



Preaching

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The Founders Journal



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Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: The Need for Expository Preaching

Tom Ascol

American evangelicals need to be honest. Despite all of the great accomplishments that we tout, all of our incredible resources and all of our imposing statistics, we have made very little impact on our world and culture. In fact, just the opposite is true. The world has had far greater influence on our churches than our churches have had on the world. And while the world is getting worse and worse, the church has lost its voice. Consequently, we live in desperate days.

Self-centeredness and selfishness are the norm today. Greed and pride are regarded as virtuous. Many in our land would prefer to blaspheme God than to attempt even one right thought about him. This generation despises authority and largely has an entitlement mentality. Many if not most glory in immorality and in the things that ought to shame us. Our culture finds death and destruction entertaining. People hate what is good. They love what is evil. Our time is marked by the widespread denial that there is such a thing as absolute truth (depending, of course, on what the definition of "is" is). People deny the existence of truth, and live for pleasure.

Furthermore, these very attitudes flourish not only in the society at large, but they have also infiltrated and are flourishing in our churches. All across our land religion is now regarded as a private matter which may, or more likely may not, have anything to do with a person's public character, life and activities. As one single man told Tony Campolo recently, "Yeah I do a lot of things that are wrong, you know, a lot of stuff sexually. I'm really into it. But, you know, I believe its all taken care of on Calvary." We've sold a nation cheap grace for so long that the real thing is no longer recognized or appreciated by many religious people.

Study after study has demonstrated that there is no discernible difference between the morality of evangelicals and those in our land who make no religious profession. Josh McDowell has surveyed teenagers who are actively involved in their evangelical churches only to discover that more than half of them are deceitful to their parents and sexually immoral. Recent studies have also indicated that the divorce rate is actually higher among evangelicals--especially those who live in the "Bible belt" states--than among the general population. What is a church to do in such days? How are we to respond? What is a pastor to do?

The Bible does not leave us guessing at answers to these questions. It speaks very clearly, very simply, very straightforwardly to this issue. The Scripture is very clear: extreme times call for extreme measures. And the extreme measures which the Bible sets before us for such days as this can be summarized in one word: preaching. Desperate days call for determined preaching of God's Word.

In his second letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul makes this point quite emphatically. From the beginning of chapter 3 through the first part of chapter 4, Paul warns Timothy of the desperate times which are coming and instructs him to be steadfast in the important work of expositing God's Word.

Preaching is God's ordained means of spreading His gospel throughout the world and accomplishing His purposes. Whatever else may be done, this always must be done. No matter how desperate the days become, the church of Jesus Christ must continually insist that God's Word be preached in and through the congregation.

Extreme Times

Paul uses most of the third chapter to warn Timothy of desperate times that are coming in the life of the world in which he lives and in the church in which he serves. Timothy is at Ephesus, serving as pastor of the church which Paul planted. Paul is near the end of his life, being held in a Roman prison.

In the world

In the first four verses of chapter three Paul writes about the coming of some very severe problems in society. He says, "Timothy, know this, that in the last days perilous times will come." What does he mean by this? He is not referring to the last days as those moments or days immediately preceding the coming of Jesus. Rather, he has in mind those "last days" which have existed since the first coming of the Lord Jesus and that will go on until the second coming of Christ. If he only meant those few days or years immediately prior to the second coming of the Lord then the rest of this chapter would make no sense.

Paul describes the perilous times which will mark the last days by cataloging some of the more odious sins which will characterize people during such seasons. People will be "lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2-4). Then Paul tells Timothy to separate himself from those who are guilty of these kinds of immoralities, a command which Timothy could not obey if the apostle had exclusively in view the days immediately preceding the return of Christ.

What Paul is saying is that there will be grievous seasons that will come in the last days--those days in which we live which extend from Christ's first coming to His second coming. Timothy was going to live to see some of those perilous times. Such seasons have appeared throughout the history of the church. They are happening again in western civilization, more particularly in our own American culture.

