



Different Name, Same Purpose

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The Founders Journal

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The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [*The Abstract of Principles*](#).

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Different Name, Same Purpose

Tom Ascol

"What's in a name?" Shakespeare's forlorn lover would have us believe that names are ultimately of little value. After all, "that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." In one sense, Juliet is absolutely right. Reality is not always reflected by the appellations we attach to it. "Civil war" is one such example.

But names do serve a useful purpose, especially when they are designed to communicate accurately the reality to which they are attached. It is out of a desire to communicate more accurately that the name of the Southern Baptist Founders Conference, Inc. has recently been changed to Founders Ministries, Inc. Our fundamental purpose remains the same, but our vision and activities have greatly expanded.

In the late 1970s there was a small but noticeably growing renewal of interest in the doctrines of grace among some pastors and ministerial students across the Southern Baptist Convention. Out of a desire to encourage this renewal and to provide fellowship and instruction for those who were interested, the first Founders Conference was organized and met in Memphis, TN, in 1983. The published motivation for that meeting was "to glorify God, honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches by providing encouragement to Southern Baptists in historical, Biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies."

Although that was a politically volatile season in the history of the SBC, the Founders Conference originated with no political agenda. From the beginning its goals have been spiritual and theological. The stated purpose of the conference has not changed through the years, namely, "to be a balanced conference in respect to doctrine and devotion as expressed in the Doctrines of Grace and their experimental application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness."

The focus has always been on churches, to see them strengthened, encouraged and moving toward biblical renewal in both understanding and practice. The particular concern has been to see God's Word applied to the issues which confront local congregations. Conferences have been planned with a desire to see churches strengthened and church leaders encouraged in the work of the Gospel. Consequently, through the years a variety of important and relevant themes have been addressed, such as, "Missions and Evangelism," "Sanctification," "The Church," "Preachers and Preaching," "Sufficiency of Scripture," and "Reformation and Revival."

While the national conference, which now meets in Birmingham, AL, continues to meet and grow, the effort to encourage renewal in churches has expanded far beyond a once-a-year gathering. Founded in 1986, the Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference now attracts several hundred young people each summer to a week of intensive Bible study and fellowship. The *Founders Journal* began in 1990 and currently goes out to every state in the union and dozens of countries around the world.

Regional conferences now meet each year in Texas and Missouri, with the prospect of others beginning in the next two years. In 1996 Founders Press began. To date four titles have been published (including Fred Malone's recently released booklet on baptism) with more in the pipeline. It was also in 1996 that Founders Online began with the launching of our own web site (www.founders.org). In the last five months of 1997 it received over 320,000 hits.

None of these expanded ministries was envisioned when the first conference met fifteen years ago in Memphis. But each one is fully consistent with our basic purpose to see churches renewed according to the Word of God. If our

purpose were simply to host an annual conference, we would not have expanded our efforts into other ministries.

We have never looked upon conferences or even publishing as our "business." Rather, our "business" has been and will remain encouraging pastors and local churches to pursue biblical reformation and renewal. This is not only our work it is the deep burden of Founders Ministries.

The name, "Founders Ministries," suggests both the breadth of our activities and the antiquity of our convictions. It points back to those who originally founded the Southern Baptist Convention and whose doctrinal convictions we share. When the original 293 delegates met in Augusta, Georgia in 1845 to organize a new convention, they all came from churches or associations which embraced the doctrines of grace. That is, they unapologetically held to a Reformed theology of salvation. They believed that God is absolutely sovereign and man is absolutely responsible in salvation. They were, in the best historic and evangelical sense of the term, Calvinistic.

This does not mean that they were doctrinaire or that they were exclusively or even primarily concerned with winning theological arguments. Rather, it means that they took biblical truth seriously and were unwilling to compromise either its authority or its message. In the same way, the agenda of Founders Ministries is not to engage in historical or theological debates. Our mission is the renewal of churches through the recovery of biblical truth. This inevitably requires historical and theological discourse, but these are simply means to the clearly envisioned goal of reformation and revival. Those who have gone before us have much to teach us in this pursuit.

Because of their commitment to the doctrines of grace, the early Southern Baptist churches and leaders believed strongly in missions and evangelism. Their efforts laid the foundation for what has become the greatest missionary sending denomination of the twentieth century.

Because of theological convictions, they believed that God and His glory are the proper focus of both congregational and private life. Therefore they took church order seriously and believed that God is not glorified in an undisciplined church. John Dagg, the first Southern Baptist theologian to publish a systematic theology text, well noted that when discipline leaves the church, Christ goes with it.

Because they took the Bible seriously, they believed that theology is important. To our Southern Baptist forefathers, sound doctrine was foundational to healthy churches and healthy Christians. So they insisted on sound doctrine being taught from their pulpits. Books and catechisms were written to give careful doctrinal instruction to church members. When the first Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was established in 1859 its founders insisted that it be a confessional institution where professors would train men for the pastorate in accordance with and not contrary to the biblical doctrines of grace as they are summarized in the Abstract of Principles.

It is to this "old fashioned" faith that we look--to the faith of our founders. We believe it not because it is old, and not simply because those who established the SBC believed it. Founders Ministries is not now nor has it ever been some sort of antiquarian society. No, we believe the "old faith" because it is true! It is that faith which has once for all been delivered to the saints. Our forbears rightly understood it and so they taught, preached and oriented their lives around those great doctrines of God's sovereign grace as they are revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It was this theology which gave strength and foundation to their lives, their churches, and their denomination. And it is this same system of biblical truth which needs to be rediscovered in our day.

It is for this purpose that Founders Ministries exists. And it is this for which we are praying and working in all of our endeavors: the renewal of churches through the recovery of the Gospel of God's grace in our day. Everyone who shares these concerns must praise God for what we are seeing throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and

beyond. The Lord is at work in marvelous ways as a growing chorus of voices is beginning to call for reformation and renewal. And we have many reasons to hope that such work will continue to spread.

Benjamin Keach, the prominent 17th century English Baptist leader, said, "Reformation is a glorious work, and it is what we all long and breathe after." It is a glorious work. And it is a much-needed work. Because of sin it is also an ongoing work which will never be finished. Not until we enter into our eternal rest can we forsake this cause. May the Lord grant us the privilege to see many churches biblically re-formed and always re-forming until the dawning of that great day. This is the burden and prayer of the Founders Ministries.



Boasting Removed by God's Sovereignty

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

"For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Romans 9:15

In these words the Lord in the plainest manner claims the right to give or to withhold His mercy according to His own sovereign will. As the prerogative of life and death is vested in the monarch, so the Judge of all the earth has a right to spare or condemn the guilty, as may seem best in His sight. Men by their sins have forfeited all claim upon God; they deserve to perish for their sins--and if they all do so, they have no ground for complaint. If the Lord steps in to save any, He may do so if the ends of justice are not thwarted; but if He judges it best to leave the condemned to suffer the righteous sentence, none may arraign Him at their bar. Foolish and imprudent are all those discourses about the rights of men to be all placed on the same footing; ignorant, if not worse, are those contentions against discriminating grace, which are but the rebellions of proud human nature against the crown and sceptre of Jehovah. When we are brought to see our own utter ruin and ill desert, and the justice of the divine verdict against sin, we no longer cavil at the truth that the Lord is not bound to save us; we do not murmur if He chooses to save others, as though He were doing us an injury, but feel that if He deigns to look upon us, it will be His own free act of undeserved goodness, for which we shall for ever bless His name.

How shall those who are the subjects of divine election sufficiently adore the grace of God? They have no room for boasting, for sovereignty most effectually excludes it. The Lord's will alone is glorified, and the very notion of human merit is cast out to everlasting contempt. There is no more humbling doctrine in Scripture than that of election, none more promotive of gratitude, and, consequently, none more sanctifying. Believers should not be afraid of it, but adoringly rejoice in it.



The Dangers of Denominational Prosperity

Jacob R. Scott

(Taken from a Sermon delivered before and published by vote of the Portsmouth Association, convened at Mill Swamp, Virginia May 26, 1843; reprinted from *The Virginia Baptist Preacher*, vol.2, no. 7, July 1843))

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

1 Cor. 10:12

The sacred oracles leave us in no doubt that as long as the world stands, God will have a church on the earth; and yet, in some sense he has left it to the church herself to preserve and perpetuate her existence. Her prosperity also, at any give period will be proportionate to the zeal and fidelity of her members. I would not by any means, here lose sight of the necessity of sovereign, divine grace in the preservation and upbuilding of Zion; but I say God has clearly instituted and made known the connection alluded to. We may have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on our side, and yet we are taught that the success of our cause is coupled with the measure of our watchfulness, activity, and prayer. The arm of the Lord must indeed awake, and put on its strength, but His people must not be deaf to the call, "awake! awake! put on *thy* strength, O Zion!"

