dr. Estep has commended as "fill[ing] in the theological background out of which Carey developed his own theology of missions" (from the back cover). Also see "Missions and the Sovereignty of God" in *FJ* 28.

⁸*Works*, 2:163.

⁹John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce, D.D., LL.D* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 73.



¹Iain Murray, *Spurgeon's Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), 221.

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⁸*Works* , 2:163.

⁹John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce, D.D., LL.D* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 73.



Doctrines Lead to `Dunghill' Prof Warns

[William R. Estep](#)

[Dr. William R. Estep is professor of church history, emeritus, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. His article is reprinted with permission from the Texas Baptist Standard, 26 March 1997. Dr. Estep kindly sent the Founders Journal a slightly revised version of this article in which he added "a few bibliographical references and corrected a couple of dates." It should be noted that he originally entitled the article, "Calvinizing Southern Baptists." The editors of the Baptist Standard are responsible for the title which appeared in that publication. Because it is the one which has been widely distributed, the original version of his article which appeared in the Standard is the one which follows. Due to his heavy writing schedule, Dr. Estep is unable to enter into correspondence with readers about his article.]

Only the most out-of-touch Southern Baptist could be unaware of the attempt on the part of some within our ranks to promote a 19th century version of Calvinism among Southern Baptists as a return to the original theology of the first English Baptists.

This newfound fascination with Calvin and the system of theology that bears his name is both intriguing and puzzling, since most of the ardent advocates of this movement have only a slight knowledge of Calvin or his system as set forth in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. They simply borrow that which they assume to be both biblical and baptistic without adequate research. This is essentially what James P. Boyce did, as reflected in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*.

Charles Hodge, the most influential of the Princetonian theologians of the 19th century, was Boyce's mentor at Princeton.

Thoroughly enamored with Hodge and his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, Boyce taught Hodge's version of Calvinism at Southern Seminary, which Basil Manly Jr. also incorporated in the seminary's founding document, the *Abstract of Principles* (1858).

These works provide the pretense upon which Ernest C. Reisinger has attempted to call Southern Baptists back to what he conceives to have been their Calvinistic roots. This assumption must be challenged on the basis of the original Baptist vision and its theological insights.

John Calvin (1509-1554)

Calvin is best known for his *Institutes*, which first appeared in 1536. After several revisions, the definitive edition was published in 1559 in four volumes. He also was the reformer of Geneva.

Trained in law, Calvin attempted to form a church-state for which he drew up laws and set up a "consistory," not unlike courts of the inquisition in the medieval Catholic Church. This church court condemned many for "heresy"--spiritual crimes--some of whom were executed by the civil authorities and others were exiled.

Among those condemned, Michael Servetus was burned at the stake for disagreeing with Calvin on the nature of the

Trinity and "anabaptism." Jerome Bolsec was exiled for disagreeing with Calvin on the doctrine of predestination.

Admittedly, this was the 16th century and the pressures on Calvin were enormous, but when all of these factors--political, sociological and religious--are considered, Calvin cannot be exonerated.

He was no advocate of religious freedom, but an autocrat who often mistook his own will for the will of God.

Calvin never was able to free himself from his Roman Catholic heritage. The tenacity with which he held to infant baptism, a church-state in which a sin against the church became a crime against the state, and the use of the civil Government to enforce conformity to the Genevan theocracy reflect his adherence to the Codex Justinian.

His Old Testament hermeneutics and his uncontrollable temper acerbated his intolerance of those who disagreed with him. A case in point was his quarrel with Jerome Bolsec over predestination.

Predestination Controversy

While it is difficult to state briefly Calvin's view of predestination, perhaps the best summary is that given by Calvin himself:

"By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation, and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" (Institutes, 3.21.5).

Bolsec could not accept Calvin's position, which seemed to erect a whole system of theology on "eternal decrees" without any reference to Christ or the love that caused God to offer His Son as a sacrifice for sinful humanity.

Bolsec did not deny man's sinful nature or the need of salvation, but his view of election focused on Christ and the grace made available to believers through faith in Him.

He also recognized the individual's ability to respond in faith or to reject God's gift of salvation. In doing so, there was no room in Geneva for Jerome Bolsec. He was expelled from the city.

Baptists and Calvinism

Baptists arose out of the English Puritan-Separatist movement, which was Calvinistic, but they modified their Calvinistic heritage to a considerable degree.

The first English Baptists of record (1608), came to be known as "General Baptists," since they believed in "general atonement"--that Christ died for all and not just for the elect. Their Calvinism almost completely vanished under Anabaptist-Mennonite influence.

The "Particular Baptists" (1641) were so designated because they held with the English Puritans' belief in "particular atonement"--that Christ died only for the elect.

But they also modified their Calvinism, as Glen Stassen has shown, under the influence of Menno Simons' *Foundation Book*, which they quoted in the First London Confession of 1644. Its revision in 1646 reveals a further departure from Calvinism in their rejection of the fourfold ministry of Calvin's invention and by greatly enlarging his article on religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

While Baptists never have been doctrinaire Calvinists, as a careful study of the sources reveals, there have been some Baptists from time to time who have advocated such a position.

When John Ryland Sr. called William Carey "a miserable enthusiast" and told him, to sit down that God "would save the heathen without your help or mine," he reflected the hyper-Calvinism of John Gill, who set forth his position in numerous works and prided himself on never extending an invitation for a sinner to trust Christ during his entire London pastorate of more than 50 years.

Andrew Fuller wrote *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation* against Gill's Calvinism, concluding: "Had matters gone on but a few years, the Baptists would have become a perfect dunghill in society."

Fuller's modification of Calvinism among the Baptists made possible the foreign mission movement of which Carey became the catalyst.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon often has been cited by Baptists as a staunch Calvinist. At times, the young Spurgeon claimed to be exactly that, but at other times it is clear he was neither a hyper-Calvinist nor even a consistent Calvinist.

A. C. Underwood, in *A History of English Baptists*, writes that Spurgeon's "rejection of a limited atonement would have horrified John Calvin."

According to Underwood, Spurgeon often prayed, "Hasten to bring in all Thine elect, and then elect some more." The mature Spurgeon confided in Archbishop Benson, "I'm a very bad Calvinist, quite a Calvinist--I look on to the time when the elect will be all the world.

Problems with Calvinism

Apparently Baptists always have had problems with an unmodified Calvinism. Only a few can be mentioned here.

First, it is a system of theology without biblical support.

It assumes to know more about God and the eternal decrees upon which it is based than God has chosen to reveal in scripture or in Christ. To say God created some people for damnation and others for salvation is to deny that all have been created in the image of God.

It also reflects upon both God's holiness and His justice, as portrayed in the Bible.

Further, Calvinism appears to deny John 3:16, John 1:12, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8-10, and numerous other passages of scripture that indicate, as Baptists confessions have consistently stated, that salvation

comes to those who respond to God's grace in faith.

Second, Calvinism's God resembles Allah, the god of Islam, more than the God of grace and redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Third, Calvinism robs the individual of responsibility for his/her own conduct, making a person into a puppet on a string or a robot programmed from birth to death with no will of his/her own.

