



## Regeneration

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# The Founders Journal

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# Bill Clinton and the Discipline of our Churches

*Tom Ascol*

He is guilty. By his own, sworn (albeit reluctant) testimony the President of the United States has admitted being dishonest and sexually immoral. Regardless of what legal consequences ultimately follow, this whole sad episode is proving to be an indictment on the nation.

In the words of 1996 presidential candidate, Bob Dole, "Where is the outrage?" Poll after poll indicates that Mr. Clinton continues to receive high marks from the American people. As long as the economy is good and the mortgage rate is low, what difference does it make if the President is an admitted adulterer and bold-faced liar? As a nation, we have forgotten how to blush.

When a people lose their sense of shame, everything becomes acceptable. Decency vanishes and, consequently, nothing can be considered indecent. Conscience, Calvin said, is "the fountain of modesty." [\[1\]](#) And the foundation of a good conscience is a proper fear of God. What our cultural immodesty and public acceptance of presidential infidelity clearly reveal is that, as a society, we have fallen under the biblical charge that "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18).

This is not a new thought for most conservative evangelicals. Our nation's moral mudslide has been increasingly apparent for the last three decades. What is not so apparent but even more serious is the moral failure of evangelical churches at this crucial stage of our nation's history.

That a nation which has been built on the rule of law would wink when its highest elected official violates his own marriage covenant is a shame and tragedy. But when an evangelical church which is founded on the Word of God allows one of its members to do so without correction, it is scandalous. At least it ought to be. Yet, in the unfolding saga of Mr. Clinton's sexual immorality and deceit, both nation and church stand guilty.

Mr. Clinton is a member in good standing of a Southern Baptist church back in his home state of Arkansas. The pastor of that church has publicly stated that no formal steps of rebuke or correction will be taken with respect to the exposed conduct of the church's most famous member.

Al Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, has called that church to exercise biblically mandated discipline over Mr. Clinton. Charges of violating "the separation of church and state" and "the autonomy of the local church" have been leveled against Dr. Mohler in the wake of his proper encouragement of the Arkansas church to obey Christ's clear teaching.

Mark Wingfield, editor of the Kentucky Baptist *Western Recorder*, speaks for many on the left wing of Baptist life when he ignorantly accuses Mohler's call with being "not only arrogant" but also "against the Baptist doctrine of the autonomy of the local church." Further, Wingfield charges, such a call "crosses the line from a free church tradition to a hyper-hierarchical church tradition."

It is a good thing that Wingfield is not teaching Baptist history anywhere (though one suspects that his revisionistic, reductionistic views on that subject are little more than a reflection of what has been widely taught on that subject for much of this century). Even a cursory reading of old Baptist associational minutes would reveal that the giving and receiving of exhortations were common practice among the churches. Circular letters by various ministers often addressed pressing issues of the day and called on churches to take specific actions. It was not uncommon for associations of churches to call on other associations to take what was judged to be a beneficial course of action.

One example of this is found in 1807 on the occasion of the republication of John Gill's commentary. The Philadelphia Association called on each church to purchase a copy of this work for its minister and encouraged other "sister Associations" to do the same. The Charleston Association did just that and advised each of its churches to provide a copy of this commentary for its minister.<sup>[2]</sup> No one screamed "violation of local church autonomy" or made wild charges of an encroaching "hyper-hierarchical church tradition" because they understood far better than we commonly do now the true nature of Baptist polity.

It is quite proper for Baptists to call on one another to take steps which will result in greater godliness and which will enable their churches to follow Christ more closely. This is all that Al Mohler has done.

The executive board of the Pulaski Baptist Association evidently misunderstands this in light of a resolution which they have recently passed. According to an ABP report, the resolution declares its support of Mr. Clinton's church and pastor "in allowing to conduct their ministry as they see fit under the direction of God's Holy Spirit." It further states that "no one outside that congregation has the right, nor the privilege, of trying to coerce" the church to do otherwise.

But Al Mohler has not stood as a pope nor pretended to speak *ex cathedra*. There were no threats, no assertion of any sort of ecclesiastical authority. He simply called on one church to do what every church which bears the name of Christ is obligated to do, namely, to obey our Lord's teachings which are spelled out step-by-step in the Holy Bible which God's Holy Spirit inspired. Jesus said:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:15-18, NKJV).

Other passages, of course, also instruct churches in handling wayward members (Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, Titus 3:10-11, etc.). But this is only one side of the kind of discipline which the Bible spells out for disciples of Christ. Before there can be any ground for correction, there must first be positive formation.

Formative discipline must be recovered before corrective discipline can be legitimately practiced in a church. The first type involves a careful use of all of the God-ordained means in promoting genuine godliness among every church member. Thus, churches must insist that the Word of God is preached with simplicity and application. Members are to be taught--and should be expected to practice--the principles of holy living. Where this takes place the members will become increasingly "formed" by the Word of God and healthy spiritual growth will become the norm in a congregation. In such situations, corrective discipline (at least in its final form of removing a member from the church) will rarely be necessary.

Those who do not demonstrate a real, saving relationship with Christ and who show no interest in growing spiritually have no business being received into a church's membership. This is not a false idealism nor an argument for perfection in Christians. Rather, it is a simple recognition that where there is life, there will be at least some demonstration of it. The church is made up of living stones. As Baptists have long argued on the basis of the New Testament, an essential qualification for church membership is regeneration. Spiritual fruit cannot be cultivated where there is no spiritual life. What does not exist cannot be "formed" or shaped.

Thus, before corrective discipline can ever be restored to our churches formative discipline must begin. Most fundamentally, a church must begin to exercise care in how it receives members. Where such care has long been neglected, there must be instruction on the biblical standards for church membership.

John Dagg, a prominent nineteenth-century Southern Baptist theologian emphasized this point in his *Treatise on Church*

*Order.* He wrote,

The churches are not infallible judges, being unable to search the heart; but they owe it to the cause of Christ, and to the candidate himself, to exercise the best judgment of which they are capable. To receive any one on a mere profession of words, without any effort to ascertain whether he understands and feels what he professes, is unfaithfulness to his interests, and the interests of religion.[\[3\]](#)

When the unregenerate are not only allowed but encouraged to join the church simply on the basis of a recited prayer, raised hand, firm handshake, completed decision card, or any other superficial method of spurious evangelism, they themselves are spiritually misled, the church is seriously weakened, and the cause of Christ generally is undermined. Yet this is precisely what has happened for more than a generation in thousands of our churches.

The results, as measured repeatedly by various statistical analyses, are grievous. In the Southern Baptist Convention over one-half of the members in our churches never even attend one of our stated services of prayer or worship. The 1996 North American Mission Board research report entitled, *A Large Convention of Small Churches*, discovered that in the typical Southern Baptist Church only 30 percent of the total membership actually show up for worship on Sunday morning. Imagine going to war and having only 30 percent of your troops show up! Where the number of members exceeds the number of attenders the church is spiritually sick. There is great need of formative discipline.

This provides an important context for the actions of the 1998 Southern Baptist Convention which met in Salt Lake City, Utah. A resolution was brought to the floor calling on Congress to nullify a pro-homosexual executive order by President Clinton. A motion to amend the resolution by adding a call to Mr. Clinton's church to "prayerfully consider" disciplining him barely failed by a vote of 1,071 to 1005.

Certainly, the spirit of the amendment was right and proper. Even its essence was appropriate. But how can 1,071 messengers vote to call on one church to exercise discipline when every indication is that the overwhelming majority of their own churches do not practice it? Just as Bill Clinton has no moral authority to call for honesty and integrity in our land, neither does the Southern Baptist Convention (and evangelicals as a whole) have any ground to call upon any single church to do what the great majority of its churches refuse to do.