Paul's description of people in verses 2-5 sounds very familiar. It is as if he were reading the headlines from one of our local newspapers. What Paul predicted that Timothy would see has also come true in our own day. Increased public immorality is once again plaguing our society. It is evidence that we are living in desperate times. But that is not the only evidence. In perilous times selfishness and lawlessness are not restricted to the boundaries of the world. Sadly, they penetrate the church.

In the church

Paul tells Timothy to turn away "from such people" (v. 5). Who are these people? Who does Paul have in mind? He gives us some clear indications by further describing those who are guilty of these kinds of attitudes and immoral actions as "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (v. 5). Paul is talking about church members! He is talking about people who have made a religious profession of faith but who refuse to walk by faith. They say they know God, but they refuse to obey God. They say that they have become Christ's but they will not live for Christ. They are religious hypocrites.

They are unteachable. They have a problem with the truth. Though they are always learning they never come to a settled knowledge of the truth (v. 7). In fact, they actually resist the truth (v. 8). They are opposed to truth. It is as if they have a phobia regarding truth.

Consequently, they are intolerant of sound doctrine (4:3). Again, we must remind ourselves of whom Paul is writing. He does not have in mind the people out there on skid row. He is not talking about the agnostics or the open atheists. He is talking about people in the churches. The time is coming, Paul warns, when church people will not put up with sound doctrine but will surround themselves with teachers who will tickle their ears. They will prefer to believe fables instead of the truth.

Paul describes two things in these verses: 1) a society that is coming apart at the seams, that is disintegrating, and 2) a church in that society that has been completely infiltrated by the world. It does not take much imagination to recognize that the apostle's warnings have come true in our own day.

Extreme Measures

What is Paul's advice to Timothy in the light of such difficult circumstances? Does he suggest some new plan? Does he come up with some unusual, brand new never-before-tried strategy to meet the difficulties of this new day? Some new measures, perhaps. Hardly. In essence, what Paul says is simply this: "Timothy, order your life and ministry by the Word of God." When things get this bad, there is only one solution.

Continue in the Word personally

He challenges Timothy to press on in his devotion to the Word of God, to live by that Word (3:14-17). Paul charges him to remember the source of the Word. Scripture is inspired of God. The NIV is appropriately literal in translating Paul's description of Scripture as being "God breathed." God exhaled it, so that God Himself is the author of the Word collectively and of the words individually.

Convinced that God is its source, Paul also reminds Timothy of the nature of this Word. It is holy. This separates it from other books. It is divine, unique revelation from on high. He further reminds Timothy of the power of the Word. It is able to make you wise unto salvation. How do people have their lives changed? It is not by going to a new psychiatrist to get the latest counseling techniques imposed on them. Rather, it is the ministry of the Word which reveals Jesus Christ and His salvation to sinners.

Paul also tells Timothy to remember the usefulness of this Word. It is profitable for doctrine (what we must believe in this life and what we will believe gladly for all of eternity), for reproof, for correction and for instruction and training in righteousness, with the result that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Paul says, "Timothy, continue in this Word, live by this Word."

When everything seems to be coming apart at the seams around you, cling to the Word. When it seems like the church is not responding and things are not going the way they ought to, cling to the Word. When both the world and the church are in a mess, continue to anchor your life to the Word of God. It is completely sufficient for your spiritual life and ministry.

Preach the Word publicly

Not only is Timothy to continue in the Word personally, but Paul goes on to tell him to preach the Word publicly (4:1-2). The first verse of chapter four sets forth the seriousness of the charge that he is about to give. Paul piles image upon image to rivet Timothy's attention on the admonition which he is about to give.

It is given "in the sight of God"--which in itself would be enough--and before the Lord Jesus Christ, "who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing at His kingdom." God will one day require an accounting from Timothy for how well he heeded this apostolic charge.

Every God-called preacher of the gospel should feel the weight and seriousness of this apostolic charge. Together with the apostle's young colleague we stand before God, in the sight of the very Christ whom we know and love, who has come into our lives to save us and change us. We are being commissioned by the authority of and before the face of the One to whom we must one day give an account not only for our personal lives but also for our public ministries.