Fourth, historically, Calvinism has been marked by intolerance and a haughty spirit. Calvin's Geneva, the Synod of Dort (1618-619) and the Regular Baptists (Hardshells, Primitives and Two Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists) are only some of numerous examples of this Calvinistic blight.

Fifth, logically, Calvinism is anti-missionary. The Great Commission is meaningless if every person is programmed for salvation or damnation, for [then] evangelism and missionary effort are exercises in futility.

Apparently, Calvinism is an excursion into speculative theology with predictable results, which we as Southern Baptists can ill afford.

It also introduces another divisive element in a badly divided denomination.

If the Calvinizing of Southern Baptists continues unabated, we are in danger of becoming "a perfect dunghill" in American society, to borrow a phrase from Andrew Fuller.



There is no learned man but will confess that he has much profited by reading controversies -- his senses awakened, his judgment sharpened, and the truth which he holds more firmly established. All controversy being permitted, falsehood will appear more false, and truth the more true.

--John Milton, as quoted in *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, compiled by I. D. E. Thomas (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 62-63.



The Reformation of Doctrine and the Renewal of the Church:

A Response to Dr. William R. Estep

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

One of the most promising signs of renewal in Southern Baptist life is the emergence of genuine theological discussion and historical interest. After decades marked by the absence of significant interest in many doctrines, Southern Baptists are awakening to historic doctrinal debates in a new key.

As if awakened from doctrinal amnesia, the denomination faces the promise of both renewal and reformation. In this process, we may recover our theological heritage even as we address our modern context of ministry.

Dr. William R. Estep, one of Southern Baptists' most distinguished historians, has recently directed attention to a resurgent Calvinism in Southern Baptist life. The "Calvinizing" of the Southern Baptist Convention, he fears, is a dangerous development.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to Dr. Estep and to present a very different understanding of what is at stake. Though vitriolic and harsh in tone, his article deserves a respectful and thoughtful response.

First, let me state at the onset that if Calvinism is accurately represented by Dr. Estep's treatment, I will have nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, few of Calvin's friends or enemies will recognize Calvinism as presented in Estep's article.

Calvin and Calvinism

Calvinism clearly draws its name from John Calvin, the sixteenth-century reformer whose towering intellect and biblical preaching gave birth to the "Reformed" tradition as one of the central streams of the Reformation. Calvin's mission was to establish the Church on the basis of Scripture, with its doctrine and practice drawn from Scripture itself.

His *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536, was his effort to set forth the doctrines revealed in the Bible. Few works have come close to the *Institutes* in terms of influence in the Church. Elsewhere, Dr. Estep has described the *Institutes* as "one of Protestantism's greatest attempts at erecting a systematic theology." Calvinism is simply the Reformation tradition which is associated most closely with Calvin.

Dr. Estep presents a very severe portrait of Calvin the reformer, and those looking for severity in Calvin need not look far. He was a sixteenth-century man who bore many of the prejudices and political dispositions common to his day. He would not understand the notion of religious liberty, and he was ready to use the arm of the law to enforce correct doctrine.

No Calvinist I know would advocate Calvin's position on these issues, any more than modern Lutherans would

endorse Martin Luther's anti-Semitism. Baptists who quickly reject Calvin's theology because of his shortcomings on other issues must, if honest, reject virtually any influence from previous centuries. This holds true for Dr. Estep's treasured Anabaptists as well.

Calvin is not fairly depicted in Dr. Estep's article, but that is not the real issue. The issue is not Calvin, but the truth or falsehood of the doctrines he taught, and the doctrines now associated with his name.

The Heart of the Matter

The central tenet of Calvinism is the sovereignty of God. This is the starting point and the highest principle of Reformed theology. Calvinism is God-centered and draws its understanding of God directly from his self-revelation in Scripture. The God revealed in the Bible is the sovereign Creator, Ruler and Redeemer. His omnipotence, omniscience and governance over all things set this God of the Bible apart from all false gods.

The God of the Bible is the holy, ruling, limitless, acting, all-powerful God who makes nations to rise and to fall, who accomplishes his purposes and who redeems his people. Arminianism--the theological system opposed to Calvinism--necessarily holds to a very different understanding of God, his power and his government over all things.

Calvinism is most closely and accurately associated with the so-called "doctrines of grace," which summarize the teaching of Scripture concerning the gospel. The Bible teaches us that we are born sinners and are thus spiritually dead. Dead in our sins, we cannot on our own even respond to God's grace. Thus, as Jesus told his disciples, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65).

Further, the Bible makes clear that God has chosen a people "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2). Paul, in writing to the Ephesian church, states that the Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3-5). The New Testament resounds with words including "chosen," "election" and "predestination." The issue is not whether these are taught by Calvin, but whether they are taught in Scripture.

We would like to think that we are smart enough, spiritually sensitive enough and responsive enough to choose to confess Christ without the prior work of God in our hearts. Unfortunately for our pride, this is not at all what the Bible reveals. God chooses us before we choose him. As Southern Seminary President E. Y. Mullins stated, "God's choice of a person is prior to that person's choice of God, since God is infinite in wisdom and knowledge and will not make the success of the divine kingdom dependent on the contingent choices of people."

Calvinism is nothing more and nothing less than the simple assertion that salvation is all of grace, from the beginning to the end. God saves sinners. Jesus Christ died for sinners. As Scripture promises, all those who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The God of the Bible saves sinners and holds those he has redeemed to the end. The vast majority of Southern Baptists hold to the doctrine known as the "perseverance of the saints," but that precious promise makes sense only in terms of the "doctrines of grace." Our choice of Christ is indeed necessary, but he has first chosen us--and he will keep us to the end.

Many Southern Baptists find predestination and other doctrines difficult to understand and even offensive to our pride. But we cannot read the New Testament without coming again and again to these doctrines.

Calvinism and Evangelism

Dr. Estep charges that a revival of Calvinism will lead to a lessening of evangelistic commitment and missionary vision. This is a common charge, but it is reckless and without foundation. Indeed, many of the most significant missionary and evangelistic movements in the history of the Church have been led by those who held to the very doctrines Dr. Estep laments.

These have included Charles Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist preacher of the last century, whose ministry at London's Metropolitan Tabernacle was among the most evangelistic in the history of Christianity. Spurgeon openly and consistently advocated all the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism and publicly identified himself as a Calvinist. In a day of doctrinal decline, Spurgeon sounded the alarm for a recovery of biblical truth and the "doctrines of grace." When asked how he reconciled his Calvinism and fervent evangelism, he responded, "I do not try to reconcile friends."

Dr. Estep claims Andrew Fuller as an opponent of Calvinism, yet Fuller also held to the "doctrines of grace." He clearly advocated the doctrine of election. In *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, cited by Dr. Estep, Fuller affirms that "none ever did or will believe in Christ but those who are chosen of God from eternity."

William Carey, the father of modern missions, was himself a Calvinist, as were leaders such as Jonathan Edwards and the great George Whitefield. The Evangelism Explosion program used by so many Southern Baptist churches was developed by a Calvinist.

