



Are Calvinists Hyper?

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The Founders Journal

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Eight-week-old Luke David Prince "enjoys" *Calvin's Institutes* while sitting in his father's lap. Son of David & Judi Prince of Louisville, Kentucky.

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The Princess, the Nun, and the Savior

Tom Ascol

Within one week the world witnessed the funerals of two of the most popular women of the twentieth century. One was struck down on the streets of France in the prime of life due to a senseless, tragic automobile accident. The other died after a long and useful life lived among the poorest of the poor in India. Through television and radio it is estimated that billions of people tuned into the public funeral services.

The Princess

The news media have been preoccupied with recounting for us again and again the stories of these two remarkable women. Princess Diana became something of a symbol for the world's younger generation. Catapulted to fame at age nineteen by marrying Prince Charles, her life was a series of tragedies and triumphs that were played out on a very public stage. She was long ago declared the most photographed person in history.

Her Cinderella-like wedding seventeen years ago gave the impression that the world was witnessing a modern fairy tale being acted out by Britain's royal family. The birth of her two sons made news around the globe. Diana became the object of great sympathy when her marriage turned sour and her husband was discovered to be an adulterer. Her own adulterous relationships seemed almost justifiable because of the sadness of her life.

Her public cheered for her as she overcame a serious eating disorder and the tragedy of divorce. Over the last five years she furthered endeared herself to the world by taking up the cause of children. She raised millions of dollars for over one hundred charities and called attention to the scourge of landmines that remain in war-torn countries. She put a human face on modern medical tragedies by calling attention to those who suffer with cerebral palsy and the AIDS virus. Her charity work for children earned her the "International Humanitarian of the Year Award" in 1995. As one who was privileged with great wealth, she did much to help the poor and underprivileged of the world.

The Nun

But not nearly so much as did Mother Teresa. Already a nun, in 1946 she sensed a divine call to establish a new religious order that would care of those who were outcasts in Calcutta. Taking as their motto, "Let every action of mine be something beautiful for God," Mother Teresa and a dozen sisters began this new work.[\[1\]](#)

After the British journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge, produced a television documentary on her work in Calcutta, her fame spread around the world. Muggeridge was so deeply impressed by her that he later converted to Catholicism. In 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize. She turned down the customary award banquet and asked that the money be sent to her mission instead. When the Pope gave her a limousine, she immediately sold it and used the money for her charity work.

Mother Teresa gave her life to care for people that no one else wanted. Lepers, beggars, people with AIDS-she refused no one. She was an ardent defender of the unborn. When she received the Nobel Peace Prize she focused her comments on the scourge of abortion: "To me the nations with legalized abortion are the poorest nations. The greatest destroyer of peace today is the crime against the unborn child."

In 1994 she addressed the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. In her speech she declared abortion to be a "direct killing of the innocent child." Speaking to four thousand of the most powerful men and women in our nation's capitol, including President and Mrs. Clinton, she said, "Please don't kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the

child and be loved by the child." Her children's home in Calcutta saved over 3000 children from abortion.

The Questions

Princess Di and Mother Teresa were shining examples of good works. They were sincere in their efforts to help others. Much of the good which they did will live on after them.

In that sense their lives are a challenge to those of us who are Bible-believing Christians. As every Christian knows, the Bible says a great deal about good works. We are meant to do them. Our Lord, Jesus Christ went about doing good. And we are called to follow His example.

Where are the evangelical Christians who are giving their lives to work among the poorest of the poor? Where are the evangelicals who are committed to serving their fellow men to the degree that these two women did? As Al Mohler asks, "Do we have what it takes to produce a Mother Teresa? Do we have the courage, the concern, and the love, for `the least of these' required for such a ministry?"[\[2\]](#) To put it quite simply, "Where are our "good works?"

We ought to be challenged by the lives of Princess Di and Mother Teresa. But in a very different and perhaps even more profound sense, we ought to be challenged by their deaths. Where are they? Specifically, where are they now? Some will think it absolutely crass to even raise this question. But it must be raised, even if it cannot be infallibly answered.

In the minds of nearly everyone there is no question that God will and must accept Diana into the bliss of heaven. The Roman Catholic Cardinal Basil Hume suggested that the Princess is enjoying the highest eternal happiness in her existence beyond the grave. But, is this so, and if so, why is it so? Is it because she was born into the church? Because she died so young? Because she did so much good?

Of course, the case is even more dramatic with Mother Teresa. Within hours of her death talk centered not on her eternal dwelling place, but on when she would officially attain sainthood. To even raise the question of eternal destiny regarding this incredible lady who gave her life serving the world's poorest and doing so in the name of Jesus is tantamount to blasphemy in the minds of many people. Yet, Jesus Himself warned that not everyone who calls Him, `Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. Even some who have prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and done many wonders in His name will hear from the Lord, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:21-23).

I am not in the place of God, nor do I aspire to be. He is the eternal judge and each person must stand and give an account to Him in that great tribunal of judgment day. I am quite happy to leave those questions finally to Him and to refrain from making judgments which the Lord has reserved for Himself.

The Answer

Nevertheless, the deaths of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa, and especially the way that they have been treated in the media and popular culture, demand that we consider again and assert again in the plainest language what the Bible says about salvation. What is the biblical testimony? Simply this: that God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone for good works.

Dead, Enslaved, Condemned

Paul puts the matter plainly in Eph. 2:1-10. In the first three verses we are reminded that we all come into the world lost. We are "dead in trespasses and sins." That is, in God's sight we are both rebels and failures. The analogy is imposing. Spiritually, the condition of every person who comes into the world is analogous to physical death. A dead man cannot

make himself alive. He has no biological abilities. Similarly, those who are spiritually dead have no power to give themselves spiritual life. They are naturally "alienated from God" (2:12).

Paul goes on to describe this condition as being under the direction of Satan. Those who are spiritually dead live "according to the prince of the power of the air." He is the one who deceives unbelievers and facilitates a life that is lived according to "the lusts of the flesh . . . and of the mind."

Even more devastating is the description of people under the condemnation of God. This is what Paul means by "children of wrath." This wrath is not some impersonal, cosmic force, but rather God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil. Because of sin, mankind has become offensive to God and He will, therefore, oppose us in His wrath.

This sad and desperate position is not something people acquire after so many failures. It is our condition "by nature." By birth, innately, we come into the world dead in sin, directed by the devil, and condemned by God.

Do these verses apply to Princess Di and Mother Teresa? Of course they do! As wonderful as they were, as much as we will miss them, as much good as they did, they were by nature children of wrath, enslaved to the devil and spiritually dead. This is equally true of everyone. If you are a Christian, this was your past reality. If you are not a Christian, this is your present condition.

Alive in Christ

How, then, does someone who is spiritually dead and under divine wrath get right with God? Can such a person actually make it to heaven? In vv. 4-7 Paul emphasizes that the only hope of salvation is found in Jesus Christ. Because of the richness of His mercy and the greatness of His love, God gives spiritually dead sinners new life in Christ. This is the testimony of every Christian. Through conviction of sin and the revelation of Christ to the mind and heart, God "made us alive with Christ."

Not only that, He has also given us a new position in Christ ("having raised up together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus") and a new future in Christ ("that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"). Our status has changed. No longer are we under God's wrath. Now we are His friends whom He intends to shower with kindness.

By Grace through Faith

All of this is because of Christ-not because of any noble deeds which we have done. It is Christ alone who saves sinners. The person who is not in Christ remains dead in sin, enslaved to the devil and under God's wrath.

Paul is careful to emphasize that the salvation which is in Christ comes only by grace. Twice he states, "by grace you have been saved" (vv. 5, 8). Grace is God's free and undeserved kindness extended to those who deserve the opposite. Rebels, in opposition to God because of sin, deserve wrath and judgment. But in Christ God gives just the opposite-forgiveness and new life. It is all His work. God is the subject and sinners are the objects of salvation.

The salvation which God gives must be received through faith. This faith involves trust and the commitment of one's life to Jesus Christ as Lord. It includes depending on Christ to make one acceptable to God.

To this salvation we add nothing. Paul specifically states that it is "not of works lest anyone should boast" (v. 9). Even the faith by which we receive salvation is God's gift. We must believe. But God must give us faith to do so.

Salvation by sheer grace is hard for people to accept. Everyone learns early in life that nothing is free; "you get what you

pay for." But in salvation we get what Another paid for. Salvation can never be earned and neither is it granted in response to good works. It is by grace you are saved. Thus it is utter folly to speak in terms of anyone deserving heaven because of her life of good works.

For Good Works

Does that mean that there is no place in biblical salvation for works? Not at all. Good works have an essential place. Works are essential to salvation as its fruit and not as its root. They are the essential, inevitable result, not the cause. Paul does not conclude his exposition of salvation by grace without adding an important word about good works. Those who receive salvation have been prepared by God for good works. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (v. 10). Part of God's purpose in saving us is that we might perform good works which will bring Him glory.

No only has He prepared us for good works, He has prepared good works for us: "which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v. 10). God has specific things which He has planned for His people to do on earth. As we match our gifts and abilities with His providential ordering of our opportunities, we discover what these prepared-beforehand-good-works are.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Princess Diana's death many politicians, pundits, and religious leaders have assumed that she is in heaven because of all the good works which she did. But is this right? No! The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is all of grace, not of works. Not even the works of royalty are enough to earn one an acceptance with God.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Good works have nothing to do with bringing us into a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Did Mother Teresa know this? She was known around the world for her good works. Did she trust in them for salvation? Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that our good works cooperate with God's grace to bring about salvation. On the basis of Ephesians 2, we must necessarily denounce such teaching. Would Mother Teresa agree?