The failure of Mr. Clinton's church to lovingly help him by confronting his sin in the way that Jesus has prescribed is certainly an indictment on that congregation and its leaders. But it is also an indictment on every Bible believing church which, for whatever reason, fails to practice biblical church discipline.

The national events of the past several months should serve as a wake-up call to every evangelical church in the nation. Each one is a part of a church culture which has come to tolerate sin--even open and flagrant sin--and ignore clear teachings of Scripture. What is needed is genuine repentance on the part of pastors and church members--repentance over lowering the biblical standards of church membership; over turning a blind eye to open sin in the church; over not loving the brethren enough to confront and correct; and over simple disobedience to our Lord's commands to His church.

What difference does it make if we have an inerrant Bible but blatantly refuse to put into practice its teachings? Christ is not honored when our affirmations of orthodoxy are not matched by actions of orthopraxy. May He have mercy on us all and enable us to repent and to recover His forgotten instructions on church discipline.



<sup>1</sup> See his commentary on Genesis 37:23.

<sup>2</sup> See *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 439, and David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmonds, 1813), 2:149.

<sup>3</sup> *Manual of Theology, Second Part, A Treatise on Church Order* (NP: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; reprint edition, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 269.



<sup>1</sup> See his commentary on Genesis 37:23.

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<sup>3</sup> *Manual of Theology, Second Part, A Treatise on Church Order* (NP: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; reprint edition, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 269.



# Nature of Saving Religion

*Ernest C. Reisinger*

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away, behold, all is become new.  
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

## The Essence of Saving Religion

*"Therefore, if any man be in Christ"*

Paul is speaking of the new creation which is wrought by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is known in its essence. Paul shows several things in this verse in relation to regeneration.

First, he addresses the essence of saving religion in the phrase "in Christ." This phrase is used at least 240 times in the New Testament. The greatest question that could be asked to help a person determine his state before God is this: "Are you in Christ?"

- *In Christ* speaks of our union with Christ, that we are united to Him in true conversion.
- *In Christ* speaks of our justification, that God has declared us righteous and forgiven.
- *In Christ* speaks of our adoption, that He has freely made us His sons.
- *In Christ* speaks of our sanctification, that we are holy and continue to be made holy.

Everything that God has for the Christian is "*in Christ*." Paul says, "*But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30). The essence of saving religion, then, is being "in Christ." A Christian is someone who is savingly joined to Christ.

## The Effects of Saving Religion

*"He is a new creation"*

This verse also points to the effects of regeneration in saving religion. The new creation is the work of the Triune God. God the Father planned it. God the Son purchased it by His death and prayed for it. And the Spirit applies it effectually. We can explain what the Spirit does, but how He does it, no man must pretend to know.

We do know that the effect of His saving work is that of our being a new creature--a new creation. Something happens to us and in us. John Wesley expressed it this way: "It's something that happens on the inside and manifests itself on the outside."

It is God commanding the light to shine out of darkness into one's heart. This inward light is a knowledge that never grew on Adam's tree. It is the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is not religious patch-work, for the sons of Adam are so far gone that even God won't patch them up.

Before the supernatural work of regeneration, the world's standards and values dominate a person's being. The center of his being is self. Sometimes it is well-disguised, but nevertheless it is something less than a new creation--no inward change.

True and saving religion changes the whole man--inwardly first, and then outwardly. The whole man is affected--his mind and thus his thinking; his affections or emotions and thus his feelings; and his will, thus his actions.

True Christianity, whatever else it may be, cannot be less than right thinking, right feeling, and right actions in relationship to God.

## **The Evidences of Saving Religion**

*"Old things are passed away; behold, all is become new."*

The evidences of saving religion, or being in Christ, are always present. Negatively, old things pass away; positively, all things become new. Before conversion, a person is dominated basically by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, as 1 John 2:15-17 says. The lust of the flesh is an inordinate desire to enjoy the things of this world; the lust of the eye is an inordinate desire to have things; the pride of life is an inordinate desire to be somebody. Such is the unregenerate man.

The primary evidence of being in Christ is that the power of these controlling factors is broken in one's union with Christ. Old things become new, or to put it another way, new things now come. There is a new purpose for living, a new path of obedience, and new practices. All things become new. That is the evidence of being in Christ. The person who is in Christ is renewed inwardly, not perfectly or finally, but in some measure in every part of his being.

His understanding is renewed, so that the man recognizes the gospel to be the wisdom of God; he now discerns the reality of the things of God. His heart and affections are renewed. The law of God is written within him, so that he loves God and he loves God's image in His children. He hates sin and all that robs God of His glory. The outward members of the person are renewed. The tongue, the eye, the ear, hand, and feet--those members which once were abused are now improved as weapons of righteousness.

The one who is a new creation has a new purpose. There is a new path of obedience to God, to Christ's commands, such as baptism, public worship, reading and subjection to the Word of God. He now walks in Christ's ways and follows the Lamb wherever He goes.

The new creation also has new practices in all his relationships. New interests govern his life because he has been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

He has been brought into a new state with respect to his relationship with God. It is an entirely changed relationship from the state of death and wrath as an enemy of God to a state of peace with God as a son, heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. This is no small change.

The new creation, the Christian, comes under a new Teacher--the Holy Spirit. This Teacher gives him new views of himself, his nature and character, his sins, duties, trials, and his eternal prospects. He gives new views of God's law. The Christian now sees it as his friend, directing him along the right road to travel. The Christian is given new views of Christ, and what He did and why He did it. There is clarity regarding the Gospel itself. He sees that the gospel is

always relevant as long as men sin and die.

The new creation (the Christian) enters into a new conflict in his own soul. It is the conflict mentioned in Romans chapter 7. This is a conflict between sin and the will. While the conflict in the unconverted person is between sin and the conscience, for the Christian, it is a conflict between sin and the will. The difference between the two (sin and the conscience and sin and the will) consists entirely in the position of the will. In the unconverted, the will is on the side of sin, and both sin and the will are opposed to the conscience. In the new creature, the will is on the side of conscience, and both are opposed to sin. One should never believe any teaching which says that one can come to a place that there is no more conflict with sin.

This great change of the new creation, being in Christ--a change so great, that there is only one thing that can bring it about. Only the Almighty operation of the Holy Spirit can effect this necessary change, and how He exactly does it, no one knows. What He does can be known, but how He does it is a mystery in the Christian faith. Such is the truth of 2 Cor. 5:17--the new creature in Christ.



# Regeneration

*Tom Ascol*

## Introduction

When Jimmy Carter became President of the United States in 1976 I remember my Political Science professor at Texas A&M University talking about the confusion which his colleagues from the North were experiencing. Several of them called him on the phone to get help in understanding what the phrase, "born again," meant.

From the outset of his campaign Carter made it very clear that he was not ashamed to be known as a "born-again Christian." At that time this was a new thought to a lot of people in our land because they had not weighed or considered Christianity in terms of the idea of a new birth. Reporters and political analysts wanted to know what the language meant and what Mr. Carter was actually saying.

Since then the phrase has come into common usage in our public conversations and people are much more familiar with the words. It is frequently used of basketball and football teams who suddenly start winning again after a series of losses. When the phrase appears in a sports headline in reference to your favorite team, you can be assured that things must be moving in the right direction.

The language of "born again" and "rebirth" has obviously become more common in our world today. Nevertheless, there is little reason to hope that the spiritual significance of these phrases is any better now than it was twenty years ago. There remains a great deal of ignorance about the biblical meaning of the new birth.