If Calvinism is an enemy to missions and evangelism, it is an enemy to the gospel itself. The Great Commission and the task of evangelism are assigned to every congregation and every believer. The charge that Calvinism is opposed to evangelism simply will not stick--it is a false argument. The "doctrines of grace" are nothing less than a statement of the gospel itself. Through the substitutionary work of Christ, God saves sinners. The great promise is that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Calvinism and the Southern Baptist Convention

Even the opponents of Calvinism must admit, if historically informed, that Calvinism is the theological tradition into which the Baptist movement was born. The same is true of the Southern Baptist Convention. The most influential Baptist churches, leaders, confessions of faith, and theologians of the founding era were Calvinistic.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was born of this Calvinistic tradition, as reflected in its Abstract of Principles. James P. Boyce, in calling for the seminary's founding, charged it to oppose all heresies, including Arminianism.

It was not until well into the twentieth century that any knowledgeable person could claim that Southern Baptists were anything but Calvinists. In referring to early Southern Baptists (especially James P. Boyce), Dr. Estep charges that they misunderstood Calvinism. This is a strange and innovative charge, considering that Boyce, for example, had been trained at Princeton Theological Seminary--the fountainhead of Calvinism in nineteenth-century America.

Boyce's colleague John A. Broadus--the greatest Baptist preacher of his day--was so certain that Calvinism was revealed in the Bible that he challenged those who sneer at Calvinism to "sneer at Mount Blanc." Broadus was

certain that the doctrines known as Calvinism were those preached by Paul and the other apostles, and were revealed in Holy Scripture.

Other Southern Baptist leaders were also well-identified Calvinists. These included J. B. Gambrell and B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Seminary.

Calvinism was the mainstream tradition in the Southern Baptist Convention until the turn of the century. The rise of modern notions of individual liberty and the general spirit of the age have led to an accommodation of historic doctrines in some circles.

Dr. Estep is correct in noting the modifications to Calvinism which have occurred among Southern Baptists. Most Baptists hold to at least part of Calvinism, while generally unaware of the whole.

As Southern Baptists seek to recover our theological inheritance and the essence of biblical Christianity, I believe we will see a return to a more Calvinistic understanding of the gospel and a recognition of the absolute sovereignty of God.

Nevertheless, my main concern is not that Southern Baptists return to Calvinism--or to any human theological system. Our main concern must be to see Southern Baptists return to theological health and biblical fidelity. This theological and biblical reformation will, I am certain, also lead to a blazing recovery of missionary zeal and evangelistic fervor--and to the renewal of our churches and denomination. Southern Baptists will truly be headed for a well-deserved dunghill only when we retreat from biblical truth and withdraw from evangelism and missions.

We stand at an historic threshold. Now is the time for Southern Baptists to stand together on the great truths of God's Word and on the front lines of God's redemptive purpose. As Charles Spurgeon reminds us, we should rejoice whenever the Gospel is preached and shared--whether by a Calvinist or non-Calvinist.

My personal agenda is not driven by Calvinism, but by the hope that Southern Baptists will embrace, confess, preach, and teach the truths of God's Word--and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with every man, woman, and child on the earth. In this hope and vision we should all stand together.

As a dear friend has well stated, the real issue is not whether John Calvin is your personal theologian, but whether Jesus Christ is your personal Savior. By God's grace, may we see genuine reformation and renewal in our churches--and a Great Commission vision in our hearts.



An Open Letter to Dr. William Estep

[Roger Nicole](#)

My dear colleague,

Your recent article in *The Baptist Standard of Texas* has come to my attention. I am grieved that you should have such a low opinion of Calvin and of Calvinistic Baptists. Although you hold that "most of the ardent advocates of this movement have only a slight knowledge of Calvin or his system," I think that I am tolerably well acquainted with Calvin, not only through the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but through his sermons, commentaries and special treatises as well as through secondary sources. His collected works in 9 volumes in the 1667 Amsterdam edition are at my fingertips in my office. My personal library has more than 250 volumes by or about Calvin, and well above 1000 if you count those about Calvinism and the Reformed faith and history, including Particular Baptists.

A number of statements in your article are erroneous and others appear to me as needing to be challenged.

1. You give the date of Calvin's death as 1554 instead of 1564. We were lamenting that Calvin should have died at the age of 55, and now your article cuts off erroneously another ten years of his life. If this is a typographical error, it should have been corrected in the galley proofs.
2. You state that the definitive edition of Calvin's *Institutes* was published in 1559 in "four volumes." This edition was in one folio volume, as indeed apparently all editions prior to 1800! The material was divided in four books, but bound in one volume.
3. Critical remarks are made concerning Calvin's uncontrollable temper and his responsibility in Servetus' execution and Bolsec's exile, in the union of church and state in Geneva, and in the failure to advocate freedom of religion in the state. All of these are clearly irrelevant to the issue whether Calvinistic Baptists ought to be shunned, unless you can prove that they are necessary inferences from Calvin's doctrines of sovereign grace, and that only those who agree therein with Calvin suffer from these defects.
4. You made a much too commendatory representation of the views of Bolsec: if his convictions were just what you describe, I could almost agree with him! You did not even mention his emphatic rejection of divine election nor his insulting accusations against Calvin's doctrine and its Biblical foundation.

If you want to promote Bolsec and Servetus rather than Calvin as your theological heroes, you need not fear competition from me: I will even throw in Castellio for good measure!

5. You state that Calvin "seemed to erect a whole system of theology on eternal decrees without any reference to Christ or the love of God." This is patently false on three counts:
 - a. Predestination is discussed at the end of the third book of the *Institutes*. It is the climax of Calvin's presentation of salvation by grace alone, not the foundation of the work!
 - b. Chapters 6-17 of the second book of the *Institutes* are devoted to the part of Christ in human salvation. Furthermore, in III. xxiv. 5 a very famous passage asserts that Christ is the "mirror of election."

c. Throughout his treatment, Calvin emphasizes the grace of God in election and rejects human merit at its base.

6. You say that "it is difficult to state briefly Calvin's view of predestination" and so you quote five lines from the *Institutes* III. xxi. 5 without making it clear that I. xvi-xviii, II. i-v and III. xxi-xxiv must be consulted in order to form a proper understanding of Calvin's presentation. Furthermore, Calvin's three treatises on predestination and providence, his "Articles on Predestination" and hundreds of references in his Commentaries and Sermons would help. You might as well say that the block of marble that was delivered to Michelangelo's studio is the famous statue of David as to say that these two quoted sentences constitute Calvin's doctrine.

You could have eased your task by quoting some paragraphs of the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Philadelphia Confession. These at least, written in agreement with Calvin, would be more reliable than one statement plucked as by hazard out of Calvin's work by one manifestly hostile individual.