There are two respects in which the adherents of any system may be mistaken, and wherein they should take heed. They may think that they are firmly planted in the truth, when they are really in error; and they may be confident of triumph, when they are destined to disaster, if not total defeat. Where the truth is actually entertained there is no question, but that is the side which must *ultimately* prevail; and yet, it does not follow before the final consummation, that its success in any given struggle will be proportionate to its superiority in point of truth. Does not universal history teach us, that truth, though immortal, may yet long lie crushed to earth, while error is rife and rampant in the world?--that the ground which she gains, if she would maintain it, she must watch with eagle eye, and defend with a vigorous arm?--and that if she would make new conquests, she must march boldly forth, and win them on fields, where every inch will be desperately disputed? Thus has it been in every past age. Truth and error, like two sturdy gladiators, have held each other in close grapple, and now one has seemed uppermost and now the other. When it may please God that the mortal blow shall be inflicted upon error, and the ultimate triumph of truth shall arrive, the Omniscient only knows; but it is certain, as yet, no one can say, "I am right, because my opinions are triumphant;" or "My opinions must triumph, because I am right." Let him that thinketh he standeth, then, either in respect to the truth or the triumph of his particular sentiments, take heed, lest he fall.

As Baptists, we trust, and we are confident in the persuasion, that we have the truth, as nearly as human imperfection can approximate to it, on our side. We cannot doubt, but our views, founded as they are, on the simple word of God, irrespective of the traditions of men, are destined ultimately to complete triumph. And from the rapid progress they have made, and are still making, we fondly believe that the day when they shall universally prevail, is not distant. That day cannot be distant, if Baptists are only true to the sacred trust committed to them. But here we have just ground for apprehension; and a little reflection will convince you, brethren, that our most serious fears must actually be based on our apparent prosperity. We are bound, indeed, to thank God and take courage, for what our ears have heard, and our eyes have seen. In this land, we have already come to outnumber any other denomination, and the leaven of our views is diffusing itself more and more widely in every direction. We have a right to rejoice; we do, and we will rejoice; but let us be careful that we do not give ourselves up too exclusively to exultation; let us not blind ourselves to the fact, that with this advance has come an accession of dangers, which should keep us incessantly on our guard. I ask your prayerful attention, whilst I shall endeavor to point out some of these dangers,--the perils of our prosperity,--perils, which, if not guarded against and counteracted, may give a retrograde movement

to the cause of truth, and involve the world once more in the darkness of error and superstition. Heaven forbid it! Heaven forbid that we prove faithless to the high and holy trust committed to us!

Impurity

I. The first danger I specify, as springing from our prosperity and threatening to mar it, has respect to our *purity*--our soundness both in doctrine, and in practice. Bodies as they grow large are very apt to grow corrupt. It is as true in the moral as in the natural world, that rapid growth is not always a symptom of health. It becomes our churches then, as their numbers increase, to see to it that there be no relaxation of sound doctrine, and that a healthy tone of piety be maintained. However the bulk of a church may have been augmented, there has been no advance in real prosperity, if, take the church through, the average attachment to the great truths of God's word, and the tone of practical religion have been lowered. And is there not danger of this? Where there have been large additions, is it improbable that among them are many whose views of divine truth are very partial and defective; and many, who, having no definite views at all, are in danger of imbibing notions exceedingly erroneous, or of being tossed about by every wind of doctrine? And so, does not experience teach us, that where many present themselves for membership, at a time, we are apt to be less particular, as to the evidence of a real change in the candidates, than where only one, or but a few present themselves? And is it not peculiarly difficult, in the flush of such an occasion, to judge accurately what weight is to be allowed to the statements presented? At all times there is danger of deceived persons being admitted to the church; but is not the danger especially great, at a time when the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence? It is a critical time with a church when membership in it is popular. But, allow that all who have been received are genuine converts, and sound in their doctrinal views, so far as they have any, this is the point to which I would come; is there not danger, where there are so many more to be instructed, and watched over than formerly,--and who will not admit the necessity of such watch-care, and instruction?--that less attention will be bestowed on the members individually? that where many are to be looked after, the business will be done in a more hasty and general manner, than where there are but few? Is it unlikely, that neglects, inconsistencies, and abuses, which before would have been promptly rebuked, will be suffered to pass unnoticed?

You know how it is in tillage. A farmer may be increasing his acres, and still be growing poorer. We should not forget that a small estate, constantly improving, is better than a large one running to waste. This deterioration in the church may not be very perceptible at once, but let some emergency arise, in which it is necessary for her to vindicate her purity,--to speak out, and act out boldly against heresy or sin,--and then it will be seen whether the church has improved, on the whole, by comparing the present degree of her union and promptitude with the past. Look in at the prayer meeting also. Have the attendants an interest there kept pace with the increase of the church? Is as large a proportion of the whole number to be found there now as when the church was smaller? Do you witness the cheerfulness of that little band, who in days gone by enjoyed such sweet seasons together? or does gloom preside, and do you hear little else than lamentations, that out of so many so few only feel love enough to the Saviour and love enough to one another, to draw them out to meeting? And how is it in respect to the interest of the church in the various objects of Christian liberality and exertion? Has the church enlarged her contributions and operations, in proportion to the enlargement of her ability? If an unfavorable answer is given to these questions is not the conclusion inevitable, that the church is not so sound as when it was smaller? Understand me, brethren, I say nothing against the large and rapid accessions to our churches; would to God they were larger and more rapid; I do not say that the evils referred to *necessarily* follow, but only that there is danger of their following, because, where there are so many more to be instructed and trained, there is a liability that individual cases will not be looked after so carefully. Now what makes this a point of great importance is these two things; 1st, the objects of church association, it must be obvious to all, can be carried out only in proportion to the soundness and piety of the body; and 2ndly, it is only in that proportion that a church can expect to enjoy the smiles of her great Head; and what, brethren, what is a church without God's blessing? I pass to notice another danger.

Disunity

II. It is the increased liability to *disunion*. All must be aware that this liability is much greater in a large body than in a small one. The more materials there are for parties the more schisms there are likely to be. Philosophy itself cannot furnish a stronger illustration of cohesive attraction than is found in that union, which binds together a little, despised, persecuted handful, cemented together by a common faith. But let their number be increased; let them come to assume an aspect of respectability and importance in the eyes of the world; destroy the powerful bond of sympathy in suffering for conscience' sake; introduce a greater diversity of interest and outward circumstance; instead of all knowing each other intimately, let numbers be unacquainted with each other, and generally the acquaintance be slight, compared with what it was before; let them come to feel that rupture, after all, will not be death to them;--I say, let the condition of that little band be thus changed, and will not discord find much easier admittance than before? No one can doubt it. Besides, the greater the number of members, the greater will probably be the diversity of views and feelings to be reconciled; consequently the more numerous the occasions which can be wrested by disaffected persons to the purposes of faction. And still further: the larger and more influential the body, the stronger are the allurements to pride, ambition, and cupidity in it; and what more fruitful parents of disunion than these? And so we might go on to enumerate many other ways in which the increase of a church widens the entrance for disunion. But time forbids. This curse *need* not enter, and it should not be suffered to enter; everything should go on harmoniously in the church of God; all I say is, there is danger on this score, and the more numerous the body, the greater the danger. Hence, with the augmentation of our ranks, the necessity of increased vigilance to prevent the evil, and promote mutual conciliation and love.

Pride

III. The next danger I notice is that which threatens our *humility*. The Lord will not bless a proud denomination, or a proud church, let their creed be ever so orthodox. When David, at the instigation of Satan, numbered Israel, Jehovah was indignant, and sent Gad, the seer, to him, with this fearful message:--"Choose thee one of these three things, that I may do it unto thee. Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, whilst that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else, three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel." Thus when David, in the pride of his heart, went to numbering the people, the Lord determined to diminish the people, and there fell of Israel 70,000 men.