The technical and biblical word for spiritual birth is regeneration. The word itself is found only twice in the New Testament, but the idea which it communicates is found throughout the Bible, especially the New Testament. The first occurrence is in Matt. 19:28, where it refers to the coming renewal of the world at the end of the age when Jesus will appear. The only other time it is used is in Paul's letter to Titus, where it does specifically refer to spiritual birth. There, the apostle writes,

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-7, NKJV).

## An Initiatory Work

Salvation includes a complex of ideas. When the Bible speaks of being saved it is not referring to only one aspect of God's work in making a Christian, but rather to a full conglomerate of realities that is included in that work. Justification, sanctification, glorification, forgiveness, regeneration, as well as repenting and believing and being converted are all spiritual realities which fit under the heading of "salvation." The very first reality which a person experiences when he becomes a Christian is the work of regeneration. Thus Paul writes, "He saved us, through the washing of regeneration." The new birth, or regeneration, is the initiatory event that ushers a person into the experience of salvation.

This is illustrated quite graphically in Jesus' analogy of birth which is recorded in John 3. Jesus is approached by Nicodemus, a religious leader, who wanted to ask a question. Before he could get the question out of his mouth Jesus went to the heart of the matter and said to him, "You must be born again. You must be born of the Spirit." Jesus uses the analogy of physical birth, saying, "What must happen to you spiritually, Nicodemus, is tantamount to what happened to you physically when you came into this world. You must be born spiritually if you're going to enter into the kingdom of God." In an analogous way, spiritual birth is that initiatory experience that brings an individual into a state of salvation. It is that which enables him, for the first time, to see Christ with faith, to repent of sin and to begin trusting and following the Lord.

Paul uses a different, but equally graphic, analogy of "quickening," or making alive in Ephesians 2. He reminds his readers that they were once dead in trespasses and sins and were apart from God. When they did not know God, He "quickened" them and made them spiritually alive. Such "quickening" (regeneration) is the initial experience which comes to a person and ushers him into the whole realm of salvation.

Why is this type of initiatory experience necessary? Why must the very first thing that happens to a person be new birth? Why not repentance? Why not faith? Why not justification? Why not conversion? Why not glorification and all the other things which are also a part of salvation? Why must regeneration be first?

Regeneration must be the very first work in our salvation because of mankind's sinful depravity. When sin came into the world it left the human race morally and spiritually devastated. Consider the way that Paul describes our condition by nature in Titus 3:3. He lists seven vices which describe the condition of every unregenerate person: foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. This description is a summary overview of the true condition and attitude of every unregenerate person.

This kind of language offends some people and they would argue that it does not apply to them. If that's your attitude, and you feel you're not any of these things, nor have you ever been any of these things, then it is most likely true that you still are these things (especially "deceived"), because this is the condition of everyone by nature.

Paul is writing to regenerate people who have been born of God's Spirit and reminding them of what they were before salvation came to them through the initiatory working of the Spirit in regenerating them. This is the way they once were. It remains an apt description of all who are yet unconverted.

Not only has sin left mankind morally polluted, it has also left everyone without spiritual ability. The natural man is spiritually blind, deaf and, most dramatically, dead. Such a person, by his own strength, is unable to please God or come to Christ for salvation.

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Paul wrote that no one by nature can please God or keep His law (Rom. 8:7-8). There is no spiritual ability in people because of sin. Consequently, if a spiritually depraved, spiritually disabled individual is to become a believer and a repenter (a follower of Jesus Christ), something must happen to him. That something is regeneration. There must be new birth, quickening, a work of God's Spirit which grants life and spiritual power, spiritual ability to see, to hear, to respond. This is the work of regeneration.

Thus Jesus' warning that "Unless a man is born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" makes perfect sense. There is no other option or alternative. There is no exception. There is no "Plan B." No matter whatever else you may have experienced, if the Holy Spirit has not come into your life to make you a new person, if you have not been born again spiritually, then you are not a Christian. Regardless of whatever else you may have experienced, in order to be a real Christian you must experience the Holy Spirit's work in your life, making you into a new person. You must be born again--spiritually. Without this, it does not matter whatever else you may have experienced or done.

A man may have experienced great visions and dreams. He may have known exalted feelings in his religious life. He may

be greatly gifted and accomplished many good, religious works. He may have been baptized, commissioned, and ordained. Nevertheless, Jesus' admonition stands undaunted: Unless one has been born of God's Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"Have you been born of God's Spirit?" This is the question which we must put to people. Not, "Have you walked an aisle?" Not, "Have you been baptized?" Not, "Have you done religious works?" Rather, "Has the Spirit of God ever come into your life so that He has changed you and worked in you, giving you new life?" Whatever words we may use, this is the question. "Have you been regenerated?"

## **A Purifying and Renovating Work**

Regeneration is also a work of purification and renovation. Paul says that God, according to His mercy, saved us through the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Regeneration works in two directions: it negates the past and reconstitutes for the future. In Christ, old things have passed away" and "all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Anyone who has ever refinished an old, tattered piece of furniture which has been painted a dozen times knows that the first step involves stripping off the old paint, sanding out the dings and scratches, and trying to do all you can to overcome the past. Regeneration does the same thing. The Spirit of God comes into a person's life and overthrows the powers of sin that have kept him enslaved for all of his life. The ultimate perfection of this will be experienced when the believer is ushered into heaven, but the process is begun on earth. In this way regeneration negates the past.

But it also reconstitutes for the future. In regeneration, the Spirit of God recreates in righteousness. The sinner's nature is changed and he is given a real desire for holiness. This new desire and new life is not perfect--but it is genuine. It is not enough to strip off the old paint and sand out the dings, restoration also requires putting on a new finish. Regeneration is the act of God's Spirit whereby new life is given to a person. The regenerate person is both able and willing to live a life of repentance and faith. He has been supernaturally changed.

This is the wonder of biblical Christianity! It is all about change! Our culture is always abuzz with talk about change. Have you ever noticed the commercials you watch or hear on the radio, the ads in the papers? All kinds of products are hawked with enticements that they will change your looks, change your relationships, change your attitudes, change your health, etc.

Multitudes of people in the world today are dying to change. This is why the offer of an improved life is such a successful marketing strategy. As a casual stroll through any popular bookstore clearly demonstrates, self-improvement sells. Sadly, however, it promises far more than it can deliver. Better hair, newer cars, whiter teeth, greener grass, etc.--these at best can add an attractive veneer to a fractured life. Sin has separated people from God and therefore has left us fundamentally broken and flawed.

The good news which the Bible teaches is simply this: God changes people! He renews from within. This is the work of regeneration which ushers people into a whole new life. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God transforms enemies into His children. This is the message of hope which the church has for the world.

## **A Lasting, Life-Changing Work**

Regeneration is the implantation of new life. Paul tells Titus to instruct those he is pastoring to incorporate certain characteristics and virtues into their lives. Christians must be submissive to rulers and authorities, ready to do every good work, speak evil of no one, peaceable, gentle and humble to all. But is this really possible? Yes! Because, Paul says, though believers once used to be people filled with vice, the merciful salvation of God has come to them and by His Spirit they have been regenerated. Regeneration always results in a new way of living.

When a healthy baby is born into the world, he or she exhibits certain natural tendencies and characteristics. Where these are missing, something is terribly wrong. Similarly, there are signs of life which are exhibited by those who have been spiritually born again. These signs of spiritual life reflect the characteristics of physical life which appear naturally in newborn babies. [1] What happens when a new baby comes into the world?

A newborn *cries* instinctively. There is a natural ingredient or ability within the creature that is given by God that when all things are going well a new baby will cry. When this does not happen the parents worry because they know that something is not quite right. When a person is born of God's Spirit there will be a spiritual cry, a prayer to God--not as a matter of formality. Rather, prayer for the new Christian will be an inevitability. When a person is born of God's Spirit, he will look to God. This is instinctive. Paul says that we are given the Spirit by which we cry out to God, "Abba, Father," in the most intimate personal terms, calling upon Him as the one who now has adopted us into His family.