7. You claim that Calvinism is "a system of theology without biblical support." In III. xxi-xxiv alone I count 173 biblical references, including 3 out of the 5 that you allege against him. How could a man who wrote commentaries on 18 books out of 39 in the Old Testament, and 24 out of the 27 in the New Testament ever be accused to be unbiblical? And his preaching program included expositions on the whole Bible, although he did not live long enough to fulfill that plan.
8. You deplore the influence of Calvin upon "Calvinistic Baptists." None of these, however, accepted Calvin's view of infant baptism, otherwise they could not be called "Baptists." There must be, therefore, something else than Calvin's authority that led them to follow him in his views on the doctrines of grace: I say it is the authority of Scripture and its teaching on divine sovereignty as well as human responsibility.
9. You say that Calvinistic Baptists have "only a slight knowledge of Calvin or his system." My impression from your article is that you do not excel either in this area! Now if what you claim is true, why in the world do you attack them on the basis of an author of which you claim they are ignorant? This would seem to make the major part of your arguments irrelevant!
10. When you deal with the five greatest dangers by which you claim "unmodified" Calvinism threatens the Southern Baptist Convention, to wit lack of Biblical support, similarity with Islam, destruction of individual responsibility, intolerance and haughty spirit, and anti-missionary spirit, one is left wondering where you picked up this nightmare. Calvinistic Baptists have sent excellent missionaries to Islamic people, and they have greatly developed the sense of accountability historically and ethically. I cannot imagine where you have encountered anyone who fits your description, and I will say that in my contacts with hundreds of Calvinists I have never met any such person. There may be some in a murky corner of the vast territory of the Southern Baptist Convention, but even then they do not represent a threat to SBC, for such people do not reproduce themselves and thus are dying out in the first generation!

My colleagues will respond to other features that we deem objectionable. As one who has been influenced by Calvin for nearly 65 years, I accepted this aspect of our task. I do find comfort in the thought that although you may oppose Calvinism on this earth, you will be yourself a Calvinist when you get to heaven, for I say "Who will deny or seek to restrict the sovereignty of God when appearing before His throne?"

In this hope I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Roger Nicole
Mutch Professor of Theology, Emeritus
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Visiting Professor of Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando



Three Reasons to Hope for Further Reformation in the SBC

Mark Dever

It is very encouraging to see what is taking place in the seminaries, mission agencies, and many churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Wonderful changes which a few years ago even the most optimistic among us could not have imagined are now taking place. Reports of these changes have given me a renewed vision for what God is now doing, and may well do in the future. I have a renewed hope for the reformation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

At the time of the sixteenth-century reformation, the motto of the church of Rome was "always the same." But some of the Christians who came to understand the truth of justification by faith alone adopted another motto: "the reformed church always being reformed according to the Word of God." This is the kind of reformation I seek and work for in my own life, and in the church I pastor. And this is the kind of continuing reformation I pray for in other churches and in the various agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. And it is for exactly this kind of reformation that I have increasing hope. Let me share with you three reasons why.

First, I have a hope for a growing reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention because of the content of the Bible. Our family of churches has gone through a wrenching time in the last thirty-five years, climaxing with a time of particular tension throughout the 1980s. The convention has come through on the other side a bit smaller than we might have otherwise been (though it is still vast), more focused, and explicitly committed to recognizing the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. When I consider what it is that the Bible teaches, I am encouraged. I am encouraged to think that this Word of God has been accorded renewed authority in many of our schools and agencies, for our instruction and conviction, for our salvation and edification. I am encouraged to think that if people happily trumpet the Word of God as being inerrant, at some point they must surely sit down and read what it is that God has so certainly said to us. And whenever we sit down and read God's Word with faith, God speaks clearly to us.

As has been so often said, God creates His people by His Word. It has always been so, and it continues to be that way. As God's promises are heard and trusted, God's people respond and move out in faith. As young ministers are taught that the Bible is completely trustworthy, they will give themselves to study it, and God will honor this in the renewal of their minds and hearts, and in the renewal of the churches in which they serve. Our Convention's clarity on the authority of God's Word should inevitably be accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the content of that Word, and therein is a source of great hope for the continued reformation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Second, I have hope for a growing reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention because the recent controversy over inerrancy has convinced many of the importance of theology. This may seem a silly thing to say about a group of Christians, as if any believer ever doubted the importance of God or of knowledge about Him. After all, theology is simply knowledge of God. We must confess, however, with some sadness, that our era, our society, our own churches, our own slothful tendencies have all inclined us to neglect the importance of theology. "Thoughts are only words," we may think. "Actions are what counts!" And in so thinking (or at least so acting) parts of our denomination have drowned in pragmatism. The phrase "whatever works" has been our watchword.

This pragmatism was certainly not meant maliciously. It was meant to avoid the narrow-minded and picky prejudices that have so often defeated the work of the saints in the past as Christians have divided their energies over this or that small matter. Churches were split over arguments about the style of music, or the positioning of the piano. Debates

which seemed obscure to church members would roil through the churches as the activities continued on. Much of this concern to be practical was good. What was so bad about the situation, however, was the assumption that the truth of the gospel was believed and accepted by everyone participating with us in our programs and our activities.

In the controversies of the last few decades, Southern Baptists have become a somewhat more theologically sophisticated people. They have learned that someone can use familiar words, but redefine them to mean something other than what first appears. Additionally, they have learned that this misrepresentation is important. So we have rediscovered that theology--what someone thinks is the truth about God--cannot be assumed. And therefore since it cannot be assumed, it must be discussed. And this rediscovery of the importance of theology gives me great hope that it will now be more widely recognized among our sister churches. The content of what we believe is crucial. Theology matters. The growing realization of this gives me renewed and increased hope for a continuing godly reformation and revival within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Third, I have hope for a growing reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention because the deepening secularization of our culture should increasingly disabuse all Christians of false hopes that we may have cherished. Most of us have a tendency to imagine things as being better than they are. We like to think that the hurtful comment was not meant in a vicious way. We like to hope that our friends and family members are in good shape spiritually, and that no one we know is really a bad person.

According to the Bible, there are, of course, problems with looking at the world this way. The Bible presents our state as being spiritually perilous. We and everyone we know are in great danger. Pretty days and prosperous circumstances do not help us to appreciate this reality as we should.

In the same way, with our society at large, when "Christian values" are generally upheld, prayers are prayed in school and decency is self-evident we feel more at peace. We feel that life is somehow better. Yet in just such times, our very prosperity may dull us to the Biblical truths of the dire straits we are in. If nothing else, the world around us becoming more worldly and more ungodly may help us to lose our addiction to gaining the approval of our non-Christian neighbors and friends. The world being more obviously opposed to God may help us to take sides, or to realize that we have been taking sides all along. We may simply now have a more accurate picture of whose side we have been on. As hopes for our wider world are dashed (in the short term anyway), God may clarify the vision of His people for that heavenly home. We may realize afresh that we are not at home in this world, but that we are aliens and strangers here just passing through. Our hope is in God, and in God alone. In the very growth of the darkness, I have hope for a growing appreciation for the promises of God. And so I hope in our darkening land for a growing reformation and revival in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Pray that it is so.



The Scriptures teach, not only that God has a general plan that is being carried out in human history, but also that God's purpose applies to the individual. When a man is saved he is not saved as a matter of chance or accident or fate; he is saved in pursuance of an eternal purpose of God. God saves men because he intends to. He saves a particular man, at a particular time, under a given set of circumstances, because he intends to.

Election does not mean that God instituted a general plan of salvation and decreed that whosoever

would should be saved and, therefore, the man who wills to be saved is elected in that he brings himself within the scope of God's plan. It is true that God has decreed that whosoever will shall be saved; but election is something more specific and personal than that. It means that God has decreed to bring certain ones, upon whom his heart has been eternally set, who are the objects of his eternal love, to faith in Jesus as Savior....