Let us learn a lesson from the history of Hezekiah also. The king of Babylon having heard of his recovery from sickness, sent messengers to him, with a present, and letters of congratulation. Hezekiah, flattered at the attention of the heathen monarch, and doubtless, wishing to show that the distinction was not unworthily bestowed, takes the ambassadors to the house of his precious things, and there makes an ostentatious display of his wealth. The light in which God regarded this vain act, may be learned from the message he sent by Isaiah: "behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon,"--the very country from which these ambassadors have come, "nothing shall be left, saith the Lord." And when we, my brethren, show symptoms of elation, in consequence of the great prosperity with which the Lord has crowned us,--when we, as a denomination, or as separate churches, begin to boast of the great numbers in our ranks,--the wealth, the talents, the respectability, the influence, that have been added to our communion,--when we begin to lose that spirit of simple, lowly, unsophisticated piety, which characterised us in the days of our fewness and contempt,--it will be high time for us to begin to *tremble* also. We may expect the withering frown of Jehovah, and the tide of our prosperity will be turned backward. We may rejoice indeed, that the Lord has blessed us; and *let* us be glad; but let us exult only because in our success we see the advancement of truth, which is the cause of God, and essential to the enfranchisement, the glory, and the felicity of our race. It cannot be doubted, brethren, that with the enlargement of our denomination, there has come a tendency to this vain-glorying. I say it with regret, I fear the indications of this tendency have already made their appearance. What means the boastful parade so often made in our publications, of

our superiority in numbers over other denominations? and especially of any inroads we may chance to have made on their ranks? Let us beware of this spirit. Let us see to it that we be not puffed up with arrogance. The devil cannot be better gratified than to witness this. Let us take heed lest we make shipwreck here, and it be left for us merely to furnish a beacon to some remoter generation, who, thus warned of the rock on which they are most likely to split, shall safely bear the holy trust now in our hands, into the port to which we had had the honor of bearing it but for our folly.

Diminished Zeal

IV. Another danger to which our prosperity renders us peculiarly liable, is a *diminution of energy* in propagating the truth. Let us not forget that our obligation to exert ourselves for the glory of God is as great now as ever it was, and we are bound to exert ourselves as vigorously as ever. What has been accomplished will afford us no apology for suspending, or in any degree relaxing our efforts. Had our churches been ten-fold more active and faithful than they have been, no excuse could possibly be offered for the slightest flagging in our solicitude and labors for Zion's good. Too much still remains to be done,--too much lost time, and too many wasted opportunities remain to be redeemed,--too many enemies are waiting for our halting,--to allow the least apology for folding our arms yet. No, when we consider how remiss in fact we have been, when we contrast all the labor that has been bestowed with the tremendous demand for exertion, and with what might actually have *been* done with proper fidelity, do we not really seem to have been asleep? So far then from thinking of rest, let us feel that we are called upon to arouse ourselves and redouble our diligence and energy; let us tremble at a single symptom of indisposition to continue,--nay, to increase to the utmost,--our attacks upon the power of the prince of darkness.

But, I repeat it, our past success brings with it a peculiar liability to such indisposition. We are apt to be satisfied too soon, before our Master is, or to fancy because so much has been accomplished, what remains can be done at our leisure; or, since because there are so many more in the service, each one may do less. It is the natural tendency of prosperity to enervate; and this tendency, if not counteracted, will eat out our vitals. When the world frowns upon the church, and Satan threatens to devour; when Christians are few and despised, there is every thing to stimulate to activity. It is then a struggle for life, and no one feels excused from fighting as hard as he can. But when large numbers have enlisted, and we imagine that we are too many, and too strong, to be scorned down, or beat down, we are prone to rest contented at this point. Many relax their exertions, while not a few cease their aggressions upon the enemy altogether. Like Job, we say, "I shall die in my nest." Like the Laodiceans, we say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Like Babylon, we say, "I shall be a lady forever." We feel safe, we feel respectable, we feel at ease, and so do not bestir ourselves,--forgetting that our own personal safety, and comfort, and respectability, are not the ends set before us, but the total defeat of Satan, the extermination of sin,--the complete subdual of the earth to Immanuel's reign. Thus, brethren, are we in danger of being satisfied with what the Lord has already done for us, of feeling that we are strong enough, and, sinking down into ignoble indolence, of restraining prayer, and neglecting all the means he has made it our duty to employ for the advancement of his glory. I pass just to hint at another danger intimately connected with this.

Shirking Responsibility

V. I refer to the danger of *activity not being so general throughout the churches* as when they were smaller,--of every church and every individual not coming up so much, as a body, to the help of the Lord. The churches being so much more numerous, the smaller ones will be apt to be overlooked in the calls which are made for the support of our various denominational enterprises; and not being particularly called upon, come themselves to forget the duty to do their proportion towards supporting those enterprises. And so, take any given church, I think this fact cannot have escaped your notice, brethren: that as the members and resources of a church increase, instead of each member doing

what he can, as in the days when it was necessary for every one to work, or see the church die, a portion of the members come to be thrown out from bearing their share in supporting the difference operations. The mites and the one talents thus fail to come into the Lord's treasury. Where the church *can* get along respectably without them, they are not considered worth the trouble of collection.

The fact is, there ought to be no trouble about it; a church should have its regular treasuries for good objects, and every member should know where the treasuries are, and have that spirit, which will lead him to bring in, systematically and punctually, his contributions himself. But the evil I refer to is not a mere matter of dollars and cents. It is the loss of a sense of individual responsibility,--of obligation on the part of every member, not merely to pay money, but to pray and labor in every way for the prosperity of Zion. From the very nature of things, it cannot be avoided that some members should become more prominent in the affairs of the church than others; but this is no reason why any one should feel that he has less personal interest in the church than any other. Alas! in too many of our churches there may be noticed a class, who hardly seem to regard themselves as part and parcel with the church, but rather, as in some sort mere useless appendages to the body. This ought not to be so. All should feel that they are members one of another; that each one has a part to perform in the upbuilding of the spiritual edifice; and that direct action, personal exertion in some way for the glory of God, is essential to the safety and prosperity of every soul. The danger on this score attendant on the progress of our denomination must be apparent to all. Let us see to it that the appropriate preventives be promptly and effectually applied.

Secularization

VI. Another danger of no inconsiderable magnitude, and to which I designed calling your particular attention, but which I can barely notice, is that of our denomination *becoming secularized by its prosperity*. From being a small body, we have become so numerous, that, by uniting for secular and political purposes, we could wield no small amount of influence and power. How strong the temptation to this is liable to become, you need not be told. But Heaven defend us against it! The moment we attempt to erect ourselves in to a great establishment, and proclaim ourselves banded together on any other grounds, and for any other ends, than those which are purely spiritual,--that moment will be disastrous indeed to us. So soon as we, in our denominational capacity, take a stand of this kind, and are to be bartered with for objects of mere worldly advantage--bought and sold in the market of demagogues and speculators,--we may inscribe Ichabod upon our banners, for the glory will have departed.

Intolerance

VII. Another point of danger on which it were perhaps worth while to dwell, but which I will only suggest, is *the influence of denominational prosperity on the toleration of others*. I confess, brethren, when I read the pages of history, I feel proud of the stand that Baptists have always taken on the subject of religious freedom. I say it not in the spirit of boasting,--truth will bear out the assertion, that the great, invaluable principle of toleration in spiritual matters, if not discovered by a Baptist, has, at least, been more clearly developed, more powerfully enforced, and more unwaveringly acted on by no denomination than ours. No denomination has shown less disposition to abuse its advantages, more freely and cheerfully conceded to others the right of judging for themselves what is truth, and of carrying out the convictions of their judgment. God has blessed us in thus respecting the rights of others. We have reason to fear his frown, should we ever consent to abuse our advantages by the invasion of those rights. God forbid that we should ever set ourselves up as spiritual dictators in the world, and attempt to tyrannize over the consciences of men. Let us go on, as we ever *have* gone, trusting to no sword for our victories, but the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Let us especially abhor and despise that petty despotism, which we sometimes see wielded over a community by a dominant sect,--so abhor and despise it, as never to tolerate the slightest approach to it in our own case. There cannot possibly be any thing lost, by the exhibition of that noble disinterestedness and generosity, which

will lead us always cheerfully to concede to others as unshakled an exercise of the understanding and conscience, as we claim, or wish for ourselves.

Ingratitude

VIII. I will detain you brethren, to notice but one danger more; and that is, the danger of *incurring the displeasure of Heaven by ingratitude*. The Lord hath done great things for us, and he expects us to make corresponding returns. He expects that we will be thankful, and manifest our thankfulness by our increased devotedness to his service. He expects that, as he has enlarged our ability, we will enlarge our operations. As there are more laborers in the vineyard, he expects that more work will be done. And he expects an increase of service, not merely in proportion to our increase of means, but that we will exert ourselves to supply the deficiencies of the past,--that we will make him *special* thank-offerings,--and that being taught by experience how certain our outlays are of being crowned with a rich return, we will never hesitate to make our investments correspond with our absolute ability.