Was her faith in Christ and in Christ alone? Of her work in Calcutta she said that she tried to convert no one to faith in Christ. Rather, as she told her biographer, she tried to make Hindus better Hindus and Muslims better Muslims.^[3] Was this spoken out of conviction or confusion? As mentioned above, such questions must be left with God.

There is one question, however, which we must emphatically answer. Did Princess Diana and Mother Teresa go to heaven because of their good works? No! There is only one way to be saved and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Without this, no one, no matter how many good works she has done, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is good news for real sinners. God justifies the ungodly. Salvation is based on His grace and not on our goodness. We must not let the media or our biblically illiterate culture have the last word about what it means to be saved. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. And those of us who have tasted this salvation must boldly declare it to a world that is lost.



¹For much of the information found in this and the following three paragraphs I am indebted to "Faith Without Works is Dead: An Evangelical Meditation on Mother Teresa" by Al Mohler, Jr. in *Fidelitas: Commentary on Theology and Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Sept. 15, 1997). Those who are interested in receiving this excellent resource should contact The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

²Ibid., 3-4.

³"Symbol of Selflessness," *World*, Vol. 12, No. 18 (Sept. 20, 1997), 11.



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Are Calvinists Hyper?

[Tom J. Nettles](#)

In recent years many Baptist newspapers have shown an encouraging trend. An unusual number of individual items have discussed the issue of Calvinism in Southern Baptist life. News articles, guest editorials, personal opinion articles, and letters to the editors have demonstrated great diversity in both heat and light. Sadly, there has usually been more of the former than the latter.

This is an encouraging trend from a couple of standpoints: first, that theology would receive any kind of hearing could have beneficial results. When one begins to think theologically the possibility of biblical doctrine having a positive effect on one's worship practices, preaching, personal life, and witness increases; second, when the doctrines of grace are the topic of conversation, ideas, thoughts, biblical passages which have never occurred to a person or have been repressed rush into one's consciousness and provide a platform for beneficial discussion. It may be that the process will bequeath to us visions of an infinitely wise God worthy of the worship attributed to Him in Scripture and commanded by it. In addition we might face the challenge of our age with a sense of confidence rather than sinking despair.

Some of the letters have shown that commitment to these historic evangelical, reformed, Baptist truths is intense in many individuals and extensive across the convention. It is undeniable that there is a growing theological renewal taking place among churches and church leaders.

Another matter, however, shows that a real challenge lies before us. It is clear that if a broader, more influential commitment to the doctrines of grace becomes a part of the convention picture, a purer knowledge of those marvelous truths is essential. If they ever become more than a just a newsworthy curiosity or a pesky polarity in Southern Baptist "faultiness" (to use the word of Jesse Fletcher), then much education is still needed. I say this because much of the attention given to "Calvinism" in these days shows that significant lack of awareness has created both misunderstandings and an easy path for misrepresentations. The confusion which reigns in discussing these issues could be multiplied to embarrassing dimensions. Two representations, however, will suffice to make this point. When one former seminary teacher was discussing the *Abstract of Principles*, he said,

Boyce and Manly received their theological training in Princeton Seminary, with Charles Hodge as mentor. Their modified Calvinism is embedded in the 1858 Abstract. A glaring example is Article V: "Election is God's eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life." Predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible grace belong to this Calvinism.

This writer goes on to say that this is the kind of Calvinism that rebuked William Carey and with which Boyce himself must have been inconsistent since Boyce manifested a "zeal for missions."

Another writer, a former Southern Baptist seminary professor, said (contradicting the prior writer though similar in sentiment) that a Calvinistic interpretation of the Abstract is "something that the author did not intend, and something our Baptist forebears clearly renounced as an impediment to their evangelistic and missionary understanding of the gospel."

We see, therefore, in these two analyses a disagreement and an agreement. They disagree on the meaning of the *Abstract*, one propounding an interpretation that minimizes its Calvinism and the other portraying it as a five-point

Calvinist document. They agree, however, that Calvinism is inconsistent with missions. In order for a Calvinist to pursue missions he must first renounce Calvinism or practice inconsistently with it. Digesting these two writers' opinions, salted down with several other pieces in various papers, one receives the distinct gastronomical sensation that the Calvinism *du jour* is simply microwaved hyper-Calvinism re-thawed and served from its eighteenth-century freezer.

There is little appreciation of the distinction between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism in spite of some recent writings, including Timothy George's biography of William Carey *A Faithful Witness*, which have carefully delineated the differences. Many continue to fail, even in the most appropriate historical context, to give a clear picture of the aggressive evangelical Calvinism that characterized the leaders of the mission movement among English Baptists, American Baptists, and Southern Baptists. Their missionary involvement becomes abstracted from a theological framework and seems to be purely the outcome of guts and zeal or of love for Christ unconnected to any clear views of doctrinal truth. That hyper-Calvinism really is a different theological system from Calvinism is rarely discussed. Hyper-Calvinism is seen as *very serious Calvinism* or "Five-point Calvinism" or the defense of "limited atonement" or "supralapsarianism." One letter to the editor in the *Baptist Record* indicates the belief of its writer that "sublapsarianism" is only "one step removed from evangelical Arminianism." P. H. Mell would be quite amused, but at the same time greatly alarmed, at this misunderstanding.

Let us assume for a moment that the interpretation of our two former professors is correct: one indeed must not hold to any distinctive of Calvinism with clarity and certainly not with uncompromising conviction if he is to be effective in the encouragement of a missionary program. Let us then imagine that we are faced with the task of electing a corresponding secretary for the purpose of communicating instructions and encouragement to the missionaries on the field and mobilizing the convention to call out its likely candidates for missionary service. We receive a letter of recommendation with the following theological profile. The information is volunteered that our potential candidate believes that "election . . . is God's free, sovereign, eternal and unchangeable purpose to glorify the perfections of His character in the salvation of a definite number of the human family by Jesus Christ, without regard to any foreseen merit or good works on their part as the ground or condition of this choice." Further, our candidate states, "God's will of sovereign purpose is not suspended upon the volitions of his creatures; the universe combined could not frustrate one jot or tittle; and in accordance with this will does he carry forward all his divine and glorious operations." Incredulous at such boldness of statement in asserting the unchallenged, unilateral sovereignty of God, we ask the recommender if this candidate understands anything about the doctrine of free will. "Oh," comes the response, "He believes that the will is in bondage to the inordinate corruption of the human heart and that such is the unrelenting depravity of sinful man, [that] he will assuredly wander on in unbelief and rebellion, unless arrested by the special exercise of efficacious, almighty grace," (*The Christian Index*, Jan 20, 1843, pp. 42, 43). The recommender then goes further in riveting this point in our consciousness. He quotes this possible candidate for our foreign mission position as insisting that "God does not suspend his efficacious grace until men exercise repentance and faith: the existence of these graces in the heart proves that the work of salvation is already begun. They do not precede regeneration, but are the fruits of it," (*Ibid.*, 1-27-1843. p. 59).

We respond with exasperation, "Well, if we are so bad and so utterly at the arbitrary disposal of God, then God help us!" Not put off at all by our mental turmoil or by the growing recognition that we are agitated and somewhat offended that such a candidate has been set forth the recommender continues to read a statement from this candidate he so clearly admires. "If the Lord saves any individual, then he intended from eternity to save him. We are driven," he says, "by the doctrine of human depravity into the doctrine of sovereign, particular, unconditional and eternal election" (*Ibid.*, p. 44).

Even if he believes in eternal, unconditional, particular election, bondage of the will, and efficacious, irresistible grace, surely our candidate believes that Christ has died for all men without exception. "Hardly," comes the

response. "For if he had our Lord would not receive the full portion of his reward for all his sufferings." Shall the Savior "quit the bosom of his Father to sojourn in this region of sin and death, here to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, here to make bare his back to the smiter, and his soul to the envenomed curse of sin, a curse that called for blood and agonies and death" (*Ibid.*, p. 58) if his reward were contingent on the uncertain obedience of his enemies? Would the Father so treat his Son? Such simply cannot be the case.

We are more nervous and offended now, but our recommender continues. "This candidate is a very clear thinker on this issue and from his engagement with a large number of Scriptures and his discernment of the cohering center of them, sees the atoning work of Christ was done in light of an eternal covenant, for a certain number of the human race." We are very confused and not able to listen well now but our recommender continues with words to the effect that all of these would certainly come to salvation and these alone would come; some persons have absolutely been given to Christ as his inheritance; the Savior regarded "a certain portion of mankind as his;" the Father promised the Son an "ample recompense for his sufferings" and "a portion of mankind are included in this inheritance;" and God has "promised to his Son a definite number of mankind" and that a definite reward for his "stupendous work of magnifying the law and making it honorable, of making reconciliation for iniquity" was arranged in the "purpose of God before the foundation of the world" (*Ibid.*, p. 58).

We are so unaccustomed to thinking in these terms that it seems like a foreign language to us; it seems like so much jargon and flies past us at a pace which makes us embarrassed that we are having this conversation. Why, this is that Protestant scholasticism that many of our mentors have warned us against! The recommender continues to explain his candidate's position but we have now been overloaded with theological ideas. When we think about missions we are theological minimalists anyway, and now, . . . such detail, . . . such narrow, exclusive . . . such *DIABOLICAL* ideas. We tune in in time to hear the phrase "A certain definite number are saved-no more, no less" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).