In the Bible, salvation is everywhere attributed to God. To save is the work of God. But to save includes bringing about this change of mind and heart that we call conversion. It is not true that the sinner within and of himself repents and believes and then God comes into the process in forgiveness. No, God was in the process from the first. He works to produce repentance and faith. He works to bring about the conditions upon which he can forgive. He seeks the sinner. We yield to a God who draws us to himself. We seek him because he first sought us. The gospel of Christ is the gospel of a seeking God....Drawing me to Christ is the work of God. Without this drawing power, men cannot come to Christ (John 6:44).

--Walter Thomas Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937), 155-156. The distinguished Dr. Conner was Professor of Systematic Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, for 39 years. He retired from teaching in 1949; he died in 1952.



The Conserving Power of the Doctrines of Grace

Tom J. Nettles

That which I propose in this article is that the Doctrines of Grace have an intrinsic tendency to preserve and give greater coherence to the defining tenets of orthodox evangelicalism. Of course, I am not the first to make this observation. Several in the history of the church have argued that Christian fundamentals are so dependent on God's initiative in revelation and salvation that any effort to maintain vibrant Christian witness and testimony apart from the Doctrines of Grace is a short-lived business.

This affirmation, however, holds particular relevance for Southern Baptists at this time. Having struggled valiantly and faithfully for years out of a sense of stewardship of the truth to reestablish absolute fidelity to the full truthfulness of Scripture as a foundation for theological education and missions, doesn't it make sense that we should understand some of the dynamics of how that affirmation is lost and what fabric of belief is most consistent with retaining it? In addition, when one sees denials of God's omniscience and immutability and a general leavening into evangelicalism of the leading principles of process theology; and when one realizes that the recipe for the mixture called for an initial dose of essence of Arminianism, one must cultivate discipline, caution, and the skill of theological analysis to be a faithful disciple of the Lord in these days.

When Spurgeon wielded both his sword and his trowel in the "Downgrade Controversy," he considered the engagement to be much more fundamental than disagreement over the intent of the atonement. "The present struggle is not a debate," he wrote, "upon the question of Calvinism or Arminianism, but of the truth of God versus the inventions of men." [*Sword and Trowel*, April 1887, p 196] This fact, however, did not make Spurgeon overlook or fail to mention, "Arminianism has usually been the route by which the older dissenters have traveled downward to Socinianism." Again in the combination of reserve and affirmation, Spurgeon continues, "We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system; but we believe that Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to the vital truth, and therefore we are sorry to see any quitting it who have once accepted it." Southern Baptists once "accepted it;" now by God's grace may we stop "quitting it."

No person alive understands all of divine revelation. Each of us is susceptible to error in interpretation or in doctrine. To seek to avoid error as much as possible is a stewardship that rests upon all Christian ministers, particularly in vital areas of gospel truth. It becomes obligatory, therefore, to think through the implications of the doctrines we believe, and to seek earnestly to understand the relationship of one part of divine truth to another. All the elements are connected, and not one part of it is inconsequential for another. God is one in being, though three in persons. Love for the Son does not at all diminish one's love for the Father, and understanding the work of the Son contributes to our understand of the Father; likewise with love for and knowledge of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Even so, an increase in one's understanding of justification may generate an appreciable increase in one's understanding of the cross, or even the Spirit's work in regeneration. These in turn will impact one's thinking about the church and the nature of its membership. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" and our goal is to lead our people into a "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." There are no unimportant doctrines in the Word of God; a weakness in one part makes us more susceptible to error in another. That is the truth which drove the Apostle Paul to tell the Galatians, "If salvation could come by the law, then Christ died in vain [Gal 2:21]" and again to the Corinthians, "If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." And those who have fallen asleep with their hope in Christ have really perished under the wrath of God.

Knowing the doctrine of election helps one know more about the reality of regeneration, and both in turn make one

more confident in the power and purpose of the preached word. Otherwise Paul could not have said, "Knowing, brethren beloved by God, your election, for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" [1 Th. 1:4,5]. Realizing the ideal of a regenerate church membership would be greatly enhanced by a thorough knowledge of the nature and evidence of the new birth. Much of the current puzzlement over the large number of absentee and non-resident members could be not only explained but remedied by careful and courageous application of the doctrine of effectual calling to situations in local churches.

With this background, therefore, I will seek briefly to demonstrate these connections through a merely suggestive discussion of two doctrines: the inerrancy of Scripture and substitutionary atonement.

In addition to the historical reality that the most cogent and formidable defenses of biblical inspiration have come from within the Reformed wing of Protestantism (see the works of Warfield, Hodge, Turretin, Calvin, Dabney, Thornwell, Andrew Fuller, J. P. Boyce, and John L. Dagg), historic Calvinism provides the most theologically integrated rationale for inerrancy of any theological system. Arminianism propounds a view in which it is impossible for God infallibly to superintend any activity to a predetermined result which at the same time involves human agency without destroying the freeness of human agency in the process. Their theological system can *guarantee* the inerrancy of Scripture *only* by assuming that human writers became automatons during the process of incription. (They do not actually claim this, but their system logically requires it.)

Calvinism, on the other hand, does not depend on indeterminacy for freedom. The most potent illustration of this is the doctrine of God. God is determined in holiness and truth and yet is perfectly free and praiseworthy for his truthfulness. Even so there can be free human action which absolutely conforms to the respective personalities involved and at the same time absolutely conforms to the decretal providence of God. This extends to the production of a written revelation. If Herod and Pontius Pilate can act condemnably in executing the exact purposes of God in the crucifixion of Christ, then the apostles, in whose hearts love for Christ has been shed abroad, can function *freely* as teachers of the church and at the same time produce a God-determined inerrant scripture.

Inerrancy appears as an aberration in the Arminian system; it is a coherent part of the Calvinist system.

Second, a substitutionary, propitiatory atonement has been at the heart of evangelical Southern Baptist life. Arminianism produces a tension with that understanding of the atonement, while Calvinism embraces it as endemic to, supportive of, and, indeed, necessary for its exposition of the gospel. There can be little doubt that Scripture teaches Christ's substitutionary death. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He died the just for the unjust, that he might lead us to God." "He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us." "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." In addition, the entire biblical witness leaves no exit from the altar on which a propitiation is offered. "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him." "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement . . . so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus." Those who were alienated from God and were enemies he has reconciled by "making peace through his blood shed on the cross." "He has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Arminianism has tended to produce systems of atonement which are variations of the moral influence theory. Grotius, a leader of the Dutch Arminians developed the Moral government theory of the atonement. The attraction these views of the atonement have for Arminianism is that they do not demand that Christ's atoning work have a corresponding objective result. The impact of the atonement is subjective and is thus merely a motivating power to repentance and faith by which forgiveness comes. Substitutionary, propitiatory atonement envelopes the biblical idea of justice that punishment must fit the crime and not be carried beyond the deserts of the crime. If Christ has suffered indeed for sins, and God's wrath has received a just settlement, then something objective has taken place and all the

benefits caused by Christ's death must be given, else punishment be inflicted without corresponding release and Christ's soul experience travail without satisfaction. These objective aspects of the atonement are inconsistent with a universal atonement that has a subjective delivery system; that is, the efficacy of a propitiatory substitutionary atonement cannot finally be suspended on the human responses of repentance and faith. Several non-Calvinist groups, therefore, have been pressed by the logic of their own position to reject substitutionary atonement.