I feel, my brethren, that this is a point of unspeakable importance. I fear we are not alive as we ought to be to its importance. I fear so, because I cannot learn that there is any more self-denial in our churches; I hear no more frequently than before of young men longing to proclaim the gospel to perishing sinners; I cannot hear that our churches are much more willing to do justice to their minister, and let them prosecute their work undistracted by worldly cares; I cannot see that our benevolent institutions are any better sustained now than they have been for years past. Our Missionary Board have been put to their wit's end more the last year than ever before. I know it has been a year of almost unprecedented embarrassment in the commercial world; but I do not see in this depression an adequate reason for the falling off which has taken place in the support of our holy enterprises, I fear that our retrenchment is too apt to begin at the sanctuary instead of our own houses. I fear that this multitude of new converts are not properly instructed in the principles of true Christian consecration, and in the claims of benighted millions. I fear that this vast mass of material is not growing up as it ought to "into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

If this be true, my brethren, how shamefully, or rather, shamelessly unthankful does it prove us! Have we not reason to fear that the gratification we feel at the increase of our denomination is of a very unholy and selfish kind? Have we not reason to apprehend that God will change his method of dealing with us,--that he will turn our prosperity into desolation,--that he will drive us from his vineyard, and commit the culture of it to those who will make him more worthy returns? O my brethren, the distinguished favor of God devolves a weighty responsibility upon us. Would that we felt it more. Let us implore the grace of God to make us feel it. Let us dwell much upon the goodness of the Lord to us, as a denomination, as separate churches, and as individuals. Let us praise Him for his goodness, and be it our earnest endeavor henceforth to serve Him with greater fidelity.

Conclusion

But it is time for me to close. I have endeavored, brethren, plainly and faithfully to portray the dangers, in which I conceive our present position involves us. Your attention has been directed to the perils which threaten us on a variety of particulars. I trust that the views presented have convinced you of the importance of our taking heed in relation to our future course. Many other considerations might be offered, but I hope these will suffice to put us on our guard, to make us instant and earnest in our supplications, and cause us to advance with renewed and vastly augmented zeal in the service of our adorable Redeemer. It is a high trust that has been committed to us. We concede, and that cheerfully, to other evangelical denominations that not a little truth may enter into their systems, and that they are doing not a little to promote the happiness of mankind, for time and for eternity; but so long as they cling to a single error, or corruption of "another Gospel,"--a degenerate Christianity,--it is not for them to lead forth

the world, completely unshackled, from its house of bondage. This I sincerely believe to be the vocation of the Baptist denomination. I am not a bigot, and no one who knows me will accuse me of an excess of zeal for the peculiarities which distinguish us from every other body of Christians; but I believe firmly, that religion will never stand forth, emancipated, and in her native majesty, dispensing her richest blessings, until all who love the Lord Jesus shall have united in the belief and practice of his simple teachings, just as he left them with his church,--and of nothing else. Believing, brethren, that God has called us to this high work, and seeing, in the success with which he has already crowned us, the earnest of victory complete, but fearing that that victory may be retarded by the abuse of past success, I have been moved to raise a voice of warning on this occasion. May the great Head of the church own and bless the feeble endeavor! church of the living God "peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces! for my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, peace be within thee!"



"One of our big problems among Southern Baptists is we're trying to get revival among unregenerate church members, and they don't have any idea what we're talking about."

Avery Willis, Senior Vice President of Overseas Operations of the International Mission Board



Samson and the Seduction of Culture

Roger Ellsworth

Our word "seduction" comes from the Latin word "seducere" which literally means "to lead away." The word has a negative connotation, that is, it implies that one is led away from something that is good and upright to something that is base and vile. In other words, it not only means to be led away but to be led astray.

We can't think long about someone being seduced without Samson coming to mind. He is the great "seducee" of all times. To appreciate what a tragic figure Samson is and what a terrible thing his seduction was we have to begin with what he was led away from.

The fact is Samson was called to be a special instrument of God at a time when the people of God as a whole had been seduced by Philistine culture. During the period of the judges, the nation of Israel found herself oppressed by her wicked, cruel neighbors on several occasions. But in each of those instances we are told that the people of Israel "cried unto the Lord" (Jud. 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6-7; 10:10). When we come to that period of time in which the Philistines had supremacy over Israel we read nothing of the people crying out to God. R.C. Sproul says: "Unlike previous invaders, the Philistines were cultured and not terribly oppressive; thus, Israel relaxed under their domination and did not cry out to the Lord."

This, then, was the situation into which God called Samson. The people of Israel had settled down into a peaceful co-existence with the Philistines, and Samson was to be God's instrument for stirring up His people and calling them away from their infatuation with Philistine culture. To this end, God commanded Samson's parents that he was to be a Nazarite. He was not to have his hair shaved (Jud. 13:5), and he was not to drink any wine or eat anything unclean (Jud. 13:7).

Endowed with superhuman strength, Samson was for a long time a powerful and effective instrument in the hands of God. As we read the account of his life, we find the refrain: "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily" (Jud. 14:6, 19; 15:14). This tells us where the real strength of Samson lay. His hair was the outer symbol of his consecration to God and his strength, but the source of that strength was the Spirit of God. James B. Jordan writes: "There was no magical tie between Samson's strength and his hair, but there was a spiritual connection in that God gives strength to those who are dedicated to Him, and in Samson's case, his dedicated head was the sign of his separation to God."

After years of being used of God in a mighty and wonderful way, we might expect Samson to be unconquerable. He had seen God achieve great victories through him time after time, and he would seem to be as strong in faith as he was in physical strength. The very last thing we would expect to learn is that Samson would flirt with losing the strength that God had given and used.

Enter Delilah. Most think she was a Philistine herself. Others think she was an apostate Israelite. The Bible doesn't say. One thing is clear, she was a Philistine in her heart, and she so identified with the Philistines that she must be counted as one.

Delilah must have been stunningly beautiful, and the Philistine lords knew Samson had a weakness for beautiful women. So they enlisted her in their cause. She would, for a tidy sum, find out the source of Samson's strength, and the Philistine lords would lurk in another room. At the proper moment they would step in and overpower Samson.

When will children of God ever learn that there are always enemies lurking nearby waiting for a moment of weakness so they can move in and destroy?

Three times Delilah asked Samson to reveal the source of his strength. Three times Samson gave her a false answer. Three times the Philistines rushed in to take him only to be overpowered themselves, but there is no mention in any of these encounters about the Spirit of God coming mightily upon Samson. Because of Samson's mad flirtation with sin, the Lord had already departed from him.

Finally, Delilah pestered Samson beyond his ability to endure and he revealed the true source of his strength. When he fell asleep, she cut the long locks of his hair, the Philistines moved in, overpowered him, and led him away.

Does this story seem to be too far fetched to be believed? Why, after it was obvious what Delilah was up to, did Samson continue even to see her let alone talk to her about the source of his strength? Why would he take such a terrible risk? Here we see the dreadful weakness of human nature. This was not just true of Samson; it is true of all of us. We flirt with things that we know will destroy us. Tell me how many times you have been burned by sin and gone right back to it, and I will tell you why Samson kept going back to Delilah.

Samson paid a dreadful price for his folly. The Philistines gouged his eyes out and put him to grinding in a mill. This was their way of showing that their god, Dagon, the god of grain, had won the victory over the God of Israel. Likewise, when a child of God falls, the unbelieving world is always quick to gloat over him and attribute his failure to an inherent flaw in Christianity.

Their victory was short-lived. While Samson was grinding in the mill, his hair grew and his repentance with it. When the Philistines brought him into one of their drunken festivals, Samson's strength had returned to the point that he was able to pull the pillars of the building down to kill himself and the Philistines.

How did Samson get into such a mess? How did he lose his strength? Taking things for granted? Yes. Not walking in obedience to God? Yes. Seeing how close he could get to the fire without being burned? Yes. All of these things and more came into play, but the final answer is that he himself became so enamored with the Philistine culture as embodied in and expressed by Delilah that he was blind to everything else.

I do not know what epitaph his relatives put on this tombstone after they dragged his body out of the rubble of the Philistine temple, but I know what they could have written: **SEDUCED BY THE CULTURE HE WAS CALLED TO INFLUENCE FOR GOD.**

Samson is a very fitting and appropriate picture of the church today. We, like him, have been called to influence our culture for Christ. We are called to be salt to slow the moral decay of the kingdom of man and light to show the way to God's kingdom.