At this we lose our Southern charm, interrupt the recommender, and say, "That is hyper Calvinism! You have described a position antithetical to missions and one which our forebears clearly renounced as an impediment to their evangelistic and missionary understanding of the gospel."

The recommender now smiles mysteriously; he seems amused; we can't tell if it is what we said or how we said it that charms him most. He then confesses the ruse. The person he seemed so enthusiastic about died in 1864. We are relieved. He certainly was no Southern Baptist; probably a Presbyterian. "You really had me going," we say. "That kind of person would never even be interested in foreign missions."

"On the contrary," the recommender says. "In fact, he was elected as the first corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board by his peers who knew him well and knew that he held all of these theological positions. In fact, they shared these positions with him."

"But he was a hyper-Calvinist!" we object.

"Not at all." We begin to think that our recommender has an acquaintance with these issues more expansive than our own knowledge of them. "He believed, in fact he preached, 'Do not for a moment suppose my friend, that the inability to which the Saviour refers, involves in it any thing which furnishes a just excuse for rejecting him'." He went on to say that this person taught that unbelief was inexcusable; moreover, the "sinner's inability, is the sinner's crime-and the greater the inability, the greater his crime." We are again becoming very confused because the recommender is saying something like all persons have the natural faculties which would enable them to walk uprightly if they desired to do so out of a love to the creator and lawgiver. Nothing hinders a compliance with the requisitions of the gospel but the sinner's rebellious will. Universal obligation to repent and believe justifies the

promiscuous preaching of the gospel. Sovereign grace does not discourage efforts for the conversion of the ungodly but gives confidence and joy to the spiritual husbandman to thrust his plowshare into the soil and sow his seed. The recommender then reads this remarkable passage from a sermon.

With what immovable confidence may the missionary of the cross, in obedience to his ascended Saviour, fly to distant land, and proclaim in every valley and on every hill, "O ye dry bones hear ye the word of the Lord." Victory he knows will sooner or later come; and the assurance of victory nerves his arm and gladdens his heart amidst all the terrors of the battle field. It is not for God's ambassador to know who will repent and believe the Gospel: duty is his; the issue is with heaven. He is not to preach to men as elect or non-elect, but as needy, guilty, perishing sinners; he is to warn, rebuke and exhort them with ceaseless importunity and affection, and having sowed his seed in love, and watered it with his tears and prayers, he is to commend his prayers, his message and his hearers to that God who alone can give the increase, and who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

We find that we are moved by the passion and sincerity of the narrative. "Who was this?" we ask. "It was Charles Dutton Mallary," comes the answer. "He served as pastor of the church in Augusta for four years in the 1830's and then at Milledgeville before he raised money for Mercer for three years. When he was elected to the Foreign mission position, the brethren earnestly solicited his compliance and even offered him a salary of \$1,200 per year. He eventually refused to take the position because of frail health and his desire to devote himself to evangelistic and pastoral labors in Georgia."

Now we think we understand. Mallary was evangelistic; therefore, he obviously didn't preach these doctrines. Suddenly, however, we realize that there is more to this issue than we have before considered and that the recommender is ready with more instruction. He points to a biographical sketch which describes Mallary's preaching this way: "He loved to preach Christ crucified as the only foundation of a sinner's hope, and to exhibit a sovereign God, working all things after the counsel of his own will. These high themes he discussed with a clear head and a warm heart, and rendered them eminently practical by the manner in which he pressed them on the consciences of his hearers." Further we learned that Mallary was aware of the abuses some committed against the doctrine of grace by tearing it "from its proper connections," mixing it with "much of their own imaginings," and holding it up to a distorted light. He believed this antinomian spell had been broken but saw another possible evil. "Happy indeed shall we be, if in disengaging ourselves from this dangerous extreme, we do not hurry on to its opposite, fritter down the doctrines of grace, and give countenance, by our faith and teaching, to self-righteous presumption." The last statement we heard before becoming lost in deep contemplation was "If I do not mistake, there is a tendency in some portion of our brethren to this very evil."

With all of that we had to bring our conversation to a close. Walking away we felt that we had much more to do than just to develop a method for the procurement of personnel. We began to think that we could use more instruction in history and theology; and we could even take a closer look at the gospel with a clearer understanding of the purity and power of its grace.



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My Journey Through the Church Growth Movement

Phil A. Newton

A friend recently received a glowing report from a member of a large, rapidly growing evangelical church. "We have the most wonderful pastor! He really preaches the Word. He preaches against sin and even calls sin by its name," the member said. When my friend asked about the doctrinal content of the sermons ("Does he preach on doctrines like regeneration, justification, redemption, sanctification and so forth?"), the emphatic response was, "No! He doesn't preach on *those* kinds of things!"

How can we reconcile a *growing church* with *doctrine-less preaching*? If doctrine is not being taught, can a church nevertheless consider itself a New Testament church? This is precisely where I found myself several years ago.

Back to School

While in my third pastorate, I grew despondent over the lack of sizable growth in my congregations. I had attended conferences and seminars that promoted *growth, growth, growth* as the end-all for pastors. I had listened to the well-respected men in my denomination and often wished that my church could have the kind of growth they had experienced. Finally, my despondency led to action! After making radical changes in my own church organization, I started seeing our numbers rise. I was gratified and motivated to go after more growth. I'm not much for doing things half-way, so I thought that the best move I could make would be to study *church growth* at the "fountainhead," Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

My first two-week seminar in Fuller's Doctor of Ministry program was under the leading spokesman for church growth, C. Peter Wagner. Wagner is a former missionary in South America who returned to his alma mater to teach with the late Donald McGavran. While McGavran, a former missionary to India, is known as the "father of the church growth movement," Wagner certainly carries the title for the best-known proponent. I had already read several of Wagner's books in preparation for this seminar, along with books by many others in the movement. I found Wagner to be an interesting and personable teacher, one who has the capacity of producing lively classroom discussions. Armed with overhead transparencies and a battery of notes, Wagner began to unfold to my class the basics of church growth.

I found myself clinging on to every word spoken in class, though at times I was uneasy with various assertions. Wagner never flinched when rebuffed in class over disagreements, though such disagreements seldom happened. He stated that he welcomed criticism and corrections for the teachings on church growth since that became one of the best tools for refining the movement.

I continued my studies at Fuller with a major emphasis on church growth and church planting. Over half of my class time was devoted to studying church growth. While Wagner was my major professor, another was John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard churches. He taught on the controversial subject of "signs and wonders" and their foundational relationship to church growth. By the time of my graduation, I was thoroughly steeped in "church growth thinking" and the broad range of the movement's influence upon evangelicalism.

Much of what I learned is simply common sense. Details regarding church parking, building the right staff, location, maximizing use of facilities, training lay leadership, utilizing spiritual gifts, and diagnosing weaknesses can be

readily found in church growth materials. Such teaching can be helpful to any church leader. Churches would be wise to avail themselves of it.

The church growth movement also provides a good analysis of the weakness of crusade evangelism and the greater effectiveness of one-on-one evangelism. Stress is laid on pursuing the "fields that are white unto harvest" in efforts to reach the lost and grow churches. A strong emphasis on "disciple making" over against merely "evangelizing" helps to correct the attitude of bloating church rolls with unconverted members. Statistics provided by church growth leaders can give churches a better grasp of the spiritual needs in our nation.

While I found many helpful ideas in studying church growth, I also found myself wrapped up in a "mentality" that proved costly. Building a church along "church growth principles" meant an adherence to *pragmatism* rather than biblical Christianity. Pragmatism can provide increased numbers, but it cannot regenerate unbelieving men. As a pragmatist, I was interested in discovering what methods and devices worked to *produce* growth and in fully employing them in my church. Though I had always believed in expository preaching, I found myself going light on exposition and heavy on appealing to the *felt needs* of the community. All of this was justified, or so I thought, because I was going to be growing a large church.

Rethinking "Church Growth" Principles

I recall visiting one night in a home of a theological student who had visited our church. He asked me what my theology was and I responded, "I have a pragmatic theology. I want a theology that *works*." I was incensed later when a friend told me that he had spoken with this student who told him after my visit, "Phil doesn't have a theology." Unfortunately, he was right and it was showing up in the way I was "doing ministry." Little by little I began to see these flaws in my own ministry and in the church growth movement as a whole.

At the heart of Wagner's teaching and the church growth movement are *principles* related to evangelism. Wagner has admirably promoted the work of evangelism as being of utmost importance in the local church. When his understanding of evangelism is examined in the light of Scripture, however, some serious question marks appear. He divides evangelism into the following categories (C. Peter Wagner, editor, with Win Arn and Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988, pp. 296-297):

- **Presence Evangelism.** Getting next to people and helping them; doing good in the world; designated "1-P" evangelism.
- **Proclamation Evangelism.** Presenting the gospel; the death and resurrection of Christ is communicated; people hear and can respond; designated "2-P" evangelism.
- **Persuasion Evangelism.** Making disciples; stresses the importance of not separating evangelism and follow-up; incorporating people into the body of Christ; designated "3-P" evangelism.

Wagner points out that all three types of evangelism have their place, but the goal must be to carry out "3-P" evangelism. Few would disagree with the fact that "1-P" evangelism cannot adequately communicate the gospel to an unbeliever. But few also would deny that without the *visible presence* of those who have been animated by the gospel of Christ, all other evangelism would be stifled.