These objective elements, however, are at the heart of an understanding that affirms the certitude of the complete effectuality of the death of Christ. Such an atonement, rather than being suspended on subjective response, is among the causes of repentance and faith. The doctrines of Grace see no incongruity between the question, "Who is he that condemns?" and the confident answer, "It is Christ who died." The death of Christ without fail releases its beneficiary from condemnation. Universal atonement cannot with doctrinal consistency engender such confidence.

Before my final observations, I want to issue one caveat concerning the approach taken in this presentation. While the argument is that the Doctrines of Grace give greater coherence to the whole system of divine truth, and particularly those central evangelical tenets of the gospel, I am not arguing that the Doctrines of Grace are merely the result of inferential reasoning. They are primarily the embodiment of a holistic approach to biblical interpretation. One can see these truths operative in apostolic teaching from Romans 8, to Ephesians 1, to 1 Peter 1 and many other places and in our Lord's own discussions in John 3 and 6 and 10 and 17 and in Matthew 11 and other places. They form the decretal and experiential substratum for the more kerygmatic aspects of God's saving work such as the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension and human response such as repentance and faith. For that reason they are slightly more hidden in mystery not only in reality but in revelation; thus these issues are the source of evangelical disagreements. But for that reason also, they do provide the most pleasing and defensible source of unity to all biblical truth.

Finally, while I think that this issue of consistency and conservation must be pressed and argued with as much spiritual fervor as possible, two factors must always be present in our demeanor and inform our mental orientation. One, a blessed inconsistency, powered by the clarity of Scripture, often salvages evangelical affirmation and practice. This week in chapel at TEDS, I led the congregation in a great William Gadsby hymn, "O What Matchless Condescension." All sang it with joy and exuberance. One of the leading Arminians on our campus told me afterwards how much he enjoyed the hymn and how wonderfully poetic and clearly accurate theologically it was. I told him that it was written by a 19th-century Baptist hyper-Calvinist. Still he found nothing in it with which he could disagree. One of the verses says:

Would we see his brightest glory,
Here it shines in Jesus' face;
Sing and tell the pleasing story,
O ye sinners saved by grace;
And with pleasure,
Bid the guilty Him embrace.

One of the Hyper-Calvinist tenets is the rejection of duty faith on the part of sinners which implies the illegitimate status of ministerial urgings in a mixed assembly for sinners to embrace Christ. Yet here we have it in a hymn; An Arminian singing the affirmation of a hyper-Calvinist, "And with pleasure, bid the guilty Him embrace."

Two, we must recognize that we too hold some doctrines or interpretations at an inchoate or embryonic stage which if allowed to mature with their present tendencies could be destructive. We stand in need of constant reproof and correction from the word of God. In addition, we hold some true things in such a manner as would be unnecessarily destructive of Christian love and unity if God's Spirit gave license to our spiritual pride to have its ultimate

devastating impact.

O please God, grant us by your grace the courage to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, the perseverance to walk in truth, the skill to teach toward a unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, the energy to press toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, the humble consistency to live by the truth to which we have presently attained, and the hope to believe that if in anything we are otherwise minded, it is your purpose and prerogative to reveal it to us, correct us, and to swallow up our partial understanding and partial holiness with the fullness of Christ's glory.



Book Reviews

Trust and Obey, edited by Don Kistler; Soli Deo Gloria (1996) 206 pp. \$15.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by [Douglas R. Shivers](#)

"If I believed what you believe, I'd do what I wanted," a man said to Luther. To which the Reformer replied, "Exactly! Now, what do you want to do?" Whether this particular conversation is actual or apocryphal, it does summarize the ripples of tension that run through the "justification by faith alone" debate. Where does personal holiness come in? Are believers supposed to be obedient? What motivates Christian discipleship and discipline?

In our own day, Evangelicals and Catholics Together has generated an Everest of material on salvation in general and justification by faith in particular. There is a desperate need for justification by faith alone to be clarified. It is alarming that this vital doctrine rates only two sentences in the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message*. Whenever justification is plainly taught, however, the question of Luther's antagonist is again asked. This volume seeks to answer the question by dealing with the living connection between justification and sanctification. R. C. Sproul, Michael Horton, John MacArthur, John Armstrong, Jonathan Gerstner, Joel Beeke, and Ray Lanning all contribute to this book edited by Don Kistler.

As with most other works by more than one author, the reader is jostled a bit by the unevenness of the writing quality. The best material is done by Sproul, Horton and Armstrong. Armstrong's chapter, "The Obedience of Faith," is an interesting historical and exegetical exercise. His thesis, based on Romans 1:5, is "Paul called men and women to a faith in Jesus Christ which was conceived of as *inseparably connected with* obedience to God and the covenant" (p. 94) (emphasis his). Armstrong calls for caution in hermetically sealing the different aspects of salvation. "The most problematic part of all in the *ordo salutis* concept is the way in which the problem of faith and obedience is related to the larger whole of our actual union with Christ" (p. 111). He calls for a more Christocentric understanding of faith and obedience, which is worthy of deeper consideration.

Michael Horton makes a minor mistake in reference to C. H. Spurgeon and the "Down Grade" controversy. He refers to the "Down Grade" controversy and then quotes from a sermon Spurgeon preached in 1855. This particular controversy did not occur until 1887.

The chapter by Beeke and Lanning, "Glad Obedience," was not as strong as the others. In an attempt to address the third use of the law, "as a rule of thankful obedience on the part of the Christian" (p. 155), they make use of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, as a case study. Though the matter of a "Christian Sabbath" and its appropriate observance are issues of interest and concern, this rather polemical material would have been better in a volume dealing with the "Lord's Day" specifically.

Overall, this work is worth acquiring. It is certainly helpful for articulating the tension between faith and works. A tension is apparently felt by these fine Christian scholars as well.

God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy, by Richard A. Muller; Baker Book House, 1991; 309 pp. (paperback).

Reviewed by [Mark E. Dever](#)

The rise of a scholastic, Aristotelian theological method among the Protestant theologians in the generation after the Reformation was the cause of the development of the Reformed doctrine of predestination. True? "False," says Richard Muller, associate professor of historical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in this, his seventh book. Muller effectively lays aside this thesis (already waning in academic circles) in a most unusual way. Instead of writing carefully on the theological method of the Reformed theologians (which he has already done quite helpfully), Muller investigates the chief Protestant "villain" among the Reformed theologians, the Leiden professor Jacob Arminius. His conclusion is that Arminius, as much as any of this Reformed antagonists, drew on scholastic, Thomistic, Aristotelian categories in formulating this theology.

The reader can discover this much simply by reading the introduction and conclusion of the book (a decision which may particularly commend itself in light of the awkward lengthy sentences with complex ideas expressed in numerous subordinate phrases throughout the book). If one proceeds into the body of the work, what one finds is an intellectually and historically disciplined discovery of the roots of Arminius' theology in medieval and sixteenth-century Roman Catholic debates, and in the discussions of the preceding generations of Reformed and Lutheran theologians. Muller, clearly at home in what is to many the theological hinterland of the late sixteenth-century, therefore presents a much more balanced treatment than those many books which have investigated Arminius solely through the controversies which led to the Synod of Dort.