But the culture we are trying to influence is not passive. It has its own doctrine, its own agenda, and its own preachers, and, it is militantly and aggressively dedicated to resisting our message and spreading its own.

Most of us do quite well for a while in being faithful to God and in standing against the agenda of the world. But the continual, seductive wooing of Delilah begins to wear down our defenses, and before we know what happened we are thinking and talking like cultured Philistines and advocating positions that are contrary to the Word of God.

The power of Christianity is in that Word, and when we allow ourselves to be seductively carried away from it, we, like Samson, will find ourselves robbed of power and humiliated before a taunting world. Samson stands as a lasting reminder that even the strongest will fall if he goes whoring after pagan culture. Such whoring always leads to powerlessness, blindness, and death. Is this not the explanation for the feebleness that keeps the church from seeing mighty movings of the Spirit of God? Is this not the explanation for the blindness that keeps the church from being able to discern what is true and what is false? Is this not the explanation for the deadness that keeps the church from rejoicing in the reality of spiritual things?

The picture of Samson is as pathetic as any could be, but there is also great hope and consolation to be found in his story. In the final analysis, the Philistines did not overpower Samson because they were stronger but because he was faithless. Christians sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that the godless culture which surrounds them is their greatest enemy. Godless culture is, of course, an enemy, but only in a secondary sense. Our greatest enemy is ourselves. If we are oppressed today, it is not because the baby boomer beliefs and lifestyle are stronger than we, but because we have been faithless to the God who makes us strong. How we need to take this home to our hearts! Our calling is to be faithful to God! But what about that child of God who has already been unfaithful? What about that Christian who has been seduced by mistaken dogmas of a godless culture? Thank God, there is another consolation from the life of Samson for such a case! Spiritual hair grows back! The child of God may be seduced by his pagan culture, but he will ultimately come back to the Lord, and be renewed. And, as Samson was finally vindicated, so each child of God is going to be ultimately vindicated. There is coming a blessed day when we will be taken out of the culture that despises the things of God, we will shine as the stars of the firmament forever, and the whole universe will know that we were right to walk with God.



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

[Ernest Reisinger](#)

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"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)*

Law Defines Love

The full content and direction of the law is not defined by love. When the Bible speaks of the "law of love," it cannot mean that love stands by itself as a definition of righteousness. Love is a principle of action, just as Paul, speaking of our remaining sin, describes that sin as a law or principle of action: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. . . . But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to, the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:21, 23 KJV). As a principle of action, law directs us in the true expression of love. Love does not spontaneously follow its own way. It is the fulfilling of the law. The law is love's eyes, without which love is blind.

Realizing this proper connection between law and love will drive us to all of Scripture to discover the behavior that God clearly defines as loving obedience. Nowhere in the Scriptures will we find that love dictates its own standard of conduct. We hear our Lord say, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," not, "If you love me, love me in any way you feel."

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. (John 14:21)

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. (John 15:10)

Our Lord's commandments in respect to morality are no different from His Father's commands. Otherwise there would be war in the Trinity. (Our difficulties in understanding the Trinity are immense enough without our suggesting a division in the Trinity!) There are not two moral standards of righteousness in the Bible-Christ's and the Father's. Nor is the Bible divided against itself, such that Old Testament believers were directed by law, but New Testament believers are directed by love.

Biblical love is never an autonomous, self-directing force capable of defining its own norms or standards of behavior. It is the fulfilling of God's commandments. We must not subtract love from the whole context of biblical revelation. Love does not stand alone or act alone. It has many biblical relatives, and the law is one of them.

A Heart for the Law

Likewise, the true Christian does not let his own heart—even though it is a renewed heart—spontaneously decide what is right. That heart must be directed by God's law. Indeed, the Spirit writes the law on the hearts and minds of all who are born again (Heb. 8:10; 10:16).

Does that mean that we come to know the law simply by reading an inscription on our hearts? No. The teaching of Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 is that the renewed heart has an affinity with, and love for, the law of God, resulting in cheerful, loving obedience. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). "I delight in the law of God" (Rom. 7:22). Here again we see an important bond between God's law and love.

If fallen man has the work of the law written on his heart so that he does by nature the things of the law (Rom. 2:14-15), how much clearer it must have been written on Adam's heart in his original state! And if the renewed man has the law written upon his heart, surely it cannot be different in principle from what was first written on Adam's heart and later written on tables of stone at Sinai.

Scripture dispels that ignorant, erroneous idea that love is its own law and the renewed conscience its own monitor. And yet, this wicked fancy continues to abound among Bible teachers, despite the clear testimony of Scriptures to the contrary.

I recently read an article by a brilliant young author who was busily sowing the seeds of antinomianism. In the article he raised a question about sexual purity: "What perspective does Paul press on the Corinthians to dissuade them from sexual morality?" (The author was referring to 1 Cor. 6:18-20, where the apostle tells the Corinthians to "flee fornication.") The young writer answered his own question: "The death of Christ by which they were purchased." What the author failed to consider, however, was how Paul or the Corinthians knew what sexual immorality was. How did they know—and how can we know—what constituted sexually immorality?

It is one thing to use the death of Christ, whereby they were purchased, as a motive for obedience to flee fornication. It is another thing to know and understand our duty to be chaste. The duty is not found in the word *love*. It is found in the seventh commandment.

The same author noted that "obedience flows from the redemptive work of Christ." Surely a proper motive for obedience is our gratitude for Jesus' redeeming work. But there must also be an objective standard for obedience before we can understand how to obey. *Motive* is one thing—specific *duty* is another. They are different, though vitally related.

Shouting "Love!" (the motive) tells us nothing specifically about our moral duties. The proper expressions of love are defined by the commandments of God. Though the Christian life is not initiated or sustained by commandment or law, Christian duty has no definition or direction without divine law.

When Paul says in Romans 13:9-10 that the commandments are summarized by the law of love, his point is not that love replaces law or is exempt from it. Law is not abrogated by love; it is fulfilled. Love neither supersedes law nor releases us from obedience. It enables us to obey. Love does not make stealing or coveting, or any breach of the law, something other than sin for the Christian (though some would give this passage that meaning). Love so penetrates and so constrains us that (not reluctantly or through fear, but joyfully) we act toward our neighbor in all things, great and small, as the law bids us. Yes, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, but not from the law itself. That would be to redeem us from a divine rule and guide, from that which is "holy, and just, and good."

Love as 'a New Commandment'-John 13:34

An often misused text of Scripture is John 13:34, where Jesus says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Does this verse imply that a new law-the law of love-has replaced the older Ten Commandments? Is that what Jesus meant when He spoke of "a new commandment"?

To understand this verse, or any verse, we must first examine it in its immediate context and in its remote context. But before doing that, it would be helpful to remind ourselves of some principles for interpreting Scripture.

Interpreting Scripture

In the very first chapter of The Westminster Confession of Faith, we have a rule of interpretation.

The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one) it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (1.10)

This rule has been called the "analogy of Scripture" or the "analogy of faith." Its meaning and importance have been well stated by Charles Hodge.

If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. Hence Scripture must explain Scripture. (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 187)

No doctrine concerning Scripture is of more importance to the Bible student than that which affirms its unity and harmony. From that principle flow the following rules for interpreting Scripture:

1. When the plain sense of Scripture is clear, seek no other sense; therefore, take every work at its usual, literal, primary meaning unless the context dictates otherwise.
2. Subordinate passages must always be interpreted in the light of leading truths.
3. What is obscure must be interpreted by the light of what is plain. Peripheral ambiguities must be interpreted in harmony with fundamental certainties. No interpretation of any text, therefore, is right which does not agree with the principles of religion, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments.

In addition, if you have only one passage of Scripture on which to form some important doctrine, you will probably find, on closer examination, that you have none.

With these reminders before us, let us examine John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

The Context of John 13:34

John 13:34 is part of our Lord's lesson on servanthood. He illustrates this concept by washing the disciples' feet (13:3-16). *Nowhere* in this entire chapter is our Lord giving a code of moral conduct or an objective standard of righteousness. That is not His subject in John 13. Therefore, we must be careful not to ask of *this* verse, What is the biblical standard of moral conduct? Love is the answer, *but not to that question*; which is to say, that is not the question raised here. To answer "love" to that question may sound very pious, but we would still need to define "love." How does Christian love act? In what direction does love go? How does love manifest itself toward God and man?

John 13 does not tell us those things. It does not teach us that we are to worship God; or that we are not to steal, murder, or commit adultery; or that we are to honor our father and mother. Our Lord's subject instead is "servanthood," and the key to verse 34 is found in the words, "as I have loved you." These words take us to the supreme example-the suffering servant-and that takes us to the cross.