The biggest problem comes in Wagner's understanding of "2-P" evangelism. According to his definition it appears to

be little more than preaching or a verbal witness of the facts of the gospel. Then the unbeliever can make up his mind on whether the facts presented appear to be worthy of his deciding to embrace the gospel.

"3-P" evangelism becomes the focal point for church growth proponents. It does involve both *presence* and *proclamation*, but that is not enough. The evangelist must use every means at his disposal to *persuade* an unbeliever to turn from his sin and believe in Christ so that he becomes a disciple. In class lectures, Wagner capitalizes upon the Greek word, *peitho*, and its use in the book of Acts. He cites Acts 13:43, 17:4, 18:4, 26:28, and 28:23-24, where *peitho* is used as a reference to an evangelistic appeal. Wagner consistently portrays the word as meaning "to persuade." Therefore, proper evangelism will be *persuasion evangelism*.

There are several problems with Wagner's deduction from these passages in the book of Acts. First, it is generally unwise to build a theology upon a historical section of Scripture unless there are no didactic or instructional passages dealing with the subject. The New Testament abounds with passages referring to the work of evangelism. Most notable is Paul's clear explanation of his method for evangelizing in Rom. 1:16-17. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* Paul declared that the gospel is adequate enough through the work of the Holy Spirit to bring a man to a saving knowledge of Christ.

In 1 Cor. 2:4, 5 he points out that he sought to proclaim the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than using all of the common mind-control techniques of the Greeks. *And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive [Greek, *peitho*] words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.* The Apostle also contends that Christians should so live out the reality of the gospel that they will "appear as lights in the world," which is "1-P" evangelism according to Wagner's definition. On the heels of such a statement he then shows the appropriate method of evangelizing, "Holding forth the word of life," which puts the believer in the position of presenting (i.e., "proclaiming") the life-giving truth of God's Word to unbelieving men (Phil. 1:15-16).

Second, Wagner's use of *peitho* as the basis for *persuasion evangelism* is extremely weak. To limit the translation of this word to one use shows a lack of understanding the breadth of the Greek language. While *peitho* can be translated "persuade" in numerous places, it also can best be translated by "urged," "convinced," "seduced," "entreat," and even "bribe" in other cases. The context determines the best translation of the word. Did Luke, the biblical writer in Acts, use *peitho* to refer to a certain type of persuasive methodology employed by Paul and other early disciples? Obviously, Luke would never want to use manipulation, trickery, or deceit in the work of evangelism (see the use of *peitho* in Acts 12:20, 14:19, and 19:26 where the ideas of "seduce" and "bribe" are conveyed in the Greek text of these verses). To do so would deny the need for the Holy Spirit's work, which must be at the heart of any true evangelistic work (Rom. 8:9, 12-17; 1 Thess. 1:4-5).

The New American Standard Bible rightly translates *peitho* in Acts 13:43 as "urging," showing that Paul and Barnabas used the best reasoning powers and their passion for truth in exhorting the listeners to "continue in the grace of God." In Acts 17:4, "persuaded," implies that the Thessalonians were "convinced" of the things which Paul and Silas had proclaimed. Luke had already noted that they had "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." (17:2-3). These descriptive words show a great intellectual interchange taking place, as the messengers utilized the proofs of Scripture, a series of questions and answers ("reasoned," Greek *dialegomai*) and all of their reasoning powers to "convince" these people of the truth. They passionately presented the Word of God to these unbelieving people by appealing to their minds with the truth (see also Acts 18:4 and 28:23 where the use of *peitho* is most naturally translated as "to convince.").

Third, the idea of "3-P" evangelism suggests that the "2-P" evangelism of proclamation lacks persuasive power. The early disciples never stoically proclaimed the gospel! They were passionate about the truth that had transformed their lives. Their presentations of the gospel contained solid logic and reasoning. They appealed to the *mind* of unbelievers rather than trying to manipulate a "decision for Christ" by appealing first to the *will* or to the *emotions*. The Acts 17 passage demonstrates this conclusively, as does the whole narrative of the book of Acts.

In the 19th century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was noted as the supreme example of a true evangelist. The scope of his ministry spread broader than any other man of his day. Spurgeon would have been repulsed by manipulation or man-centered emotional methods in evangelism. Yet no one would ever accuse him of proclaiming the gospel without persuasion or passion. The gospel itself, rightly proclaimed, *is persuasive!* And such a gospel, when savingly believed due to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, produces true disciples.

Last, while I agree with Wagner that we must be persuasive in presenting the gospel, his emphasis puts undue confidence in the evangelist's abilities to bring about conversions. Such confidence is foreign to the teaching of Scripture (see 1 Cor. 2:1-16; see also Iain Murray's excellent treatment of the subject in *Revival and Revivalism*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, pp. 161ff.). The Apostle Paul was so overcome with a consciousness of divine judgment, that he stated, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." The natural sense of translation is that because Paul understood that sinners would stand before a just and holy God, he sought "to win men to Christ." He looked for the lost, proclaimed passionately the gospel to them, but depended upon the power of the Holy Spirit to save. Those whom the Spirit of God saved would inevitably become a part of the visible body of Christ (see Acts 2:47). True evangelism seeks to proclaim clearly and passionately the *whole* gospel of Christ in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to save. Such evangelism will result in the work of incorporating new believers into the church. The disparity comes when the evangelist sees himself and his methods as the keys to the man's salvation rather than the regenerating work of the Spirit.

Wagner bases his categories of evangelism on "The Engel Scale," which is a "spiritual decision process model" developed by James Engel. The scale has a series of negative and positive numbers which chart the process of evangelism:

- 8 Awareness of Supreme Being but no effective knowledge of the Gospel
- 7 Initial awareness of Gospel
- 6 Awareness of fundamentals of Gospel
- 5 Grasp of implications of Gospel
- 4 Positive attitude toward Gospel
- 3 Personal problem recognition
- 2 DECISION TO ACT
- 1 Repentance and faith in Christ
- REGENERATION--A "NEW CREATURE"
- +1 Post-decision evaluation
- +2 Incorporation into Body
- +3 Conceptual and behavioral growth begins

The basic problem with the "Engle Scale" can be seen in the reversal of the biblical order of *repentance and faith in Christ* and *Regeneration-a "New Creature."* Following the logic of this chart one would assume that a sinner merely has to begin to grasp the fundamental implications of the gospel, recognize his "personal problem" (which is a kind way of implying "sin"), then make a decision to be saved. What Wagner assumes concerning regeneration implies that a sinner must not be totally depraved or dead in his trespasses and sins. Otherwise, regeneration would of necessity precede repentance and faith as is clearly taught in the numerous passages dealing with regeneration (note

the following examples which refer to the act of regeneration: Titus 3:5, where the Greek *paliggenesia* means "a birth again," "new birth;" Eph. 2:5 and Col. 2:13, where the Greek *sunezoopoisen*, means "to make alive together with;" John 3:3, 5, where the Greek *gennaō*, means "to be born," "to be begotten;" James 1:18, where the Greek *apekuasen*, means "to give birth," "to bear").

Wagner's whole premise is that once the sinner is persuaded to make a decision to repent and believe *then* he will be regenerated. It is the act of the sinner that thus causes his regeneration. The sinner has the capability to make a willful and appropriate choice concerning the gospel if he is under good 3-P or *Persuasion evangelism*. How does that sinner's nature *improve* enough for him to repent and believe? If the sinner's spiritual problem is the result of not only his sinful behavior but his depraved nature, then until his nature is changed he *will not* repent and believe; it would be against his nature to do so. Besides, how can a "dead man" make himself alive, which is what takes place in regeneration? This is especially clear in Eph. 2:1-5 where Paul asserts twice that an unregenerate person is "dead."

C. R. Vaughan, in *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, explains the inability on man's part to rise above his sinful nature and pursue holiness, repentance, and faith. "No stream can of itself ascend higher than its source; no nature can transcend itself in the manifestation of its energies, and if man is really dead in trespasses and sins, he can put forth no energy containing in it the element of real holiness, or true spiritual life" (Banner of Truth Trust, 1984, p. 175). Yet in Wagner's paradigm, the evangelist attempts to persuade a sinner to do something which he has no desire to do. His nature demands that he rebel against the gospel, rather than respond to it. Only by a regenerating act of the Holy Spirit does that sinner have a change of nature which causes him to see his separation from God due to his sin, then to grasp the work of Christ propitiating for him, so that gladly, he repents and believes in Christ. Just as Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, the sinner is dead to the things of God until animated by the life-giving Spirit in the new birth (compare John 3:1-7 with Ezekiel 37 where "the Spirit" and "the breath" convey the same divine Person and work).

The Church Growth movement's priority of "3-P" evangelism shows that it believes that "2-P" evangelism cannot get the job done. *Proclamation evangelism* merely opens a window to let the light of the gospel come in, so that an unbeliever may hear well but stops short of becoming a disciple. The evangelist must use the right kinds of methods, techniques, and approaches to truly make a disciple. He must appeal to the sinner's *felt needs* so that he will be *interested* in the gospel. This is where the church growth movement brings out a broad array of *principles* and *axioms* which, if rightly applied, can almost guarantee results.