In the first chapter, Muller gives his apology for the book, by surveying the literature on Arminius, finding it surprisingly sparse and insubstantial for one who is so widely considered to have been influential. After noting some seventeenth-century studies of Arminius, Muller briefly appraises the twentieth-century works on Arminius.

In the second chapter, Muller traces Arminius' own education, noting the influences of logical Ramism on the one hand, and a revised Aristotelianism on the other. Muller suggests that Arminius was less influenced by Ramus than is frequently suggested, and that instead the influence of the metaphysics of the Spanish Jesuit, Francis Suarez, is more pronounced in Arminius' theological method. Muller suggests that Arminius' theological conclusions were as substantially different as they have often been represented, but that these conclusions did not emerge mechanically from a particular theological method. Arminius was typical of his generation in being more open to the method and interests of medieval scholastic theology; he was atypical in the conclusions that he reached.

In the third chapter, this scholastic method is distinguished from the earlier reformers' reluctances about the medieval scholastics. Though "a profound doctrinal continuity" between the reformers and their theological progeny was maintained, Muller rightly insists that the historian's first task is not one of inquisition as to whether the reformers' theology was distorted or altered. To do so "utterly misses the point of his [Arminius'] work." Arminius must first be understood in his own context before comparisons and contrasts with other theologians can move from mere polemic to greater understanding. Though Muller denies that Arminius could be accurately described as "a Reformed theologian" he insists that Arminius "must . . . be understood in relation to the Reformed tradition," (42). Muller characterizes his theology as "an eclectic theology with a Thomistic center or of a modified Thomism," (39).

In Chapter 4, Muller expounds Arminius' understanding of the theological task as practical (having knowledge of an object for another goal). Arminius was, however, unusual in that he advocated seeing our knowledge of God as also speculative (having knowledge of an object for no further reason). It was this combination of the practical and speculative understandings of theology which Muller in Chapter 5 presents as unusually eclectic.

In Parts 3, 4 and 5 of the book, Muller turns to the contextual explications of Arminius' theology of God, our knowledge of God and his will, and God's acts of creation and providence. He shows how Arminius, along with some of his contemporaries, went beyond the earlier generation of reformers in exploring the proofs of the existence

of God as foundations for Christian theology. With considerable insight Muller demonstrates the influence of Aquinas and Suarez on Arminius' explication of both the mode and object of theology, e.g., knowledge of God and of his divine attributes (Chapters 6 & 7). He presents careful discussions of both the method of knowing the attributes of God, and of Arminius' descriptions of the attributes themselves. In Chapter 9 he reconstructs some of the history of theological discussions about divine knowledge, concluding with a particularly helpful and important investigation of the history of the concept of middle knowledge, and its function in Arminius' theology. He corrects Isaac Dorner's misconception of the supreme place of divine power in Arminius' theology, (173).

Chapter 10 is a careful discussion of Arminius' understanding of the different types of God's will. In the crucial Chapter 11 Muller points out the centrality of the creation in Arminius' theology, no longer seeing creation as a means to a higher end, as did his reformed contemporaries, but instead giving creation "a virtually principal status for theological system" (Shades of a process-like dualism to come in some of Arminius' later followers, perhaps?). Here he also explains why Arminianism has been perhaps uniquely open to intellectual alliance with, if not subversion by, rationalism. In the final chapter, Muller carefully sets out the discussion that has traditionally been the focus of interest in Arminius--providence.

Whether lamented or lauded, Jacob Arminius' theology has been a remarkably neglected field of study. Particularly welcome, therefore, is this balanced study, appreciative but critical, aware of secondary works, but with a masterful command of medieval and contemporary Roman Catholic discussions. This book should help create more interest in Arminius than any study since Carl Bangs' *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* appeared over twenty years ago.

Personally, as a pastor with Reformed convictions, I found this book to be a telling intellectual journey, suggestive of the unwitting capitulations made by our Arminian brothers and sisters to secularism itself. At the end of the day, in a consistent Arminianism, the understanding of God and of humanity must be seen to be "rational" by the world around. Therefore I fear that their notions of God and of humanity can rise no further than the surrounding unbelieving culture. As an evangelical pastor in postmodern America, this is my fear. I pray that I am wrong.



News

New Church in Kansas City, MO

North Pointe Baptist Chapel of Kansas City, MO, began its regular Lord's Day meetings in September of 1996. The group first met in March of that year in the home of Don and Caffy Whitney. (Don is Assistant Professor of Spiritual Formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.) Through spring and summer there were occasional meetings on Sunday nights and weeknights for worship, fellowship, prayer, and discussion about the future of the group. When the body began meeting regularly, it worshipped in a large room on the campus of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

On Reformation Sunday the church moved its meeting site to the home of Jim and Pam Elliff. (Jim is founder and president of Christian Communicators Worldwide, a publishing and itinerant preaching ministry, and Director of the Midwestern Center for Biblical Revival.) Currently about 40 people worship with the church each Lord's Day. There are plans to move to a larger facility during the summer or fall.

This Southern Baptist church has adopted the 1689 Second London Confession and consciously attempts to apply the Regulative Principle to its worship. The church also expects to be supportive of the Founders Conference ministry as Don is on the national Founders Conference committee. Jim has attended that conference and spoken at the Founders Conference Midwest and some of the church members have attended the Birmingham conference.

For more information, write to Jim or Don in care of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 5001 N. Oak St., Trafficway, Kansas City, MO 64118. Their number at the seminary is (816) 453-4600. Jim's e-mail address is cbw.mbts@juno.com. Don's is donwhitney@compuserve.com.

Specially Commissioned Founders Print

Prints of a specially designed oil painting by Robert Nettles, son of Founders Journal Assistant Editor Tom Nettles, are now on sale. This work was done as a final senior project in an art class at Mississippi College. The project, designed and executed by Robert, contains portraits of six Baptist leaders: J. P. Boyce, John Bunyan, John A. Broadus, William Carey, B. H. Carroll, Charles Spurgeon plus the Founders Logo. The logo contains the sword and trowel emblematic of the ministry of Spurgeon, the carpenter's tools in the top third of the shield representing the incarnation of the Lord, the cobbler's tools reminiscent of the plodding practicality of the great Baptist missionary William Carey, and the tinker's anvil calling to mind the great soul of experiential Calvinism, John Bunyan.

A limited number of prints are available on 80 lb. pH balanced dulcet paper. The size is 18" X 24" and each print will be signed and numbered. The cost is \$60.00 per print. Send payment with orders to Robert Nettles, 181 Puckett Street, Brandon, MS 39042. A percentage of the proceeds will go to support the Founders Press.

1997 Founders YOUTH Conference

Over 500 youth and counselors convened in Panama City Beach June 15-19 for the eleventh annual Founders YOUTH Conference. This conference has been owned of God in lives of young people and adults alike from its very first year of existence. Phil Newton, pastor of Southwoods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee and Paul Stith, associate pastor of Northside Baptist Church in North Ft. Myers, Florida, preached on the theme, "Knowing God."

Seminars were taught on abortion, peer pressure, alternate lifestyles, and drugs and alcohol. Tapes of all of the messages and seminars (along with information on next year's conference) are available from Bill Ascol at (318) 798-7088.