A newborn baby also *eats* instinctively. So it is with those who are born of God's Spirit. There is in the new Christian a hunger for spiritual food--the milk and meat of the Word. There is a desire to be nurtured by the Word of God. The Bible is no longer a boring and closed book. Rather, for those who are born of God's Spirit it becomes the source of spiritual nourishment. They cannot do without it.

This makes suspect those people who say they are Christians but who do not read the Word of God and do not want to hear the Word of God preached or taught. Such a person has no reason to think that he is a Christian. When a person is born of God's Spirit there will be created within a hunger for the Word.

Not only does a newborn baby cry and eat, he also *moves*, turning his head, and wiggling arms and legs. A spiritually reborn person also begins to make spiritual movements by sorting out new priorities: "What does this mean now that I belong to God?" "What does this mean now that He has taken me and brought me into His family and changed me?" "What about my old habits?" "What about my old relationships?" "What about how I've used my time and ordered my life?"

All of these types of movements will take place. They are not all instantaneous nor will they all occur at the same time. But there will be spiritual movement in the life of one who has been born of God's Spirit. There will be an effort to live for God, to do good works, and to serve the Lord in some way.

A newborn *rests*. This is true of a person who has been born of God's Spirit as well. A regenerate person is able to rest in Jesus Christ; to trust God with His life; to experience that real inward peace that comes only through faith in the Lord.

Where regeneration has taken place, there are always things that go with it--signs of life. The little letter of 1 John elaborates this point very clearly. Take 20 minutes to read this letter and you will find that it teaches that everyone who is born of God, does righteous things (2:29), has been delivered from the power of sin (3:9), knows and loves God and loves those who have been born of God (4:7), believes that Jesus is the Christ (5:1), overcomes the world by faith in Christ (5:4) and exercises self-control and guards himself (5:18).

What John is saying in his letter (and what the Bible elsewhere teaches us) is that whenever a person is born of God's Spirit and becomes a true Christian he will act like it. Not perfectly. Not always consistently. But there will be a change. Why? Because he has been born of God's Spirit.

Remember Jesus' parable about the farmer who went out and sowed the seed on four different kinds of soil. Some fell along the path, some fell on thorny ground and some fell on rocky ground. None of the seed sown in these places produced fruit. Some of it sprang up for a little while but it was choked out and died because it was not real. But the seed that fell on the good ground all came up and produced fruit. Some of it produced a hundred-fold, some only sixty-fold and some only thirty-fold, but all of it produced fruit because it all fell on good soil. In the same way, everyone who is born of God's

Spirit will bear fruit. Where there is no fruit, there is no spiritual birth.

## Conclusion

This is the way that God makes Christians. In His mercy and grace He saves sinners--by the washing of regeneration. All praise and honor and glory belong to Him. Christians should be the most thankful, humble, praising people in all the world. God in His mercy has come to us who once were dead in trespasses and sin and has made us alive in His Son. We are trusting Christ today because His Spirit has enabled us to do so. We are repenting today because His Spirit has granted to us that grace of repentance. We are following the Lord Jesus today--we've persevered thus far--because the Spirit has been given to us to look to Christ and to follow after Him all of these years. The praise goes to God. May the Lord help us to see that of the essence of biblical Christianity is this wonderful, amazing, life-changing work of His Spirit called regeneration.



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<sup>1</sup> See J. I. Packer's helpful chapter on "Regeneration" in his *God's Words* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), 148-55.



<sup>1</sup> See J. I. Packer's helpful chapter on "Regeneration" in his *God's Words* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), 148-55.



# The Foolishness of Preaching: a Report on the 1998 Founders Conference

*Russell D. Moore*

Reformation and revival in Southern Baptist churches will come not through savvy political maneuvering or slick advertising campaigns, but through the "foolishness" of the faithful, exuberant and unrelenting preaching of the Bible, speakers said during the 16th annual Southern Baptist Founders Conference, July 21-24, on the campus of Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama.

The Founders Conference is a national meeting of Southern Baptist pastors and church leaders who embrace the Reformed doctrinal heritage, historically known as "Calvinism" or the "doctrines of grace," which was held by those who founded the Southern Baptist Convention in the mid-19th century.

Conrad Mbewe, pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia, served as keynote speaker, preaching messages from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 each day of the meeting. Mbewe, known across his homeland as the "Spurgeon of Africa," argued the primary content of all Christian preaching should be the cross of Christ.

"This is becoming less and less an emphasis in the ministries of so many people who consider themselves to be preachers of the gospel," he said. "Where are we hearing that certain note, unmistakable note, that when we stepped back to the end of these messages we can say for sure that Christ has been portrayed before us as on a big billboard as one crucified for our sins?"

Mbewe asked preachers to consider if their congregations would testify that they are heralds of the cross.

"Does it pulsate in you?" he asked. "To graduate from that experiential knowledge of the cross is to hand in our resignation from the pulpit. We become useless after that. Let those who have no souls to save consider the preaching of the cross to be foolishness, as being irrelevant, as being outdated."

He explained a zeal for success has lead many ministers to abandon God's appointed means of preaching and prayer for "underhanded methods" which are utilized "at the expense of many souls." These methods have resulted in many professing Christians waking up on the other side of the grave in the terrors of eternal hell, he argued, and ensures pastors find themselves "shepherding goats."

"What use are the many man-made methods of getting people from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light in the light of these stupendous facts?" he asked, citing the apostle Paul's numerous descriptions of unregenerate people as blind and dead. "Can an organ playing in the background raise the dead? Can it? And yet, how many decisions are wrung out of people's hearts by the atmosphere, getting the right atmosphere? We are up against death, spiritual death."

Despite this less-than-optimistic view of the state of fallen man, Mbewe said Christians have reason for abounding hope because of the invincible efficacy of the Holy Spirit to convert sinners to faith in Christ.

"In our work of preaching, we are not alone," he proclaimed. "What we may be saying might be sounding as

foolishness in the ears of the world, but oh, that we had faith to believe that there is Another with a capital A working alongside us and, if it pleases him, no one can resist. No one, however hostile they might be. Oh, for more faith in the Holy Spirit in our pulpits!" he said.

"Someone may happily accept the authority of God's Word, and even profess belief in the inerrancy of the Bible," Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, warned preachers. "Yet if that person in practice, whether intending to or not, does not preach expositively, he will never preach more than he already knows."

Preaching which does not lash itself to the content and message of the text itself will conform the congregation to the mind of the pastor rather than to the revelation of God, Dever said.

"The Roman Catholic preacher too often gives us the church. The liberal preacher too often gives us essays. The evangelical preacher too often gives us stories. The Calvinist preacher too often gives us doctrines," Dever said. "But what our people really need, and what we need, is the Word of God, and it is our great privilege by God's call and strength to give it."

Examining Ezekiel 37 on the prophet's command by God to preach to a valley of dry bones, Dever compared the "virtual resurrection" of the bones in Ezekiel's vision to the call of the preacher to proclaim God's words in calling the spiritual dead in his congregation to new life in Christ. The preacher must deliver to his congregation the same biblical word by which the preacher himself was resurrected from his own spiritual death, Dever said.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, lamented the fact that much contemporary preaching could hardly be labeled, in the words of the apostle Paul, "foolishness to the world," but instead could be described as "prudential wisdom, good advice, sound counsel, maybe even a therapeutic word or two."