On the basis of this extremely Arminian view of evangelism, the church growth movement has thrived. Seminars, conferences, workshops, books, modules with this type of approach have flooded the ranks of evangelical Christianity. Evangelicals of every stripe are using church growth principles to build greater numbers and larger churches. The *proclamation* of God's Word no longer has central place in such churches. The teaching of sound doctrine is considered an unnecessary thing of the past. Instead, methods and grand productions become the draw for people to attend a church and decide to become members. While talk of the work of the Holy Spirit takes place, dependence upon the regenerating work of the Spirit is neglected.

Theological Revolution

After coming to terms with the biblical theology of our founding Southern Baptist fathers I began to question the church growth principles which I had been taught. As I studied and preached expositionally through Ephesians, I found my whole concept of church growth shattered by the truth of God's Word. As I dug into the first fourteen verses of the first chapter of Ephesians over a two-month period, I had to come to grips with some doctrine which I had carefully avoided for years. I had given much thought to the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man, believing these truths as much as I could understand them. But what I had failed to see was that if I did believe in the

biblical teaching of God's sovereignty and man's total depravity, then the only logical conclusion to which I could come would be the balance of "the doctrines of grace" which Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Boyce, and others taught. Anything less than this pictured God as not-quite-sovereign and man as not-quite-depraved.

So I faced the question, if conversion is wholly a work of God's grace, then who am I to think that my techniques and methods can convert even one soul? I realized that the issue of my theology must dictate my practice in ministry or else I would be a hypocrite to both. I began to back off from most of what I had been taught in my years of church growth studies (the exception being primarily the "common sense" principles and those principles clearly spelled out in Scripture). I tried to concentrate on proclaiming God's Word with clarity, purity, and passion, dealing with the doctrines encountered in each week's text.

This radical theological revolution took place in the Fall of 1990. I had two seminary degrees to my name to go along with my bachelor's degree, but I would gladly have traded them for the richness of spending fifteen months studying Ephesians. It was an education that somehow I had missed along the way. Every week of exegeting the Greek text, reading Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John MacArthur, Leon Morris, John Stott, and others brought me to a clearer understanding of the whole glorious message of redemption. I approached my preaching task with a renewed consciousness of preaching "the whole counsel of God." I knew that everyone would not receive freely what I was preaching, but that I had the responsibility to patiently and clearly proclaim the Word and let the Holy Spirit do the needed work.

Did such a move meet with hearty approval with everyone in my congregation? Absolutely not! I did discover an openness in many who hungered for the truth of God to be proclaimed without apology or fear of man. Some have gone on into a wonderful liberty of walking in the truth of God. Others have battled against the Word, hanging on tenaciously to beliefs that have been prejudiced by experience and traditions.

I have found that moving away from *church growth* practices to exercise a ministry in the tradition of our Baptist fathers may not bring in the masses (though I hope and pray to see many come to Christ and brought into the church). In some cases it even meets with opposition. Yet, the passion which grips my mind and heart is that one day I must answer to the Sovereign Lord for *how* I carried out my calling. My observation is that too often pastors have their ministry dictated to them by the *expectations* of other ministers. The pressure placed upon ministers to grow large churches, bring in great numbers, and produce a multitude of conversions spurs many to imbibe everything from the wells of the Church Growth movement. When that happens the minister will inevitably compromise his responsibility of preaching the Word and depending upon the work of the Holy Spirit. He will scurry from one technique to another, grappling for every new idea that comes from the proponents of church growth. What is the minister's motive for all that he does? Is it truly for the glory of God and for the sake of God's kingdom?

Someone may wonder of me, "Do you believe in church growth?" Sure I do! I long to see growth that has been engendered by the work of the Holy Spirit and the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. If the Word and the Spirit cannot produce it, then I do not want it! Indeed, one day, I trust, our Lord will find pleasure in moving upon our congregation and community with mighty, awakening power. Then men will know that the salvation of sinners comes not through our shrewd techniques, nor by the implementation of *church growth principles*, but by the sovereign grace of an all-glorious Lord.



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Fifteenth Founders Conference

Iain Murray was the keynote speaker for the fifteenth annual Founders Conference which met in Birmingham in July. He addressed the theme, "Reformation and Revival" and brought challenging instruction and exhortation on this vital subject. His warnings to guard against "wildfire" while seeking the genuine fire of renewal were especially timely in light of what is going on in Toronto and other places with the so-called "laughing revival." Other papers and messages complemented the theme very well and the singing was once again a wonderful encouragement. Over four hundred attended the meetings, making this the largest gathering to date.

Of special note is the evaluation of the revival in Korea by Dr. Young M. Pee. He is an American trained (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) professor of theology in Korea. His presentation was both humbling and heart warming. The zeal and devotion of our brothers and sisters in Korea in seeking God exposes the shallowness which characterizes too much of our own spirituality in this country.

Full reports of the conference are available on the Founders Web site at www.founders.org. Tapes may be ordered from Dick Cook at Sound Word Associates * P.O. Box 1035, Mall Station * Michigan City, IN 46361-7735. Next year's conference is scheduled for July 28-31 in Birmingham. Conrad Mbewe from Zambia is scheduled to be the key note speaker.

Southwestern takes a stand

Though details are sketchy, administrators at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth have evidently acted to remove Professor Jeff Pool from teaching responsibilities. Last year Pool edited a controversial issue of *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. It included articles by noted Southern Baptist moderates on the Baptist Faith and Message. At that time the administration pulled the journal but gave as the reason a desire to redesign the format. Recently, Pool published the articles with Smyth and Helwys in a book entitled, *Sacred Mandates of Conscience: Interpretations of the Baptist Faith and Message*. He has another book forthcoming, entitled, *Against Returning to Egypt: Exposing and Resisting Credalism in the Southern Baptist Convention*.

President of SBC admonishes students to study doctrine

"Learn Christian doctrine" was the advice Tom Elliff had for young ministers and seminarians in a pastors' forum at Southern Seminary. "Part of the problem we have had in the Southern Baptist Convention is that we have a generation of preachers who did not learn doctrine," he said. "If you don't get systematic theology planted in your heart, when you go to your church you're going to talk to them about things that are about as significant as cotton candy." (BP)

Correction

In *FJ* 28 an editing mistake was made in a footnote reference on page 17. The second paragraph of footnote 1 should read: "Every Commandment, except the fourth, is repeated or clearly alluded to with approval in the New Testament Epistles." The reference sighted for the fourth commandment is from the Gospel of Mark and not from a NT letter.



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The Godmakers: A Review Article

Chad Brand

According to Shakespeare, the telling of history is sometimes full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. At those times it may not be the history itself that is problematic, but the telling of it. Anyone who assays to narrate takes on a difficult task, a task all the more challenging if the subject is as controversial as the one taken up by this volume. This review examines Bruce Gourley's book, *The Godmakers: A Legacy of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1996), with three questions in mind. Is his research qualitative? Is his treatment of the material objective, in any measure? Are his interpretations of the data fair? In other words, how much is there in this book of sound and fury, and how much of significance?

The volume contains extensive research into both Baptist history and the controversy between conservatives and moderates in the SBC. The book includes a total of 411 footnotes, which, while not exorbitant, is impressive. Gourley himself teaches Baptist history at Yellowstone Baptist College and is a graduate of Mercer University and of Southern Seminary. One would expect to see good quality research in a volume such as this.

This book is essentially a critique of the "fundamentalist takeover" of the Convention. As such, the author refers repeatedly to the major players from the conservative side of convention politics, particularly Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, R. Albert Mohler, Richard Land, Jimmy Draper, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Jerry Vines, W. A. Criswell and Mark Coppenger. He repeatedly quotes these individuals and critiques them. But his quotations and his critiques are almost all from identifiable moderate sources. In such quotes and references, this reviewer could find only ten footnotes citing either primary sources or sources which might have been in sympathy with the person being quoted. Three of these citations were from James Hefley, one from *SBC Life*, one from the *Indiana Baptist*, one from an article by Paige Patterson in *Review and Expositor*, one from Albert Mohler and three from a book by David Dockery. Out of 411 footnotes, over three hundred of which actually deal with the convention controversy, only ten cite self-identified conservative sources. On the other hand, at least 272 of the footnotes cite self-identified moderate sources, most of them involving negative assessments of the conservatives listed above. A simple statistical observation tips off even the sleepy reader that this might just be a hatchet-job of second-hand criticism rather than a thoughtful analysis by someone who is admittedly from the other side. One has to wonder how historian Gourley could have considered his uneven research to be of the quality needed for intelligent discourse and analysis.

Gourley's use of his sources is also problematic. Granted that he makes use almost exclusively of sources whose authors have a vested interest to critique the conservative resurgence. But does he use those sources accurately? In many cases he does not. In Chapter Four he critiques the conservative movement for its racism. "It is a tragedy, however, that the white God which Southern Baptists of the 1800s worshipped is still alive in the minds of many Southern Baptists, particularly in fundamentalist circles" (p. 75). As a prime example he presents this: ". . . Adrian Rogers, fundamentalist pastor and past SBC president, recently revealed his racist beliefs when asked about slavery: 'Well, I believe slavery is a much-maligned institution. If we had slavery today, we would not have this welfare mess'" (p. 75). Gourley seeks with this quote to prove that Rogers is a racist in his attitude toward African-Americans. The footnote for this comment cites an essay by Cecil Sherman, former head of the CBF. But when one looks at the essay by Sherman, an entirely different perspective is apparent. Sherman asked Rogers the question about slavery in the context of their work together on the Peace Committee. But the question he asked was about slavery in the Bible, not the American institution of racial subservience. This is very plain in Sherman's essay ("Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement," in Walter Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, p. 36). Sherman did not take Rogers' comment to refer to the American institution of Southern injustice, and there is no reason why Gourley should have taken the text in this manner, either. One may disagree with Rogers'

statement in any event, but to twist his words willfully in order to score a rhetorical point is unconscionable reporting.