Letters

Dear Dr. Ascol,

I was surprised, in more ways than one, to happen upon the Founders Journal Online page recently and read your article on Kirby Godsey for the winter 1997 issue of your publication. As a Baptist, a senior (and very soon to be alumnus) of an excellent Presbyterian liberal-arts college, and a person generally interested in debate and discussion on important issues in Christianity, I am, from time to time, inclined to scrutinize views very radically different from my own. Of course, the views espoused in your article and your publication can well be described in the aforementioned manner.

However, I am quite impressed by both your civility and your honesty and sincerity; I am not used to experiencing such qualities in the fundamentalists with whom I have discussions. I also appreciate your scholarly tone.

However, I still feel I must respond to this article in particular. I don't want this to take on the guise of a righteous polemic, but I do disagree with the arguments you use to indict Dr. Godsey. Here's why:

1.) You lament the fact that "evangelicals" (whoever they are; no two Christians seem to be able to define this much-banded-about term the same way) no longer worry too much about heresies. Well, I don't know where you've been since 1979, but there are plenty of "heresies" nowadays in the Southern Baptist Convention, and defending any of them (or merely defending any fellow Baptist's rights to defend any of them) can--and usually does--get you fired. Women's ordination, the Religious Right, the priesthood of all believers, local church autonomy and democratic rule--if you don't hold to a certain orthodox viewpoint on all of these issues, you are considered a heretic by the new regime. Please go tell Dan Martin, Al Shackleford, Molly Marshall, and Russell Dilday that no one cares about "heresies" any more in the Southern Baptist Convention. They may find cause to disagree with you....

2) You suggest that, if Dr. Godsey had read the work of certain unnamed Puritan theologians, that he may better be able to understand the proper balance of devotion and theology in the Christian life. Well, I don't know about you Founders folks, but a theology and devotion that lead one to burn innocent women accused of witchcraft, massacre thousands of Native Americans in a religiously-motivated campaign of genocide, and banish fellow Christian leaders for speaking the truth is NOT the kind of theology of faith and practice that I want to use as my model. I prefer the one that Jesus Christ preaches, thank you very much. But not many people who call themselves Christians these days seem to be following that model. If only Roger Williams could speak to us now. But, I know that people in your camp don't like to talk that much about the man to whom we owe our entire Baptist heritage in this country....

3) You suggest that Dr. Godsey, a man of more impeccable Southern Baptist credentials than any Al Mohler, Jerry Falwell, or Charles Haddon Spurgeon, is nothing but a "neo-Baptist." Now, I may just be a bit presumptuous to ask this of a man much better educated than myself, but you beg the question: who in the world are you to define who is and who is not a Baptist? The very idea is the most un-Baptist thing I've ever heard of! I won't dare deny Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, or even Pat Robertson the right to call themselves Baptists, even though they espouse many a belief that seems to run contrary to the very core of Baptist principles and distinctives. However, I know that calling yourself a Southern Baptist, yet acting in markedly un-Baptist ways, is very much in vogue right now in the late, great Southern Baptist Convention.

Grace and Peace from our Lord Jesus Christ,
R.M., Memphis, TN, via e-mail.

P.S.--Please feel free to print this in the letters to the editor section of your next issue. I would be thrilled to entertain any responses to this message by any interested parties, as I feel the Lord teaches me the most by placing me in controversy--"baptizing by fire," if you will. As I said, I am singularly impressed with what I have seen of you and your publication.

Thanks for your kind words and for taking the time to offer your point of view to us. Regarding the numbered concerns which you raised: 1) I do not recall any of the people whom you named being charged with heresy, although it may have been appropriate in one of those cases. I used the term very carefully to refer to matters of faith that relate to the core issues of salvation. One might be a Christian (albeit a misguided one) and reject the inerrancy of Scripture. One may not, however, be a Christian and reject the deity of Christ. 2) The Puritans are more often vilified than read. As I have mentioned to you previously, I will be happy to give you a book which will introduce you to Puritan devotional theology. Simply let me know of your willingness to read it. In addition, I was referring primarily to the English Puritans. Roger Williams, by the way, was a Calvinist. 3) Concerning Southern Baptist credentials, you are two-thirds right (only because Spurgeon is dead and Falwell is Independent Baptist). Historically it has been recognized that one must be an orthodox Christian if one is to be a genuine Baptist. The modern tendency to claim otherwise (ie. that the wedding of Baptist distinctives to unorthodox views constitutes a legitimate Baptist) is nothing more than Landmarkism of the Left.

--Editor

Dear Editor:

Thank you for this great publication!

I am enjoying the Founders Journal so much! Each issue is filled with material that is so-o-o-o good! I'm 66 years old and I can remember my dear sweet father preaching some of these truths. I call them the "Biblical Doctrines of Paul" rather than Calvinism.

Anyway, keep up the good work and with much prayer maybe our young preachers will get a good start!

Love in Christ,
Miss R.R., Dallas, TX

Dear Editor:

I just like to say thank you for putting the Founders Journal publication online. This is helpful to us.

About myself, I was introduced [to] the Bible in the Southern Baptist church about 18 years ago. Last year I pastor[ed] a Southern Baptist church but this [was] only for a year for some reasons. Here in H[ong K[ong] the

doctrines of grace among the Southern Baptist churches and also among Christians in general is [considered] a strange doctrine. Some consider it in fact to be a false teaching. Presently I am laboring here to establish a church, a Baptist one, English speaking, and adherent in the doctrines of grace, by the enablement of God.

Thank you and I hope to make some visit[s] [to] your site again. I made this visit using an "internet cafe" computer in H[ong] K[ong], so please ignore the source of this E-mail if another name than mine appears.

Yours in Christ,
R.V., Hong Kong, via e-mail.

Dear Friends:

I deeply appreciate the Founders Journal and its commitment to returning Southern Baptists to their historical theological roots. I have enclosed [a gift] to help with your ministry. Within the last couple of years, the Lord has given me a small degree of boldness to proclaim the doctrines of grace. I am beginning to sense what I am sure many of you dear brethren know all too well--that although the doctrines of grace are precious to us, they are hated and despised by others. I ask that you please pray for me. I have not experienced any open hostility, but I often feel faint. The Arminianism that we see both in and outside of the Southern Baptist Convention seems almost like a taunting Goliath that threatens to devour anyone who dares to challenge it. There is comfort, however, in knowing that, unlike David who had to fight alone, you brothers are out there. May the Lord bless and multiply your ministry.

In Christ,
T. H., Mississippi



Are You a Calvinist?

If you mean by a rigid Calvinist, one who is fierce, dogmatical, and censorious, and ready to deal out anathemas against all who differ from him, I hope I am no more such a one than I am a rigid Papist. But, as to the doctrines which are now stigmatized by the name of Calvinism, I cannot well avoid the epithet rigid, while I believe them: for there seems to be no medium between holding them and not holding them; between ascribing salvation to the will of man, or the power of God; between grace and works, Romans, 11:6.; between being found in the righteousness of Christ, or in my own, Philippians, 3:9. Did the harsh consequences often charged upon the doctrine called Calvinistic really belong to it, I should have much to answer for if I had invented it myself, or taken it upon trust from Calvin; but, as I find it in the Scriptures, I cheerfully embrace it, and leave it to the Lord to vindicate his own truths and his own ways, from all the imputations which have been cast upon them.

--John Newton (author of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*)



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