A cross without a broken law is a cross without sin. Without law and sin, the cross is a jig-saw puzzle with the key pieces missing. Basic to the cross is Christ's satisfying divine justice, thereby upholding the law. The spirit of the cross is His manifesting saving love. The cross affirms law and love together. Verse 35 says, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Does this mean that all men know that we are His disciples if we march around holding up "Love" signs, or singing "Love, love, love"? Of course not! They will know that we follow Christ if they see Christlike love in our actions-holy deeds of mercy as defined by the Father's commands.

To follow Jesus' example is to love what Jesus loved, and to hate what Jesus hated, conforming our conduct to the same standard that He perfectly obeyed. He could say, "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). Where is the Father's will expressed in respect to morals? In the holy commands of Scripture. Jesus was indeed a law-keeping Savior.

Was the Command to Love New?

Was the command in John 13:34-to "love one another"-new? No, the law of love for God and man is the summary of all the commandments, and has been from the giving of the law to Moses.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! *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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but *you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:18)

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:35-40)

These passages, and many more, prove conclusively that to love is not a new obligation. Nor is it a new, different standard of right conduct. There already was a perfect, eternal standard of morality in the Ten Commandments, which has always been summarized by the law of love.

What Was New About the Command to Love?

What was new about our Lord's command in John 13:34? The answer is in the words "as I have loved you." The text offers a living demonstration of servanthood. In the person and work of Jesus, love was manifested, yes, personified, as never before!

Our Lord displayed:

- a love superior to its objects.
- a love that never varied.
- a love that deemed no sacrifice too great. He gave *Himself*. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).
- a love that did not subordinate, abrogate, or mitigate the law.

The love that Christ explained and manifested had always been commanded but never so pointedly demonstrated or personified. Such a demonstration was new! This commandment was also new in respect to its objects. God's new commandment was *brotherly* love, "that you love one another." *Brotherly* love is a special kind of love, going beyond love for one's neighbor. It is intended for a special people—the people of God.

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you . . . because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his *brother*, is in the darkness until now. He who loves his *brother*, abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his *brother* is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:7-11)

Brotherly love regarding the family of God is a new dimension to an old commandment. The commandment is new in respect to its manifestation of servanthood and new in respect to the objects of this love. Not only are we to have kind affections toward all men—that is just plain Christian benevolence. And genuine love to neighbors is extended to all according to their circumstances. We are even instructed to love our enemies. But this is not "*brotherly love*."

Brotherly love—the love of godly men and women for their godliness—is peculiar to the household of faith. An affection directed toward the excellency of true religion, it delights in holiness and truth. It loves the image of God reflected in God's true sons and daughters. This love attracts the eye and wins the heart because it embraces that divine nature of born-again men and women.

God imparts to His own a portion of His own loveliness. He made them new creatures of His free and distinguishing grace. Christ loves them as His own, calling them "My sheep." The Holy Spirit loves them, and they love each other. To love Christ is to love those who are like Him. Among His people, all divisions vanish: name and nation, rank and party, race and gender. All are lost in the common name Christian. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, rich and poor, male and female are one in Christ. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5).

It is by the mark of brotherly love that Jesus' disciples are to judge themselves. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). This is also the criterion by which Christ would have the world judge the sincerity of His religion and the truth of His gospel. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

THIS NEW BROTHERLY LOVE does, not negate the objective standard of the Ten Commandments. It applies the commandments in a fresh and compelling way to the communion of the saints. Love and law, working together, give us clear guidance in how to please God and know His will. The law shows us our sin and thrusts us to the cross and the Savior for mercy and grace. Love constrains us to walk a path of righteousness defined by the commandments and marked by joy and humble servanthood. That is the right relationship between law and love.



Book Reviews

A Call to Spiritual Reformation by D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992; 230 pages paperback, \$11.95.

Reviewed by [Chris Bruce](#)

Take yourself back almost 2000 years and imagine that you are Luke, Barnabas, or another of Paul's companions. Imagine spending days and nights in lent homes or on the road, sharing Paul's concern for the churches, and his joy in hearing of new life and growth among his spiritual children. Now imagine again that you were there when Paul took all of these things to God in prayer. How much would you know about how Paul prayed, and how would that knowledge affect your prayer life?

You might know more than Don Carson, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and you might even be able to communicate it more effectively. But that would be some feat. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, a study of Paul's prayers, is a book worthy of reading and re-reading on an annual basis. Carson's goal is "to work through several of Paul's prayers in such a way that we hear God speak to us today, and to find strength and direction to improve our praying, both for God's glory and for our good." The need is dire, he says, noting "the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church."

Among other characteristics, says Carson, Paul's prayers exhibit his habit "of looking toward the end of history, to his conviction that Christian life can be lived faithfully only if it is lived in light of the end." Also remarkable is the large amount of space that Paul devotes to praying for others. Paul's prayers, Carson says, "are outstanding for the large part intercession for others and thanksgiving for others play in them." Probably the only way to understand the power of these prayers, he says, is to take the time to read through them in one sitting. And if you buy this book, you can do just that, because Carson sets out the prayers of Paul in the space of eight pages.

Although Carson keeps a tight focus on Paul and his prayer life, from time to time he draws from other figures when dealing with certain themes, such as the relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility. He points to Daniel 9:2, for example, where Daniel is told that the 70 years of exile was coming to an end. A fatalist, Carson tells us, would simply look forward to the promised release. But not Daniel, whose response is to turn to prayer.

"Daniel is perfectly aware that God is not an automaton, still less a magic genie that pops out of a bottle at our command. God is not only sovereign, he is personal, and because he is personal he is free. . . . In other words, precisely because Daniel is aware of the promise of this personal, sovereign God, he feels it his obligation to pray in accord with what he has learned in the Scriptures regarding the will of that God."

Carson pays special attention to Paul's prayer in Romans 15:30-33, urging the reader to meditate on its relevance for our own day. Carson speaks frankly about the dangers of ministry in our culture, the stark reality of spiritual warfare, and the need for God's people to support their leaders in fervent, faithful prayer.

This is a first-class tool for individual or group study, complete with thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter. And there are the special touches that come with almost any book by this fine teacher, such as a wealth of practical tips, and a liberal dose of hymns and poems to illustrate various points.

Counterfeit Revival by Hank Hanegraaff, Dallas: Word, 1997; 315 pages hardcover, \$19.99

Reviewed by [Douglas R. Shivers](#)

On one of the days of my tender youth, amid the pastoral bliss that was my home, a bovine behemoth kicked a solid oak gate into my face. An immediate vision followed. It was the vision of a barn lot tilting and growing dark in a most disorienting, slow motion sway. Recognizing barn lots as one of the six worst places to fall, I wisely decided to sit down rather than fall down. Though my recovery was swift, a black-eye badge marked me for a while after.

The disorientation and shock of that bovine encounter made an undeniably powerful impression, but I never ever sought a repeat performance. Not all encounters are meant to be sought after. And some encounters are best never experienced. But today there is a kindred sort of phenomenon going on and, rather than running clear of the kicks, folks are stampeding to the gates for an "encounter." They are crowding round the ministries of disorientation and shock. These ministries don't use 800-pound steers and a stout gate, but they do employ music, expectation, and the flourish of a hand to hit folks with a bewildering variety of experiences, claimed to be "God's greatest work."

This new book by Hank Hanegraaff provides an understanding of the persons, places, principles of this claim. "Prophet" Paul Cain declares:

"No prophet or apostle who ever lived equaled the power of these individuals in this great army of the Lord in these last days. No one ever had it. Not even Elijah, or Peter, or Paul, or anyone else enjoyed the power that is going to rest upon this great army" (p. 160).

This is only one of the outrageous claims Hanegraaff cites. He is wise to provide precise documentation for these claims in end notes. I kept a book mark there for frequent referral because I needed constant confirmation that someone could actually talk about "Holy Ghost glue" (p. 25), the Holy Spirit "backfiring" (p. 49), Popeye and Olive Oyl as prophetic mediums (pp. 68,69) and people laughing during a sermon on hell (p. 87). A meeting is even described:

"The scene was surreal. It looked like a bomb had exploded. Bodies were strewn haphazardly throughout the sanctuary. Some lay motionless on the ground. Others twitched spasmodically. Behind me a woman shrieked, 'I'm hot! I'm hot!' In front of me a girl was shaking violently. A boy standing in the aisle chopped his hands feverishly at some imaginary object. Next to him a man whirled round and round in a circle. All the while waves of sardonic laughter cascaded eerily throughout the sanctuary" (p. 21).