If that were the only example of bad research, it would be forgivable, perhaps attributable to a hasty reading of the document. But the volume is replete with this kind of investigation. In Chapters Eight and Nine he refers to a critique of fundamentalism offered by Jimmy Draper in his book *The Church Christ Approves*. Draper wrote the book in 1974 and the fourth chapter features a withering challenge to ultraconservatism. Gourley then claims that ten years later, though, Draper was "lured into becoming part of the very group that he so strongly condemned" (p. 131). But if Gourley had read Draper's actual book, rather than reading only the pre-digested version of it in Grady Cothen's narrative (*What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention?*) to which all the footnotes refer, he would have known that Draper was critiquing classical fundamentalism of the J. Frank Norris variety (about which more will be said later in the review). Instead, Gourley sees Draper as critiquing the form of "fundamentalism" represented by people such as Criswell, a form which crystallized in the post-1979 "takeover." But this is ludicrous! At the time that the book was published, 1974 (not 1973 as Gourley mistakenly notes, p. 143), Draper had just taken a position as Associate Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas. The pastor of that church was the man referred to by Gourley as "fundamentalist W. A. Criswell" (p. 148). In fact, Criswell actually wrote a "Special Introduction" to the volume by Draper which levels such a strong criticism of classical fundamentalism. Is it likely that Criswell would have endorsed a book written by one of his own Associate Pastors--a book which, by Gourley's account, assaults the foundations of all he held dear? Had Gourley looked at Draper's book itself, rather than depending on a secondary reference, he might have saved himself from committing such an egregious error.

Further, the author's use of the statistical work of Nancy Ammerman is extremely muddled. Ammerman lists five categories of theological/political alignment in her sociological study of the SBC (Baptist Battles). In appealing to this study, Gourley notes that only eleven percent list themselves as belonging to the group labeled "self-identified fundamentalist." He then disingenuously co-opts the other eighty-nine percent for his cause. "The current fundamentalist leadership has consistently labeled as 'liberals' a large bloc of the eighty-nine percent with whom they do not fully identify" (p. 68, also p. 16). In other words, because only eleven percent call themselves "fundamentalists," the author assumes all others are in opposition to the ideology of the conservative leadership in the Convention. This is simply a misuse of statistics.

This list could be enlarged many times. He refers to other works for support of his claims, though it is often the case that those works offer no such support. Gourley claims, for instance, that Jerry Vines' comments in 1988 about his appreciation for Jerry Falwell "sent chills through the mainline SBC conservatives and moderates" (p. 133), citing Nancy Ammerman's volume again. This reader looked in Ammerman's book to find out what these "conservative and moderate" individuals thought about Vines' statement. But Ammerman does not even mention this. Gourley often makes grandiose claims about history and interpretations, while offering no substantiation whatsoever to his assertions. For instance, "Today, 'pharisaic' is a term sometimes used to describe . . . ultraconservative or fundamentalist Christians who are overly legalistic in their beliefs and practices" (p. 142). Used by whom? He does not say. If these comparisons are being made, the reader ought to have the benefit of knowing who is making them. Is it Herschel Hobbs? Bill Clinton? Jesse Jackson? William F. Buckley? Jimmy Draper? It might make a real difference to our appreciation for his claim if we knew who held this view. Gourley does not tell us. This is simply a rhetorical ploy disguised as research. Logical fallacies and poor reasoning abound in this work. Noting that Paul Pressler gave an interview to theonomist Gary North in 1986, Gourley interprets this as indicating "an openness to Christian Reconstructionism." He then asserts, "Pressler's association with North in regards to this interview . . . bodes ill in the eyes of mainline conservative and moderate leaders" (p. 139). If giving an interview to someone indicates an acceptance of the interviewer's beliefs, then every moderate leader in the Convention who ever answered a question posed by Jim Hefley is, in reality, a "fundamentalist." (That is the term he uses for Hefley.) The logic of such reasoning escapes this reviewer.

It should be clear by this point that there are decided difficulties in Gourley's use of sources and his research methodology. But beyond that, does the book attempt to be objective in its treatment of the controversy? Two lines of probing ought to reveal the answer to this question. First, does the author use rhetorical devices inappropriately in his exposition of the views of either side? Second, is he even-handed in dealing with controversial subjects on both sides of the controversy?

As to rhetoric, one does not have to read far to discover that Gourley is not happy with the conservative resurgence. The conservatives are "intolerant" (15), "militant" (54, 56), "unethical" (58, 162, 182), "usurpers" (59), "unscrupulous" (62, 129), "conniving" (62), "crusad[ers]" (65), "racist[s]" (75), "decept[ive]" (114, 118, 153, 161), "idol[atrous]" (119), "humanistic" (124), "legalistic" (145), "hypocritical" (150), "self-righteous" (154), "sinister" (160), "extremist" (160, 190), "dishonest" (161, 180), "ungodly" (162, 164), "prideful" (164), "vicious" (174), "malicious" (174), "paranoid" (182), and "un-Christian" (182). They have exercised a "coup" (59, 177), won elections by evoking "emotional responses from their hearers" (67), they are not "concerned about . . . spiritual matters" (60), they are deceptive (75), "popo-like" (89), and possess a "flagrant disregard for God's truth" (103), while believing that "God verbally dictated the Bible, word for word" (105). They are "ax" wielders (63, 65), they loathe the seminaries (64), they are like the communists (65), they manipulate numbers (67, 91), "flagrantly mangle Baptist history" (69, 121), "bend Scripture to their liking" (95), and are "absolutely terrified of modern scholarly biblical research" (100), while "more than a few" (how many that is, he does not say) "rest their very salvation on the belief that the King James Version is the only accurate translation of the Bible" (102). They "lunge" at their opponents (120), are "outraged" (62), are "insolen[t]" in their claims to absolute knowledge (121), are "power brokers" (122), place their "human opinions" above the Bible (124, 182), persecute others (125), and have developed ties with theologians, who espouse "a complete overthrow of democracy and installation of a government based on" the Mosaic code (127). These fundamentalists foster "witch-hunt[s]" (128, 182), worship a "Falwellian god" (134), give only "token support" to the Cooperative Program (158), and regularly make "illegal" moves (58, 180). Further, they were supporters of Ronald Reagan, "who will long be remembered for his lack of integrity" (135). (Curiously, there is no mention of the integrity factor of the current administration in Washington or of the support given it by Southern Baptist moderates.) This is only part of the list of intemperate terms used to describe conservatives. No negative appellations are used to indict moderates, on the other hand. Rather they are "respected" (55), "spiritual" (59), "just" (81), honest (99), "educated" (100); they are "appalled by partisan politics" (159), are people of "integrity" (163), and have "love and compassion" for others (192).

Beyond rhetorical language, does Gourley treat the issues of the controversy in a fair manner? How does he interpret the various events and debates that have arisen over the last eighteen years? Since the book is full of such expositions, a complete examination would require a book of similar size and scope to the one being reviewed. That is not possible. A sampling will have to suffice.

Gourley attempts repeatedly to smear conservatives with the taint of racism. He claims that the "current CLC" has "at times, displayed openly racist attitudes" (75). To the casual reader, such an allegation would seem serious. And it would be, if that were the whole story. It is not the whole story. The author, though, simply leaves it there. Those who follow such events know that he is referring to a statement made by one of the trustees of the CLC. But they also know that the Commission dealt with this matter swiftly and summarily. The author of this volume conveniently fails to note that fact. But there is more. Gourley does not inform the potentially unwary reader that Richard Land sponsored a forum on racism in which he invited several key "moderates" to speak. Nor does he note that it was "fundamentalist" Richard Land, not Drs. Valentine or Baker, who first integrated the CLC staff by hiring an African-American to a staff position.

This is not the only such attempt by Gourley. For instance, after inveighing against Mohler for his handling of Molly Marshall and Diana Garland, the author alleges that "accrediting agencies are once again turning a doubtful eye

toward Southern" (183). Two questions beg to be asked. What does he mean? and how does he know this? If he is implying that Southern is on probation from ATS or SACS, then he is not telling the truth. So, just what does he mean? And, how does he know? The accrediting agencies have not made any public statements, and all communication from these agencies is strictly confidential. So, just what does Gourley want the reader to think? It is not clear, but it is possible to infer an answer. Perhaps Gourley knows that some faculty member or other has registered a complaint with the agencies. That would be followed up by a letter from the agency to Southern Seminary. But such letters do not necessarily constitute "turning a doubtful eye." In other words, Gourley here is simply assaulting the institution by innuendo. It is probably his hope that readers of his book will not know enough about accreditation to read between the lines. But informed readers must wonder where the integrity is in all of this. Why does he not say what he really means? The book is replete with similar examples.

Gourley regularly mentions the fact that conservatives in the SBC have been concerned about theological problems and perceived "liberalism" in SBC seminaries and agencies. Yet, there is virtually no exposition of the specific theological concerns raised by the supporters of the "takeover." The book examines the controversies surrounding Ralph Elliot in the early Sixties and Crawford Toy in the nineteenth century, but it discusses none of the actual allegations about theological reductionism made in the course of the present controversy. Yet, several key persons and issues have been targeted for criticism by conservatives in the last twenty years. Paul Simmons has been critiqued for his views on abortion and homosexuality. In addition, Alan Neely's theology of religions, Molly Marshall's doctrine of inclusivism, and Robert Alley's Christology have all been major factors in the rhetoric from the conservative movement. But none of these is even mentioned by Gourley. One would think that a careful, objective treatment of this controversy ought at least to list some of these concerns. This volume does not fulfill that expectation.