Preaching of biblical truth proves especially scandalous, Mohler explained, with the onset of a postmodern mind-set which heralds the deconstruction of truth claims, the jettisoning of authority and the rejection of any overarching "metanarrative" which seeks to explain the flow of history and the purpose of the universe.

Tracing the march of postmodern influence in the spheres of architecture, art, literature, philosophy, politics and theology, Mohler defined postmodernism as an attempt by contemporary humanity to claim the "bones" of the classical tradition's superficial ornamentation while discarding the "marrow" of the world view which stood behind it.

The postmodern assault on universal objective truth is not confined to university English departments, Mohler said, but rears its head in the aisles of Christian bookstores and even in the parish pew. Mohler pointed to the phrase "what this text means to me is ..." as a particularly common example of a dangerous postmodern outlook which sees the truths of the Bible as hinging upon personal interpretation rather than upon the meaning intended by the biblical authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The influence of postmodernism could also be heard, Mohler contended, in the recent arguments of professing evangelicals who, in response to the decision of this year's Southern Baptist Convention in Salt Lake City to add a statement on the family to the Baptist Faith and Message confessional statement, denounced the words of Paul on family relationships in Ephesians 5 as "oppressive."

"They are right," Mohler said. "It oppresses our fallen human instinct even as it liberates by the transforming power of the gospel." Nonetheless, Mohler said, postmodern chaos cannot hold back the tide of the gospel of Jesus Christ through biblical preaching.

Expounding upon the Bible's testimony of its own threatening "two-edged" self-designation in Hebrews 4, Mohler diagnosed the anemic state of many contemporary churches as resulting not from a dearth of creative programs, but from the absence of unhesitatingly biblical preaching. Preachers must not seek to "reach people where they are" by building a "bridge" between them and the biblical text, but must realize that no one is beyond the "reach" of a Scripture which promises to perform "sovereign surgery" on its hearers.

Mohler added preachers must not recoil from the sufficiency of God's Word by co-opting the world's obsessions with therapeutic "authenticity," self-esteem modification and trendy cause movements, but should follow the apostolic model of preaching the Word and getting out of the way.

"Brothers and sisters, we pray for reformation in our churches," Mohler said. "But it is not going to come by any program and it is not going to be the result of any meeting and it is not going to come by the wholesale adoption of any theological system. It's going to come by the preaching of the Word....The Word must do this thing."

Don Whitney, assistant professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, asked the assembled ministers how any of them could hope to be prepared to preach when "people, without consulting our schedules, inconveniently decide to die on Friday."

Pointing to the Apostle Paul's admonition to his young protégé Timothy to "watch your life and doctrine" in 1 Timothy 4, Whitney told ministers "the first priority of a man of God is to be a godly man." The goal of prayer, devotional study, fasting, keeping a prayer journal and all other spiritual disciplines, Whitney explained, is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

"The ministry does not make you more godly," he said. "The ministry in fact can be the means of making you more unlike Christ. It can foster political maneuvering and infighting. It can foster greed. It can foster power plays. It can foster so much that is antithetical to Christlikeness. And the only way we will keep that from happening is to do what this passage says and watch our lives."

Paul also commanded Timothy to pay attention to his teaching, Whitney said, asserting that most contemporary ministers are more interested in psychology and methods than in doctrinal truth. Those who see doctrine as dull or irrelevant to their ministries are in violation of a biblical command, he noted, and do not understand that doxology is ignited by theology.

"Burning hearts are not nourished by empty heads," he said. "Doctrine is the fuel for the fire in the heart. That is what keeps that passion burning."

Warning that one can "preach about the gospel without preaching the gospel," Fred Malone, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Clinton, Louisiana, exhorted attendees to center their preaching on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ-centered preaching, he elaborated, is more than periodically repeating the name of Christ or tacking a reference to the atonement onto the end of a sermon on the sovereignty of God. Preachers, he asserted, must consistently explain to their congregations "who was crucified" and must magnify God's redemption through Christ as it fits in the context of every text preached.

Tom Nettles, professor of historical theology at Southern Seminary, contended that gospel preaching is relevant for all people in all cultures because of the image of God and the intrinsic moral nature within all human beings. Such a realization, he argued, provides an impetus for Christians to cross racial, ethnic and geographical barriers with the gospel.

Preachers must not create "false issues of conscience" by which hearers follow the preacher's instructions in performing some physical action which makes "overcoming timidity tantamount to repentance and faith," he said. Instead, preachers must persuasively articulate to those indicted by their own consciences that there is no other sacrifice except for the atonement accomplished by Christ which can rescue them from their wrath-deserving condition.

"We can move from our own culture into a group with which we may be completely unacquainted," he said. "And while we may make many mistakes, while some cultural things we may not understand, if we come to the heart of the biblical revelation we will find that there is something that is transcendent about his truth. There is something internally present in all of those that he has created, that have grown from Adam's vine, that will witness and that will indeed pierce the conscience."

Jim Elliff, consultant for the Center for Biblical Revival at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and president of Christian Communicators Worldwide, tackled the question of how pastors can more biblically lead those convicted of sin to "close with Christ" in response to the gospel. Citing what he claimed to be large numbers of unregenerate members on Southern Baptist church rolls, Elliff described the prevailing contemporary practice of pastors and evangelists granting immediate verbal assurance to individuals based upon the professed convert's sincerity and the accuracy of the repetition of the "sinner's prayer" during a post-sermonic altar call. He contrasted this method with a "corrected way" which centers on persuasive evangelistic preaching, an emphasis on repentance and faith in conversion, and a reliance upon Spirit-given assurance related to the presence of spiritual fruit, confidence in God's promises, and inner witness.

Tom Ascol, conference planning committee member and editor of the *Founders Journal*, told Baptist Press the theme of preaching was selected because "we are witnessing a crisis of confidence in preaching today."

"Churches are giving up on it in favor of drama, movies, therapeutic talks and a myriad of other substitutes because they have wrongly concluded that it simply won't 'work' in our modern age," said Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida. "But the Bible clearly teaches that God has ordained to use the foolishness of preaching to save people, and the apostle Paul's command to 'preach the word' will never become outdated."

Ascol and other committee members expressed a surprised delight at the record-breaking registration of more than 400 pastors, laypeople and ministerial students who registered for the conference in addition to hundreds of others who will attend the four different regional conferences in the coming year. Approximately half of this year's total are first-time attendees, Ascol said, which, along with increasing journal subscriptions and nearly one million visits to the group's Internet site ([www.founders.org](http://www.founders.org)), "indicates that interest in biblical reformation is spreading."

The conference saw the announcement of three new titles from Founders Press, the ministry's new publishing arm. These include Fred Malone's *A String of Pearls Unstrung*, which defends the Baptist doctrine of believers' baptism, a hymn booklet and a CD-ROM which packs an array of Southern Baptist books, sermons and back issues of the *Founders Journal* in an electronic format.

The committee also announced that next year's conference, centering on the theme of world missions, would meet

July 20-23, 1999, on the Samford campus. John Piper, pastor of the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis and a widely known evangelical author, will be the keynote speaker.



# News

## President of the SBC preaches on Calvinism

Dr. Paige Patterson, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC and also President of the Southern Baptist Convention, spoke on the subject of election in a chapel service at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on September 10. With Romans 8:29-30 as his text, Dr. Patterson sought to dispel the notion that Southern Baptist conservatives will split over the doctrine of election.

According to a Baptist Press report, Dr. Patterson stated that "any approach to soteriology which omits the Bible doctrine of election is incomplete, inadequate and misleading." Further, he said, "Oftentimes to hear evangelists preach and to hear some of our own Southern Baptist preachers preach, you would think that the doctrine of election never appeared on the pages of sacred writ at all, and to fail to take it into thorough consideration is incomplete, inadequate and misleading."