Beyond citation of what these folks are claiming, Hanegraaff also does a thorough historical and biblical analysis of the claims. Connections to the Vineyard Churches, the Pensacola phenomenon, Trinity Broadcasting Network, and Tulsa are all traced. Claims to revival are shown to be manipulation and a flirting with insidious spiritual powers. Their claim of Jonathan Edwards for historical support is shown to be, at best, a misunderstanding, and, at worst, a misrepresentation.

Fraudulent claims besiege Christians constantly on every side these days. Sincere believers, longing for genuine revival, may be confused by charlatans. Because of this, it is gracious of Hanegraaff to warn folks away from the kicking gate. His work is invaluable for exposing the disturbance for what it is: *Counterfeit Revival*. Those who wish

to avoid an undesirable encounter would do well to heed the warning.

Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900 by Gregory A. Wills, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; 195 pages hardcover, \$39.95

Reviewed by [Philip R. Taylor](#)

The battles in this century over the life and soul of the Southern Baptist Convention have seen the development of many new and novel theories to support particular positions. One such position is that of soul liberty allowing an individual or a church to believe or do anything and still remain a Baptist or Baptist church in good standing. The real question of whether this is a valid position is partially understood through studying church discipline in Baptist history. Wills has done an outstanding job of opening up this topic in a clear and readable style from the perspective of our 19th century predecessors.

Baptists of the last century understood the Scripture as supreme and discipline as a necessary tool to maintain fidelity to the gospel. Individuals and churches were subject to discipline for sinful actions and doctrinal error. The keys of the kingdom were held by the congregation and they were meant to be used to strengthen the kingdom. Democracy was seen in the voting by all members of a fellowship or association. Wills documents how women and African-Americans participated in the process even with the controversy about their status in the church. The chapter on associations points to how individual congregations were kept on the Calvinistic side by the proper use of peer pressure. The section dealing with the decline of discipline as a healing and teaching tool brings up two underlying themes. The first theme is that discipline is one key to real revival. The lack of discipline prevented real revival by corrupting the church with worldly members. The other theme is that the adoption of the world's standards and programs can sap the strength of the church by compromising fidelity to the Scripture. Discipline is a corporate matter that reflects true democracy in action. This volume is highly recommended to those with an interest in the subject. Pastors wanting to read actual advice from the period given by the Charleston Association should consult *Some Southern Documents of the People called Baptists* printed by the Society for Biblical and Southern Studies. Wills' work is worth reading its 183 pages for a true understanding of the subject.

The Precious Things of God by Octavius Winslow, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993 reprint of 1860 edition; 424 pages hardcover, \$29.95.

Reviewed by [Douglas R. Shivers](#)

I am an unrepentant "bookmarker." My inkpen moves with my eyes, marking the best parts for use in sermon preparation. The copy of *The Precious Things of God* in my library, however, has not one mark in it. Not because there wasn't anything to underline, but because I couldn't find anything *not* to underline. The richness of the work flows unabated.

Devotional books are either so weak theologically or so syrupy in style that I never recommend them. The one exception has been Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*. Winslow's work is now the other exception. This is appropriate, since Winslow was one of the guest preachers at the dedication of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Winslow describes his volume as,

Not so much a systematic treatise of theology, as the companion, in his hours of devotional, meditative retirement, of the experienced and spiritual Christian. The truths which it contains, and the style in which they are presented, are perhaps more adapted to those peculiar seasons in the Christian experience of the believer, in which profound discussion and laboured thought would not only be distasteful, but out of place (Preface, p. iii).

This work is sound theologically, but it is also theology fully connected to experience and adorned with a beauty of language which eases its way into the soul. This is a feast for the inner man. Winslow's work is not divided into daily readings. Reading a few pages a day, however, will reward the reader with some of the most encouraging, uplifting and moving thoughts this side of heaven.

It seems most appropriate to close this review with a few samples of the "precious things." Think of these as some appetizers for the soul:

Beloved, read the love of you heavenly Father in the precious promises. They are but the echoes of His heart sounding from each page of the sacred volume.

Precious to Him is every spiritual desire, every heaven-sent thought, every holy aspiration, every feeble, languid, yet sincere hunger and thirst of the quickened soul after righteousness" (p. 232).

Christian mourner, let me once more direct your eye--too dimmed perhaps by tears to behold the precious truth--to this divine source of true, unfailing comfort. God's Word is the book of the afflicted" (p. 269).

But, beloved, the Lord demands of you, ere you approach Him in prayer, no self-fitness, no previous preparation, but that you, a poor, sinful, unworthy soul, needing Christ, coming empty to Christ, bringing all your sins and backslidings, and sorrows and wants to Christ, may 'receive out of His fulness grace for grace' (p. 343).



News

Don't believe everything you hear

Baptist historiography took another hit recently when Jesse Fletcher, Chancellor of Hardin Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, addressed the Texas Baptist Historical Society, Nov. 10, 1997.

According to a Baptist Press Report, Fletcher told his audience that a "group of young theologians organized themselves in 1972 as the Founders Conference, dedicated to calling Southern Baptists back to Calvinism." The original group, he said, included Thomas Ascol, Tom Nettles, R. Albert Mohler Jr. and Timothy George.

Dr. Fletcher was half right on the people and completely wrong on the date. Only Ascol and Nettles were among the seven people who met to establish the Founders Conference. The year was 1982. In 1972 Tom Ascol was 15 years old and Al Mohler was 11.

This and other minor mistakes are of little significance when compared to Fletcher's statement that early American Baptists "tended toward a modified Calvinism or a general atonement framework." This assertion cannot account for the stated theology of the Philadelphia Baptist Association and the Charleston Baptist Association, both of which adopted the Second London Confession of 1689, which is a clearly Calvinistic document. Given the fact that they were the two most influential associations in the South in early American life, one can hardly be convinced by any presentation which overlooks or dismisses their role in shaping early Southern Baptist theology.

The best book on this issue remains *By His Grace and For His Glory* by Dr. Tom Nettles. Nettles argues quite persuasively that there was a consensus of theological convictions among Southern Baptists for the first 75 years of their existence. No one has ever seriously attempted to refute his arguments.

1998 Founders YOUTH Conference

Pastor Jerry Marcellino of Laurel, Mississippi and Dr. Sam Tullock of Cornerstone Baptist Church of Wylie, Texas are the preachers for the 1998 Founders YOUTH Conference, scheduled to meet July 6-10 in Panama City, Florida. The theme this year is "The Authority of Scripture." Cost is \$200.00 per person. Registration deadline is April 15. For more information call Bill Ascol, (318) 798-7088.



Letters

Dear Sir,

I am a pastor in Colorado. I am ordained SBC, but I am in a Conservative Baptist church now. Because of family needs, I am going to relocate back to Texas. . . . I was at Southeastern Seminary when all of the "moderate" troubles and Dr. Lolley's resignation took place. I am eager to be a part of reformation and revival in our churches in the SBC.

Thanks for any assistance.

Yours in Christ
D. A., via email

Dear Founders:

I just read the *Christianity Today* article "Calvinism Resurging Among SBC's Young Elites" posted on your home page. Thanks for making it available.

I suppose resistance and misrepresentation are to be expected when you challenge the current religious opinions. We all recognize the fact that our blessed Lord Jesus drew the most heated resistance from the entrenched religious crowd, but the common people heard Him gladly. Like incumbent politicians, entrenched doctrine is difficult to overcome--but our God is able! . . .

It is most encouraging that sovereign grace doctrine is enjoying a renaissance in general, but I have to confess that sometimes my expectations regarding a great return within the SBC is rather underwhelming. None are so blind as those who refuse to see.

I appreciate your dedication and wonderful work. I have been a subscriber to the journal since its inception. I am a layman who had a great struggle with the sovereignty issues before coming to embrace them. What a difference a truly biblical understanding of the purpose of God brings. Praise be to His name forever!

D. B., via email

Dear Sir,

I found the information and services of your Web Page very helpful and encouraging. I am a Charismatic that discovered the Reformed Faith as I was trying to find a tradition and theology that was both biblical and orthodox.

The Charismatic movement is a movement in search of a theology. We are also Baptist both in terms of forms of baptism and also in our understanding of the Church as a community of believers. Thank you for your wonderful contribution to restoring the doctrines of grace to their proper place in the life of the Evangelical Church.