Many other problems in the volume beg for treatment, but this examination will conclude by looking at only two more--both very critical issues, in the opinion of this reviewer. On virtually every page, Gourley uses the word "fundamentalist" to identify the objects of his scorn. The question is, what does Gourley mean by the term? Further, does he use it honestly and consistently? Fundamentalists, according to the author, made their presence known in the SBC in the early years of the twentieth century, primarily in opposition to E. Y. Mullins and the progressive approach which was taking root at Southern Seminary. This group of "ultraconservatives" (Gourley's synonym for "fundamentalists") also was instrumental in founding Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth. (He calls it a "training ground . . . for fundamentalists," p. 47.) Early on these sectarians were galvanized around the ministry of the flamboyant J. Frank Norris of Fort Worth. Norris, though, would gain no permanent foothold in the SBC. His vocal perorations did stir Southern Baptists to adopt a confessional statement, but it was a statement which "indirectly refuted fundamentalism" (p. 50). Aside from two skirmishes in 1963 and 1970-71, fundamentalism was not a major problem in the SBC after the time of Norris. According to the author of this volume, though, that hiatus ended in 1979.

Gourley does something very odd at this point. He moves directly from "fundamentalist" Norris to "fundamentalist Paige Patterson" and "fundamentalist James T. Draper" without even an indication that there might be some substantive differences between the various versions of "fundamentalism" represented by these different persons (pp. 50-59). What is even more curious, Gourley never defines fundamentalism. He never attempts to give any careful consideration to the roots of the movement or to the relationship between early fundamentalists and their very conservative (though not actually fundamentalist) brethren. Nor does he distinguish between different kinds of "fundamentalisms." A glance or two at George Marsden's several works on fundamentalism, or a look at the analyses of Joel Carpenter, Grant Wacker or Leonard Sweet would have made Gourley's typology of fundamentalism more precise, more informed, more credible. Instead, he simply tells his readers that Norris and Patterson and Land and Draper and Henry and Dockery are all pretty much interchangeable versions of one another. This is almost beyond belief! But again, it simply shows that Gourley has his own (unarticulated) definition of fundamentalism.

Alternative interpretations of the fundamentalist question in the modern SBC are available. Clearly, many of the leaders of the conservative movement have followed a "fundamentalist" paradigm. But it does not seem to be the paradigm of Frank Norris or William Bell Riley or Bob Jones, a fundamentalism based almost exclusively on battle, confrontation and separatism. Rather, it is similar to the "fundamentalism" of men like Charles F. Fuller and Donald Grey Barnhouse. Fuller and Barnhouse combined a strong affirmation of conservative theology (including a willingness to fight for their convictions) with a vibrant piety and a towering passion for evangelism. This is a better characterization of many of the persons Gourley reproves. Others in the SBC conservative movement have eschewed virtually all fundamentalist paradigms, preferring to side with mainstream conservative evangelicalism, after such models as D. Stuart Briscoe, D. A. Carson and Chuck Swindoll. Some have patterned their work after the church growth ministries of Bill Hybels and John Maxwell. Still others have gravitated to a theological and ministerial model somewhat after the fashion of Reformed evangelicalism. Important figures here would be J. I. Packer and James Montgomery Boice, and (out of a more Baptist matrix) Carl F. H. Henry and John Piper. Some of these persons hold views not in full sympathy with Baptist theology, but in terms of their alignment on many of the issues facing the church today, they have marked out specific, identifiable positions. This reviewer is simply indicating that J. Frank Norris is not the model for contemporary SBC "fundamentalism." Gourley indicates that he is. That claim seems clearly to be reductionist.

Tied in with his broad-brush-treatment of "fundamentalists" is an attack on their doctrine of Scripture. Gourley claims that the concept of inerrancy was birthed by the Princeton theologians in a "knee-jerk reaction against the rise of modern science" and was "not born out of a systematic study of the nature of Scripture" (p. 107). So, the notion of inerrancy is of recent origin and is, thus, unworthy of attention. Anyone who has actually read the Princeton theologians (A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield) on this matter will immediately recognize that Gourley has not even glanced at their works. The inerrancy position was not birthed in apologia against Darwinism. In fact, Warfield was himself a theistic evolutionist (though certainly a moderate one). Further, Warfield's various essays on Scripture (now collected in a single volume) are an exercise in precisely the activity which this author denies to them. They are meticulous, painstaking analyses of hundreds of biblical texts, done with a view to develop an inductive doctrine of the nature of Scripture. Had Gourley even so much as looked at the "Table of Contents" of Warfield's book, he could have saved himself from this faux pas. Furthermore, it is facile to claim that the Princetonians invented the notion of inerrancy in the first place. Rogers and McKim, in their critique of the doctrine, trace it at least back to Turretin and Quenstedt, and John Woodbridge, in his rejoinder to Rogers and McKim, traces it back much further. Doubtless, Gourley never looked at these volumes, either.

So, what of this little book? It will likely take its place alongside a growing number of monographs, histories and book-length sermons currently being written by persons on various sides of the Controversy. It is not likely, though, that this will be considered one of the more memorable or important reflections to come to print. The book is too rhetorical. Partisanship is one thing; fury is something entirely different. One wonders, after reading this volume, how the author could in all conscience criticize those conservatives (or fundamentalists) who have used the rhetoric of "skunks and snakes." Gourley's book really does not rise above that level. Such rhetoric has happened on both sides of this conflict, of course. Is it not time, though, for us to turn away from all the name-calling and get on with the business? It seems, after looking at this little exercise in history-telling, that there is not much here that is significant. But the sound and fury just seem to go on and on.



The world's theology is easy to define. It is the view that human beings are basically good, that no one is really lost and that belief in Jesus Christ is not necessary for anyone's salvation, though it may be a helpful spiritual crutch for some people.

--James Montgomery Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996),
p. 145.



God's Law and God's Love (Part 1)

Ernest Reisinger

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

*"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.
And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)*

What God Has Joined

In order to serve the Lord faithfully, we must not only distinguish things that differ but also preserve the connection of things God has joined. Law and love are two such things that God has joined. They are inseparable mates.

When Martin Luther said, "Love God and do as you please," his point was this: If you truly love God, you will do what pleases *Him*. But that still leaves the question, What is pleasing to God? Thus Luther's statement needs some explanation, lest the issue be oversimplified or confused.

One of the greatest difficulties in dealing with this subject is the many ways the words themselves, *law* and *love*, are used in the Bible. In chapter 6 we discussed the different meanings of the word *law*. Likewise, in Scripture we read of the love of Christ, love for your wife, love for our neighbor, love for our enemies, and a special and peculiar love for the brethren. Volumes have been written on these two little words, *law* and *love*.

Every true Christian wants to know how to please God. This desire comes with the new birth and immediately thrusts us into the Bible, where God's will is expressed. But how does God express His will? Does He simply say, "Love . . ." or does He express His will by giving us His commandments? The Bible clearly does both, all the while teaching us the proper relationship between law and love.

We must exercise our best efforts to discern what that relationship is. The assortment of books, discussions, and opinions on this subject is vast. Thus sorting through the issues requires prayer and the plentiful work of the Holy Spirit, the only true Teacher. May God give us all discernment to distinguish things that differ and to join things that must be understood together.

"All You Need Is Love"?

Every heresy and cult waves the word *love* around like a banner of virtue. It is their favorite word, but it is never connected to God's law. The hippie movement of the sixties also proclaimed this word-painted on vans and placards—often in the form of "free love." Political liberals continue to speak of love divorced from individual responsibility.

In March of 1965, *Time* magazine reported a meeting of nine hundred ministers and students at Harvard Divinity School in which they considered the subject of the "new morality." The title of the article, "Love in Place of Law?" set up an antithesis. Under the heading, "We Are Delivered," the article said, "Inevitably, the speakers reached no definite conclusion, but they generally agreed, that, in some respects, the new morality is a healthy advance as a genuine effort to take literally St. Paul's teaching that through Christ we are delivered from the law."

Though these words do come from the New Testament, they certainly do not teach what the Harvard speakers implied. Some questions need to be asked about the context of Paul's words: In what respect are we delivered from the law, and, from what laws are we delivered? People who are motivated by genuine love are certainly not lawless. They love the moral and ethical standard that Christ loved and kept, contrary to the words of Princeton president, Paul Ramsey, who said in the same article, "Lists of cans and cannots are meaningless."

Now, we are not surprised at this dangerous, destructive ignorance when we find it among cults, liberals, and agnostics. But when Bible-believing preachers set up a false antithesis between law and love, we should be shocked, appalled, saddened, and greatly pained.

Setting up a false antithesis between law and love (as if they are conflicting, opposing ideas) is one of the most subtle ways to undermine the Ten Commandments, biblical morality, and true Christianity. Granted there is a difference between law and love; but there is also an immutable connection. The failure to see this unchangeable relationship has led people into countless errors, heresies, and spiritual shipwrecks.