Dr. Patterson also noted that any treatment of the doctrine of election must take into account the entire biblical witness without "facile handling" of certain texts. He illustrated this by pointing to "a popular handling of the doctrine of election by the uninformed" who dismiss references in Scripture to "the elect" by explaining away election as a sinner breaking a tie vote between God and the devil. "Have you ever heard an absurd explanation like that?" he asked. "All you can say is it is not made by someone who takes the Scripture seriously."

Similarly, Dr. Patterson warned Calvinists not to attempt exegetical gymnastics with the "whosoever will" passages so as to make them say "whosoever, of the elect." Calling for humility and a "white-hot passion" for evangelism, Dr. Patterson went on to say that any construal of the election which makes one more an evangelist of a doctrinal system "than an evangelist of Jesus and his atonement is seriously at odds with the Scripture." (This report is taken from the BP article by Russ Moore)

## Founders Youth Conference Changes Venue

The Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference is moving out of Florida after 12 years. The 1999 conference is scheduled for June 21-25 on the campus of Toccoa Falls Bible College in Toccoa Falls, Georgia, located one hour northeast of Atlanta. The theme for the conference is "The Providence of God." Cost is \$200 per person if registration is received by April 30. Late registration costs \$225. A \$75 deposit is required and should be sent in as soon as possible since space is limited. For more information contact Conference Coordinator, Bill Ascol, at (318) 798-7088; email: tuliplover@earthlink.net.

## Southwest Regional Founders Conference

The Southern Baptist Founders Conference Southwest met September 22-24 for the first time at Heritage Baptist church, Mansfield, Texas. Mansfield is in the south-central area of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. For several years First Baptist Church of Roosevelt, Lubbock, Texas, under the very able leadership of Pastor Rusty Canoy, hosted the conference.

The theme this year was "Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God." The meetings were blessed with some of the best preaching which the organizers have ever heard at any conference. Our speakers were Dr. Don Whitney, of

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Dr. Walter Johnson, of North Greenville Baptist College, Evangelist R. F. Gates, Dr. Sam Tullock, and Planning Committee members and Pastors Tom Chantry, Dr. Fred Malone, and Bob Selph. Heritage Baptist Church is thankful to have been asked to host the conference. It was a privilege to be of service to the LORD's people in this way, and it was a very unifying experience for our congregation. It is a great blessing to join with the Founders Ministry in the work of the Kingdom of Christ. Several pastors, seminary students, and lay people from the DFW area, who had not previously attended, came and enjoyed the conference. All reports from those who attended have been very encouraging, so much so that we look forward to hosting the conference next year. The plans are to hold it Thursday, September 30 through Saturday, October 2, 1999. The theme will be, "Our Triune LORD." A seminary student luncheon is planned after the last session on Saturday afternoon. Contact Pastor Larry E. Vincent Heritage Baptist Church, 817-551-6337, [levseven@flash.net](mailto:levseven@flash.net)

## Founders Press Announces New Book

*Pentecost -- Today?* by Iain Murray is scheduled for release by the end of the year by Founders Press. This book, which is a joint venture with Banner of Truth, is built on the lectures which Mr. Murray gave at the 1997 Founders Conference. The important topic of revival is analyzed from biblical, theological and historical perspectives in light of modern claims which are being made, especially in North America. It is 240 pages, hard back, and will retail for \$19.99. Copies may be ordered from Founders Press at the introductory discounted price of \$15.00 (plus 10% shipping and handling).



# Letters

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To Dr. Tom Ascol:

...There's an issue I'd like to address to you. In studying many of the Dutch theologians, I was constantly bombarded with two things: deep and meticulous thought (good), but also bitter and vitriolic criticisms of one another (bad). I want to commend you and those of the Founders ministry for your deep and meticulous thought, and at the same time the "class" and civility you show to your critics.

I was proud to read the responses to Dr. Estep in the summer issue of the journal [#29]. I found myself with my mouth wide open as I read through his article from the *Baptist Standard*. I still find myself amazed at the fact that this misinformed attack came from a professor of church history. Nevertheless, the response to him was as Albert Mohler said--"a respectful and thoughtful" response and as you hoped such discussion would be--"conducted on a high level."

There are many young men in ministry who want to be pleasing to their King, and we look to fellow pastors to help us learn to carry the doctrines of grace and Reformed thinking into our every day ministries. I am pleased that you give us an example in believing that the truth has its own inherent power to transform and reform our thinking (and as a consequence, our lives) without needing to misrepresent or belittle our critics, or engage in inflammatory and personal attacks. Thank you.

C. N., Sarasota, FL

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Dear Dr. Ascol,

Greetings in the name of our sovereign Lord.

Someone sent me a back issue of the *Founders Journal*, which thrilled my soul with articles of sound teaching. I have been devoted to the Doctrines of Grace for many years, and have sought to expound them in my ministry.

I am writing to enquire if the magazine is still available, and how can I go about becoming a subscriber? If you are not the right person to answer my query, would you be so kind as to pass this letter to the one responsible?

I have been a Baptist minister for 38 years, 32 of which have been spent in Australia. Unfortunately, we are seeing the denomination swerve away from the principles and practices of biblical theology to a popular entertaining gospel, which deceives rather than saves the soul.

May the Lord bless your magazine to the glory of our great God.

Through grace alone,

B. S., Australia

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Dear Sirs,

Let me thank you for my subscription to the *Founders Journal*. This is a journal of real "substance", well worth the subscription price. And we are so glad to commend your serious--and fruitful--efforts to bring at least a good number of Southern Baptist pastors back to their Calvinist roots. May God bless your every effort.

I am mentoring a young SB pastor who is "typical" of so many others in his mixed theology. I would like him to examine the *Founders Journal*. Will you send him a sample copy? I'm enclosing a little help for the postage. Thank you.

In Christ Jesus,  
A.M., Montana

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Dear Sirs,

I want to thank you so much for the *Founders Journal* and the encouragement it has been to me.

I was able to attend the Founders Conference this past summer for the first time. It was fantastic! The fellowship and the speakers were great...

Again, thank you for a great journal. For those of us at Southwestern Seminary who hold to the doctrines of grace it is a wonderful encouragement and resource. Keep up the good work!

W.D., Arlington, TX

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Dr. Ascol,

...I am a Cumberland Presbyterian pastor of 13 years experience who read about the Founders growth in *Christianity Today*, explored your website, and am much intrigued.

I am a former Southern Baptist, with degrees from East Texas Baptist College and Southwestern Seminary, who wishes the Reformed option had been open to me during my seminary days. In fact, since Cumberland Presbyterians are more Arminian than Calvinist (we reject unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace, so we're "TP" rather than TULIP--a distinction that didn't bother me in the mid 80s but really concerns me now), I really wish I could be part of a group that had no problem with TULIP, even if I have to immerse folks.:-)

I read the online article on Church Growth [issue #30] and concur wholeheartedly. I tried the movement's theology and methodology in a new church development I pastored in the early 90s and found it wanting for much the same reasons.

I do have some questions. Are there really a number of SBC congregations following good Reformed theology, a la Spurgeon, et al? Is their number growing? How does one plug into them? How do they fight against the rampant Arminianism that seems such a part of SBC, Cumberland Presbyterian, and American evangelical life? Are they marginalized in SBC life because of their Reformed emphasis? I noticed one of your conferences was held in Lubbock--is Lubbock a hotbed for this movement? Are there SBC churches in Lubbock who are Reformed, not Arminian?

I am moving to the place where I must soon move to a denomination and/or church more in line with my new understanding of Reformed theology. Please pray for me that God will open doors.

Thank you for your time. Please write back with any comments or questions you may have.