For the Lambs War,
D. S., WV

Please start my subscription to the *Founders Journal*. I'm very impressed with the topics covered and even use the journal in helping me prepare lessons for Sunday School. Great work on the Web Site! Thank you for your commitment to biblical Christianity.

E. S., Memphis, TN, via: e-mail

Subject: Thank you

We appreciate your ministry. We first found out about the *Founders Journal* while visiting our son at seminary (NOBTS). We are so glad that we found you on-line and are pleased with what we are reading. We were wondering if we were the only people in a SBC church that were concerned with the theology held by the early church fathers.

In Christ,
The H. Family

Dear Bro. Ascol:

I received my free copy of the *Founders Journal*. Before I finished reading the first article my heart was filled with joy. I attempt to preach the blessed doctrines of grace in a church that has been fed a steady diet of Arminian doctrine for more than forty years. Many are rebelling against the truth and are leaving, others are beginning their whispering campaign to have me ousted from the pulpit, but thank God, some, only a few, are receiving the Word and are showing real evidence of grace in their lives. . . .

Please remember me when you pray that I will be faithful to my calling and never compromise the blessed truths our Sovereign Lord has been pleased to reveal to me. I am so thankful that there are others like you who are declaring these blessed truths. I long for some fellowship with men of like faith, but there are few in my denomination who will publicly own them. I am seeking to be a light in the midst of much doctrinal darkness and confusion. . . .

Yours because of His free grace,
J. H., Texarkana, TX

Hi Tom,

Thank you all for the current issue [#31]. Confronting the stereotypes and confusion about Calvinism is so needed these days. Many of those in the church growth movement, even when presented with clear biblical evidence for the doctrines of grace, will automatically call to mind pictures of disobedient behavior to our Lord's great commission as the necessary and logical outcome of believing such theology. I see this as a major hurdle for many in their thinking. Thank you for spending time on this subject.

By the way, you sent me a manuscript (by Fred Malone) I have really enjoyed it and it has helped to strengthen my faith.

Thanks,
J. H., via email

Editor's note: The manuscript by Fred Malone is a reference to A String of Pearls Unstrung, now available from Founders Press.

Dear Editor,

I read with delight the *Founders Journal* most recently sent to me!

I was saved in a Southern Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 1962. In 1968 I left the Southern Baptists to join an Independent Baptist church. Please know, I have always believed in the election of the saints.

Approximately 10 years ago I read with avid delight Vols. I and II of the works of Jonathan Edwards (Banner of Truth.) From then on I have had--and continue to "thirst" for the wonderful old ways of Calvinistic Christianity. I now wonder, why do I remain in the Independent Baptist Fellowship (BBF) that is far from Calvinistic, or what I so believe to be biblical truths?

Springfield is considered "conservative Bible Belt"--that again is quite untrue!

I keep praying--and believe God has greater days ahead for His own--and indeed I pray for revival; without which, I personally see little hope!

Please do acknowledge my subscription! You or anyone else cannot write enough concerning the "old ways," or encouragement to return to our wonderful Christian roots (for us, that would be Baptist.)

The Puritans are my ideal of Christianity! I'm sick and disgusted with the Baptist Church of whatever persuasion that thinks "entertainment" is important, which is not [true]!

Again know, I read with delight the Winter/Spring 1995 journal that I received! . . .

Respectfully,
L. E., Springfield, MO

Dear Dr. Ascol,

This year a friend gave me the gift of *Founders Journal* and it has given me much encouragement and information. We are living in a time of struggle over beliefs--people have dug in and hold fast to a lot of false ideas they have been taught. Not until 1984 did I see the Bible in the light of Calvinism. Before that time, as a Southern Baptist, I was taught "milk-style" in the churches I attended. I became a Christian in 1953 at the age of 13. When I look back, I know without a doubt, God did all the work in my salvation. Although I did study for years on my own, [I] went to church to find it watered down--it was discouraging. Those years were hard because I had no leadership with direction. When I read publications such as yours I have great hope for reform among our people. We need not war with each other as Christians unless there is error--there is much error--sad to say. It is hard for me to think I trusted leaders who would not lead. But it is not all waste because the Holy Spirit taught me scripture and when the right leader came along I knew it right away. I am now in a Reformed Southern Baptist Church with a wonderful Calvinist pastor who is not afraid to preach the truth as God's word plainly gives.

Again, may I say thanks for the wonderful way you present the truth, giving both sides a hearing--that is very commendable.

Love in Christ,
L. K., SC

Dear Sir,

I would like to extend my subscription for the next two years.

I give thanks to our God for information I receive through the journal. It has helped to change me to be a more biblically sound Christian and to have a better awareness of the history of Southern Baptists.

I once gave adherence to a "man-centered numbers game," approach to Christianity. The *Founders Journal* and some area friends helped me to see that there was more to it!

I'm thankful for His providential hand in bringing me to more of an awareness of who He is! Our Southern Baptist forefathers knew the God of the Scriptures in greater depth than those who seek to lead us now.

Thank you, dear brothers, for your work in helping us around the church field to know these truths.

Sincerely a *Founders Journal* fan,
R.S., Conyers, GA



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How to Find the Elect

It is often charged that the doctrine of election stifles the spirit of evangelism. It is claimed, and it has no doubt happened, that some church or missionary board has been frozen in their tracts by the doctrine. They have said, "It is not our work to save the heathen; when God is ready to save the elect He will do it by himself." So they sat and did nothing. And as a result the doctrine got a bad name. For it is assumed that the lethargy of such men is caused by their belief in election. But is this true? Is it the doctrine or the men who are to blame? Don't good men sometimes misuse right doctrine? Can it not be that hard-headed, indifferent men twist truth to their advantage?

The elect are in our communities. We can find them as we pray and go out trusting in the leading of the Spirit and the capability of Providence. An unbeliever will move next door to a real Christian and will find life. A change in working assignments in the shop will place an "empty" soul at the workbench of a "full" soul. Before long both will be full. A casual conversation at the hairdresser's boutique will result in a thirsty soul finding living water. Unaware of the power controlling him a high school counselor will enroll a young lost girl in a class where she will sit at the desk with a praying Christian. She will find in that friend the Great Friend. Are these coincidences? Not in the opinion of faith. The Father is drawing to himself those whom he has chosen. And a share in the joy is promised to those who pray and lean upon the Spirit. Thereby the chosen in your community will be found.

What Jesus said to Paul in Corinth he says to us: "I have many people in your city. The elect are living up and down these corrupt streets. The apartments condominiums, and homes of your city are inhabited by those who are chosen of God. At this moment you cannot identify them. Not by their address. Not by their style of life or morality. Nor by their pursuit of truth. They seem dead to you. But I have put it into their heart to come; and they will. Just believe and be faithful. See your own helplessness and pray. Let my Spirit guide you to Troas Street; some of the elect live there. You will find another in the jail on Philippi Avenue. They will drive you from that place but in fleeing you will run right into some more of the chosen on Thessalonica Boulevard; just stop at Jason's place. Again you will flee for your life but you will be extremely fruitful on Noble Place in Berea; don't miss it.

"The Athens Culture Apartments will be a severe test and not too productive. But I have there one sophisticate, Dionysius, and one woman, Damaris, and a couple of others I want to bring into the fold. So drop by there and preach my Word. Don't worry about the 'name-calling;' I've given you a new name. Be strong in the Corinth Condominiums. It's a wicked place. But those rooms hold many that will live in my house forever. And I assure you, the manager, Gallio, won't bother you. Be strong now. Don't hold back the message. I will be with you in all of these places. Together we will find my elect. All that the Father giveth shall come to me through you."

--Kenneth D. Johns, *Election: Love Before Time*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976, pp. 46, 53-54.



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1998 Southern Baptist Founders Conference

*Samford University
Birmingham, Alabama
July 21-24, 1998*

"The Foolishness of Preaching"

Speakers:

Mark Dever
Jim Elliff
Fred Malone
Conrad Mbewe
Al Mohler
Tom Nettles
Sam Tullock
Don Whitney

For more information see the [online flyer](#).

Registration Deadline: July 6, 1998



Titles Available from [Founders Press](#)

[*From the Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention: What Hath Geneva to Do With Nashville?*](#) by Thomas K. Ascol, 16 pp. booklet, \$2.40

[*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*](#) by Mark Dever, 32 pp. booklet, \$4.00

[*A Foundation for the Future: The Southern Baptist Message and Mission*](#) by Thomas J. Nettles, 64 pp. paperback, \$4.95

LATEST RELEASE! [*A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey Into Believer's Baptism*](#) by Fred A. Malone, 56 pp. booklet, \$4.50