An Immutable Connection

Let us consider a few passages that show the immutable connection between law and love. Notice how love is joined to the Ten Commandments in the following teaching of Paul:

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)

Moreover, what better definition of love could we give than the biblical one we have from John, the great apostle of love himself? "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Observe, also, our Lord's conversation with the lawyer in Matthew 22:35-40. When asked in verse 36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" our Lord immediately connected God's commandments and God's love. Jesus always connected law and love. What could be plainer than the following examples?

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (John 14:21,23-24)

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. . . . You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." John 15:10,12,14)

These statements should settle forever the fact that there is an eternal relationship between God's law and God's love.

To emphasize that love itself is a command is consistent with many New Testament passages: "Love your neighbor" (Matt. 5:43); "love your enemies" (Luke 6:27,35); "love one another" (Rom. 13:8); "love your wives" (Eph. 5:25); "love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17).

These passages are sufficiently clear to show that there is a vital connection between law and love. They should cause us to renounce any teaching-whether packaged in clever illustrations or dispensed via subtle implications-that would separate law and love. If ever the biblical teaching about the commandments was needed in the home, the church, and the nation, it is now! With lawlessness rampant, we certainly do not need preachers and teachers who separate what God has joined together.

The "love only" doctrine is the enemy of true Christianity, of the Bible, and of the souls of men. It is not biblical love at all. Nor is lawless love Christlike.

The gospel of Christ breathes the Spirit of holy love, namely:

- Love is the fulfilling of all gospel precepts.
- Love is the pledge of all gospel joys.
- Love is the evidence of gospel power.
- Love is the ripe fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Spirit of genuine love is never, never, at the expense of law and truth. Nor is love ever separated from the biblical directives for holy living that are objectively and eternally set out in the Ten Commandments. This is underscored in that great love chapter in the Bible, where Paul says that "love rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

The connection between law and love is deeply embedded in the Old Testament, as well as the New. This is illustrated in Exodus 20, where God gave the Decalogue at Sinai. Before giving the Ten Commandments, God reminded the Israelites of His redemptive love. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (v. 2). That was a loving redemptive act. Not only does the prologue to the Ten Commandments speak of God's redeeming love, but later, in reference to the second commandment, verse 6 speaks of God's "showing mercy" to His people. Love and mercy are harmoniously tied to the Decalogue.

Jesus reaffirmed that connection in John 14:15: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." His summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-40-the law of love for God and neighbor-echoes the love command given with the law in Deuteronomy 6:5. Not only our Lord and His apostle, but the whole Bible joins God's law and God's love.

Love as Motive

Love has no eyes except the holy law of God, no direction apart from God's commands. Paul spoke of the love of Christ constraining us. It moves us to duty. Love is the only true motive for all worship and duty, but by itself it does not define either. Therefore, we may not put love "in place of law." They belong together. Christian behavior springs from love to God and our neighbor. If we loved them perfectly, our character and behavior would be perfect because it would conform to God's will. Love is a motive for and expresses itself in obedient action.

Such action fulfills the law: "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Motive and action cannot be more tightly joined than they are in this passage. If love does not constrain us to

fulfill the moral law, it is not the love of which the Bible speaks. The apostle Paul made this very clear when he said that "the love of Christ constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14). It is the love of God that puts the law of God into effect.

Genuine love for God is intensely preoccupied with Him as the Supreme Object of love. It is, therefore, intrinsically active in doing His will. Love itself is commanded in the Old Testament as well as the New. Jesus said, "These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:17). Love is also described as a command in Deuteronomy 6:5-7: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

We must be very clear that the command to love will not create love or generate love. This command, like every other, cannot create the disposition or will to obey. But the mere fact that love is a command should silence those who argue for an antithesis between law and love. Moses, Jesus, and Paul all connected law and love, as does John in 1 John 5:3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

Woe to anyone who separates what Moses, Christ, and the apostles have said belong together! What God has joined let no man put asunder.



Book Review

The Coming Evangelical Crisis, edited by John H. Armstrong, Chicago: Moody Press (1996); 269 pages; \$12.99.

Reviewed by [Douglas R. Shivers](#)

Please accept my nomination of the word "crisis" for chronic overuse. There's a bewildering array of crises in economics, politics, culture, racial interaction, families, communities, *ad infinitum*. Purchasing this volume was an effort simply because I am weary of crises. So many of them appear to be merely reactionary or a marketing ploy. Besides, after seeing words like "earthquake" and "disaster" in evangelical titles, "crisis" seems a bit tame. But there is nothing imaginary about this "crisis" for evangelicals. In fact, "emergency," better captures the seriousness of the issues. John Armstrong, editor, sounds the alarm in the introduction:

The shape that modern evangelicalism has taken over the last few decades makes it increasingly less Protestant. This is certainly true theologically. It is increasingly true practically in how the church conducts ministry. As the church acts upon its theology, or lack of theology, trends follow. Some are inclined to regard this as a positive turn of events. The contributors to this present volume of essays believe that this new direction presents the church with a crisis that looms with serious consequences on the ecclesiastical horizon (p. 17).

The contributors, fourteen in all, include: R. Albert Mohler, Jr., R. C. Sproul, John D. Hannah, John MacArthur, Jr., and Michael Horton. They address an array of issues upon which there's little agreement today: the meaning of "evangelical," the place of theology, the nature of revelation, approaches to worship and spiritual warfare.

This is an uncommonly good book. Each article is engaging. I especially appreciated "'Evangelical': What's in a Name?" by Al Mohler, "How Shall We Sing to God?" by Leonard Payton and "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?" by R. Fowler White. David Powlison's, "How Shall We Cure Troubled Souls?," presents a thoughtful view of pastoral counseling:

Idoltrous cravings hijack the human heart. Both the Christian life and Christian ministry are by definition about the business of accomplishing a transformation in what people want. Such transformations lie at the very center of the Holy Spirit's purposes in working His Word into our lives (p. 223).

Since pragmatism, rather than theology, drives and defines most ministries today, theology isn't even considered. Current ministry models, so afflicted with modernity, treat theology as an embarrassment. Michael Horton's concluding article includes this perceptive appraisal:

If theology is not guiding the church, then the Bible is not guiding the church, for theology is the systematic study of the Bible and its relation to our beliefs. . . [W]hen we downplay theology . . . before long we lose the content of Scripture. And not long after our loss of biblical content follows the loss of the authority of Scripture altogether" (pp. 258-259).

The worth of this volume can hardly be overestimated. It is popularly written without being trite. It assesses the problems without being panicky. It is candid without being caustic. This is more than someone merely crying "Wolf!" The authors include positive input, not just critique.



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Letters

I appreciate you taking up this challenge. . . I had Dr. Estep for Baptist and Church History while I was at S.W.B.T.S. in 1985-88. I should have learned through him what I learned from the *Founders Journal*. I would hope that he would come to the truth, as well as his students, along with the many others that read of this controversy. I appreciate you guys on the Founders Conference Planning Committee. Be faithful to the truth!

Blessings!
R. S.

Dear Sir,

I have read most of this new issue [#29]-it is excellent. It is sad to see a scholar of Estep's stature make such blunders to support what's dear to him.

Your journal ranks as my favorite right now! You all serve the truth well. May the Lord continue to bless your endeavors.

In Him,
R. R., via email

. . . just a brief note to congratulate you on the current issue [#29]. I greatly enjoy reading and thinking over the various articles. Great job!!

The doctrines of sovereign grace are the light of my daily experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. As a reader of Spurgeon and an admirer of the Puritans, I glory in His glory! What a wonderful release: the doctrines of sovereign grace shift all the attention to our Lord and away from ourselves.

May God richly bless your noble efforts!
Love in Him,
M. H. via email

Dear Dr. Ascol,

I am gladly renewing my subscription to the *Founders Journal*. I am very thankful for the alternative you offer to the usual SBC and state convention fare that we pastors are swamped with each month. (Most of which is shallow and

dreadfully lacking in sound, scriptural content). Even though your magazine comes out only four times per year, in your case less is more!

Again, thank you very much for your Christ-honoring, Biblically-based magazine.

S. W., KY

Dear Sirs,

. . . I now take the opportunity to comment that I find the journal refreshing, doctrinally sound, and utterly devoid of the theological fluff that seems to find its way into many religious journals. Far too few pastors and other church and denominational leaders have an affinity for biblically sound teachings. Let it be the *Founders Journal's* goal to continue to take the ax to the root of today's Christian Lite church life.

Thank you for your service to the Body for I am a fellow member and remain grateful,

J. B., Raleigh, NC

Dear Brothers in Christ:

Thank you so much for your sterling efforts on behalf of the doctrines of grace. I have been reading the *Founders Journal* on the internet now for some months. I would like to subscribe, in order to receive the journal in more usable booklet form. It is very expensive to send a bank draft from this country. Could you arrange to receive payment via Visa card or through an outlet such as Great Christian Books which already accepts credit card payments?

I am the pastor of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in Hamilton, New Zealand. I was born in Australia and became interested in the doctrines of grace while working for The Navigators. During Systematic Theology classes at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dr. Roger Nicole dispelled my concerns about limited atonement. Pastoring Baptist Union churches in Australia increased by desire to pastor in a situation where the sovereignty of God was understood and believed. I therefore accepted a call to Trinity in 1992.

The latest issue of the *Founders Journal* [28] is very timely in our situation . . . It seems that we must always be defending orthodox doctrine even while striving to communicate the gospel to a lost and dying world.

Keep up the good work. Hebrews 6:10.

Yours in Christ,

D. M., via email



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