Grace and peace,  
C. B., via e-mail

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Sirs:

Your new Online CD is great! Please send me another one so I can send it to a missionary-friend in Slovakia.

In Him,  
J. O., Amarillo, TX

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Dear Sirs:

Who are you? This is excellent material: A call of the Baptist to return to the original teachings of scripture as testified in Baptist history. This is like a call of repentance to the Baptist denominations who have strayed like lost sheep from true scriptural teachings--especially in regard to the nature of God and the true gospel, as opposed to the modern day pulpits who merely say that we just need to "believe in Jesus"--meaning a kind of belief that is apart from the sovereign grace of God in granting real faith that leads to repentance and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that converts a man or woman!...

Are you familiar with the Founders on-line? This is also excellent with a similar message. You should be at the forefront of their website to join in the effort. Please see their Abstract of Principles if you have not already. The Southern Baptists were originally Reformed too? What has happened? What apostasy has taken place! Their ministry is to "rebuild the walls" as Nehemiah did. Let's go to work!

Sincerely your brother in the tradition of Baptists,

B. S., via e-mail

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. . . I praise God there are "reformation" Baptists in the SBC. I thought my Calvinistic beliefs would find no place among my lifelong denomination. I'm glad others are, like me, discovering (re-discovering) the great doctrines of the reformation we have so long ignored.

Looking forward to my first edition!

C. L., Layton, UT

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Dear Brethren:

I am a 69 year old woman; have been a Christian since age 14; have taught Sunday School and home Bible studies for many years. I love God's Word with all my heart.

I am just now learning (at this late date) things which have become very dear to me--things like the doctrine of election--things which should have been presented to me week by week by my pastor and through our Southern Baptist literature.

I love your little magazine, the *Founders Journal*, and read it from cover to cover, sometimes over and over again. I thank God for a man at the SBC convention meeting in Atlanta a few years ago who stood at the base of an escalator distributing them. I took one and have been enlightened and overjoyed with the truth in it.

...It is my prayer that our sovereign God will continue to bless your efforts. I thank you sincerely for your consideration of this request.

J. D., via email



## Book Reviews

*Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*, by Joel A. Carpenter, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Hardcover, 335 pages.

Reviewed by [Sam Tullock](#)

An increasing amount of material has surfaced over the last several years concerning two aspects of the fundamentalist movement in the United States. Historians like Ernest Sandeen and George Marsden have blazed important trails concerning fundamentalism's developmental years, and Nancy Ammerman, among others, has provided useful studies of more contemporary manifestations of this important conservative religious movement. Unfortunately, a gap existed between the treatments of the early developmental period and studies that focused on contemporary concerns. Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again* bridges that gap by providing an excellent analysis of the history of fundamentalism from 1930 to 1950. The book traces the development of fundamentalism from the early leaders and the setbacks of the 1920s to the emergence of the new evangelicalism of the 1950s.

Carpenter suggests that competing forces tore at the fundamentalists during the 1930s and 1940s; in particular, they could not decide if they were "alienated outsiders" or "quintessential Americans." In other words, they wrestled with their own sense of identity. Should they separate themselves from this evil world and prepare for the imminent rapture of the church (almost all fundamentalists espoused dispensational premillennialism), or should they take up arms as defenders and preservers of Protestant America? In his opening chapter Carpenter asserts that fundamentalism remained a vigorous religious force and resolved its "separatist/activist" tension by constructing a theology of revivalism that allowed its adherents to separate themselves from the world while recovering an active role in their culture. They could foster a sectarian mentality, yet remain relevant.

Carpenter devotes three chapters to what he calls "the separatist impulse." In his second chapter he describes three sources of fundamentalist evolution into "estranged dissenters by the 1930s." First, fundamentalists alienated themselves, he claims, from the university scholars by aiming their appeal at a grassroots, populist constituency. Second, dispensational predictions concerning the end of the world fostered an "embattled minority" mentality and promoted increasingly hostile exchanges between fundamentalists and their denominational opponents. Last, Carpenter observes that once-respected conservatives like James M. Gray were stung by the loss of respect they had previously received from many academic and denominational sources.

Feeling a sense of alienation, fundamentalists constructed a theological framework that rested, according to Carpenter, on three pillars. They placed primary focus on an evangelism that fundamentalists largely equated with great campaigns, fiery preachers, and altar calls. However, they buttressed their evangelistic appeals with Keswick views on sanctification that they retained from the Bible Conference Movement of an earlier era. Thirdly, they carefully aimed their ministries at rural transplants to urban industrial centers who longed for something warm and familiar in their alien environment. A number of interpretations of fundamentalism, including very early works by Stewart Cole and Richard Niebuhr, have portrayed religious conservatives as social "outsiders" who found themselves lost in the rampant urbanization of post-World War I America.

Chapters Five and Six provide a useful analysis of what Carpenter terms "a window on the world": dispensational premillennialism. The whole book pivots on the arguments in this section. According to Carpenter, dispensationalism should have produced a dismal outlook concerning the prospect of positive social change, however, fundamentalists ingeniously managed to avoid cultural irrelevancy by forging a theology of revival that allowed them to retain their dispensational views while promoting the fundamentalist cause. They poured their energies and resources into

aggressive plans to promote a great world revival that, they believed, would foreshadow the rapture of the church.

The next several chapters masterfully describe the various methods fundamentalists employed to promote their concept of revival: broadcast evangelism, the rise of the "new evangelicals," and the parachurch organizations. Carpenter's discussion of the new evangelicals is most intriguing. He asserts that many religious conservatives grew increasingly weary of the combative and separatistic spirit of fundamentalism. New evangelicals like Carl Henry, Harold Ockenga, George Eldon Ladd, Gleason Archer, and John Gerstner, according to Carpenter, retained much of the orthodoxy of fundamentalism while rejecting some of the more unsavory elements of the older movement. While Carpenter undoubtedly has a valid point here, one wonders how John Gerstner might have reacted to his inclusion in a group that this author characterizes as theologians who simply retooled fundamentalism.

Joel Carpenter has filled a considerable historiographical gap in the study of fundamentalism and has done so with meticulous research and analytical insight. Along with the works mentioned earlier, I would recommend *Revive Us Again* to any student of this important religious movement. However, Carpenter centers his attention on the northern aspects of the movement to the considerable neglect of its southern manifestations. Carpenter has helped bridge the gap between the 1920s and the new evangelicals. Nevertheless, he does not explain the geographical shift of the power base of fundamentalism from the North to the South. Historians of fundamentalism must deal with the movement's shift to the South before the bridge Carpenter attempts to build can be completed.

*Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900*, by Gregory A. Wills, Oxford, \$39.95 hardcover.

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 19<sup>th</sup>-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.



# A New Heart

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." --Ezekiel 36:26

You will notice...God does not promise to us that he will improve our nature, that he will mend our broken hearts. No, the promise is that he will give us new hearts and right spirits. Human nature is too far gone ever to be mended. It is not a house that is a little out of repair, with here and there a slate blown from the roof, and here and there a piece of plaster broken down from the ceiling. No, it is rotten throughout, the very foundations have been sapped; there is not a single timber in it which has not been eaten by the worm, from its uppermost roof to its lowest foundation; there is no soundness in it; it is all rottenness and ready to fall. God doth not attempt to mend; he does not shore up the walls, and re-paint the door; he does not garnish and beautify, but he determines that the old house shall be entirely swept away., and that he will build a new one. It is too far gone, I say, to be mended. If it were only a little out of repair, it might be mended. If only a wheel or two of that great thing called 'manhood' were out of repair, then he who made man might put the whole to rights; he might put a new cog where it had been broken off, and another wheel where it had gone to ruin and the machine might work anew. But no, the whole of it is out of repair; there is not one lever which is not broken; not one axle which is not disturbed; not one of the wheels which act upon the others. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot, to the crown of the head, it is all wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. The Lord, therefore, does not attempt the repairing of this thing; but he says, 'I will give you a new heart, and a right spirit will I put within you; I will take away the heart of stone, I will not try to soften it, I will let it be as stony as ever it was, but I will take it away, and I will give you a new heart, and it shall be a heart of flesh.'

--Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The New Heart," *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 4, 378.

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The various forms of expression are employed in the Scriptures, to denote the change of heart; and they signify it with various shades of meaning. It is taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh (Ezek. 26:26); giving a new heart (Ezek. 18:31); putting the law in the heart (Heb. 8:10); quickening or making alive (John 6:63; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 6:11,13); a resurrection from the dead; an illumination (Heb. 10:32); a conversion, or turning back to God (Matt. 13:3; Ps. 25:16; Isa. 59:20). So great is the change produced, that the subject of it is called a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), as if proceeding, like Adam, directly from the creating hand of God; and he is said to be renewed (Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2; Tit. 3:5), as being restored to the image of God, in which man was originally formed. With reference to the mode in which the descendants of Adam come into the world, the change is denominated regeneration (Tit. 3:5); and the subjects of it are said to be born again (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet. 1:23).

--John L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology*, 277-78.

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"Mere outward reformation differs as much from regeneration as white-washing an old rotten house differs from pulling it down and building a new one in its place."

--Augustus M. Toplady

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"Men by their own free will cannot turn to God until he first change their stony hearts into hearts of flesh."

--John Calvin

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"Unless God changes a person's heart, nothing lasting will be achieved."

--Will Metzger

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"The change of a sinner's heart is as great a miracle as any Jesus Christ wrought on earth."

--Joseph Wilson

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Concerning regeneration and conversion: "At the outset of a discussion of these two subjects we are met by the question, whether they are not one and the same thing. They are unquestionably so intimately associated that it is difficult to separate them and point out the distinctions between them. The Scriptures connect the two under the one idea of the new birth, and teach that not only is regeneration an absolute essential in each conversion, but that in every intelligent responsible soul conversion invariably accompanies regeneration. It is not strange, therefore that they are often confounded. Yet, after all, the Scriptures also teach that regeneration is the work of God, changing the heart of man by his sovereign will, while conversion is the act of man turning towards God with the new inclination thus given to his heart."

--James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 373-74.



# The Nature of Regeneration

*Charles H. Spurgeon*

To give a man a new heart and a new spirit is God's work, and the work of God alone. Arminianism falls to the ground when we come to this point. Nothing will do here but that old-fashioned truth men call Calvinism. '*Salvation is of the Lord alone:*' this truth will stand the test of ages and can never be moved, because it is the immutable truth of the living God. And all the way in salvation we have to learn this truth, but especially when we come here to this particular and indispensable part of salvation, the making of the new heart within us. That must be God's work; man may reform himself, but how can man give himself a new heart? I need not enlarge upon the thought, it will strike you in a moment, that the very nature of the change, and the terms in which it is mentioned here, put it beyond all power of man. How can man put into himself a new heart, for the heart being the motive power of all life, must exert itself before anything can be done? But how could the exertions of an old heart bring forth a new heart? Can you imagine for a moment a tree with a rotten heart, by its own vital energy, giving to itself a new young heart? You cannot suppose such a thing. If the heart were originally right, and the defects were only in some branch of the tree, you can conceive that the tree, through the vital power of its sap within its heart, might rectify the wrong. We have heard of some kind of insects that have lost their limbs, and by their vital power have been able to recover them again. But take away the seat of the vital power--the heart; lay the disease there; and what power is there that can, by any possibility, rectify it, unless it be a power from without--in fact, a power from above? Oh, beloved, there never was a man yet, that did so much as the turn of a hair towards making himself a new heart. He must lie passive there--he shall become active afterwards--but in the moment when God puts a new life into the soul, the man is passive: and if there be aught of activity, it is an active resistance against it, until God, by overcoming victorious grace, gets the mastery over man's will.

Once, again; this is a *gracious* change. When God puts a new heart into man, it is not because man deserves a new heart--because there was anything good in his nature, that could have prompted God to give him a new spirit. The Lord simply gives a man a new heart because he wishes to do it; that is his only reason. 'But,' you say, 'suppose a man cries for a new heart?' I answer, no man ever did cry for a new heart until he had got one; for the cry for a new heart proves that there is a new heart there already. But, says one, 'Are we not to seek for a right spirit?' Yes, I know it is your duty,--but I equally know it is a duty you will never fulfil. You are commanded to make to yourselves new hearts, but I know you will never attempt to do it, until God first of all moves you thereunto. As soon as you begin to seek a new heart, it is presumptive evidence that the new heart is there already, in its germ, for there would not be this germinating in prayer, unless the seeds were there before it.

'But,' says one, 'suppose the man has not a new heart, and were earnestly to seek one, would he have it?' You must not make impossible suppositions, so long as the man's heart is depraved and vile, he never will do such a thing. I cannot, therefore, tell you what might happen, if he did what he never will do. I cannot answer your suppositions; if you suppose yourself into a difficulty you must suppose yourself out of it. But the fact is, that no man ever did, or ever will seek a new heart, or a right spirit, until, first of all, the grace of God begins with him. If there be a Christian here, who began with God, let him publish it to the world; let us hear for once that there was a man who was beforehand with his Maker. But I have never met with such a case; all Christian people declare that God was first with them, and they will all sing,

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,  
That sweetly forced me in,  
Else I had still refused to taste,  
And perished in my sin.'

It is a gracious change, freely given without any merit of the creature, without any desire or good-will coming beforehand. God doeth it of his own pleasure, not according to man's will.

Once more; it is a *victorious* effort of divine grace. When God first begins the work of changing the heart, he finds man totally averse to any such a thing. Man by nature kicks and struggles against God, he will not be saved. I must confess I never would have been saved, if I could have helped it. As long as ever I could, I rebelled and revolted, and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray: when he would have me listen to the sound of the ministry, I would not. And when I heard, and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. When my heart was little touched, I tried to divert it with sinful pleasures. And when that would not do, I tried self-righteousness, and would not then have been saved, until I was hemmed in, and then he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort of his grace. It conquered my depraved will, and made me bow myself before the sceptre of his grace. And so it is in every case. Man revolts against his Maker and his Saviour; but where God determines to save, save he will. God will have the sinner, if he designs to have him. God never was thwarted yet in any one of his purposes. Man does resist with all his might, but all the might of man, tremendous though it be for sin, is not equal to the majestic might of the Most High, when he rideth forth in the chariot of his salvation. He doth irresistibly save and victoriously conquer man's heart.

And furthermore, this change is *instantaneous*. To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life; but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second, swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today, an enemy to God, with a wicked heart within, hard as a stone, and dead and cold; but if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble--begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy. Other parts of salvation are done gradually; but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace.

--Excerpt from "The New Heart", New Park Street Pulpit, Vol. 4, 382-383



# *Regeneration by the Spirit*

Not all the outward forms on earth,  
Nor rites that God has given,  
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,  
Can raise a soul to heaven.

The sovereign will of God alone  
Creates us heirs of grace,  
Born in the image of his Son,  
A new, peculiar race.

The Spirit, like some heavenly wind,  
Breathes on the sons of flesh,  
Creates anew the carnal mind,  
And forms the man afresh.

Our quickened souls awake and rise  
From their long sleep of death;  
On heavenly things we fix our eyes,  
And praise employs our breath.

--Isaac Watts