And what is the nature of this charge? Simply and forcefully, Paul declares, "Preach the Word!" This is the first of five quick imperative verbs in verse 2. The first one comprehends all the rest and they in turn help elaborate the nature and content of preaching.

Paul uses an official word for preaching. It is a word that was used of a herald, an emissary, an ambassador that went in behalf of his king to make known a matter of great importance. Preaching is the divinely authorized proclamation of God's message to men and women. It is nothing less than heralding the oracles of God to men.

Paul ties the nature of this work to its content when he instructs Timothy to preach *the Word*. What is to be preached is not the prerogative of the preacher. The messenger does not originate or create the message. His job is to accurately communicate it. He is the deliverer of the message. The success of his work is measured by the degree to which he accurately communicates that which the One who has given him the message has actually said. Deviation from the message which he has been given is nothing less than insubordination to his King.

The content of the message comes from God Himself. "The Word" consists of the Holy Scriptures, which are "God-breathed." In verse 3 Paul identifies this Word with "sound doctrine," which is nothing less than the Word accurately understood and applied. To preach the Word is to teach sound doctrine which, he warns, some will not put up with in the last days.

What this means is that if the man of God is going to preach the Word of God, then he himself must be a sound theologian. He must be willing to do the hard work of study so that he can draw out of the text God's truths and explain and apply them to his hearers.

One of the greatest maladies that has befallen evangelical life in the last century is the church's abdication of the work of theology to the academy. Praise God for academicians and those who give themselves day in and day out to the study of matters which can equip churches and those who serve in them! But theology, sound doctrine, the Word, belongs to the church. Those who would preach the Word must commit themselves to being the best students of it. They must commit themselves to understanding it, to knowing sound doctrine.

A preacher must be a sound theologian if he is to draw out of the text God's truths and explain and apply them to his hearers. This means that he must be committed to letting Scripture interpret Scripture. He must be so familiar with the Word that no one passage is taken out and explained in contradiction to other passages. He must refuse to twist or treat superficially any portion of Scripture. He must measure all his thoughts and conclusions by the standard of the inscripturated Word of God.

This kind of work in preaching is what John Owen calls a "sweaty kind of preaching."[\[1\]](#) It is a charge to be an expository preacher. Expository preaching has almost become a shibboleth among conservatives and evangelicals in our day. No self-respecting, conservative, Bible believing pastor would admit that he does anything less. But, as the old song says about heaven, so it is equally true that, "not everybody talking about expository preaching is doing it." There is more to it than merely using the Bible as the starting point of the sermon.

When many preachers prepare to preach they take their texts from the Bible and their sermons from the newspapers. To "preach the Word" means more than merely preaching *from* the Word. Rather, the Word itself must govern and guide that which we would say in behalf of God.

The Scripture must be studied so that it is accurately understood, simply explained, and legitimately applied. The great nineteenth-century, Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert Dabney aptly summed up the work of preaching: "The preacher's business is just to show the people what's in the Bible."[\[2\]](#)

Paul then adds four more imperatives to flesh out the concerns of this work. He says that the preacher is to do his work

with a sense of urgency and readiness--he is to "be ready in season and out of season." Proclaiming God's Word is never to be "out of season" for the preacher. When times are good and when they are bad; when it is easy and when it is hard, he must always be willing and prepared to declare God's message.

Further, he is to "convince" in his preaching--to bring truth to the conscience in order that his hearers might repent of sin and trust Christ. He is to "rebuke"--to deal with sin sharply and forthrightly. And he is to "exhort." Just as a father would tenderly encourage his child to do that which is right and to pursue the right course.

These are the extreme measures which extreme times demand. What is a church and a pastor to do when the world around them becomes increasingly immoral? Preach the Word! What should we do when we see the church becoming more like the world? Preach the Word! But what if church members are not interested in learning sound doctrine, what then? Preach the Word!

A pastor may be called simplistic, archaic, unrealistic, irrelevant and insensitive, but if he would be called faithful to the charge which he has been given, he must never allow the church to do away with God's solution to perilous times. He must confidently and joyfully insist on the priority of preaching God's Word.

Why Preaching?

Given the situation that Timothy is facing; given the difficulties which emerge in the world and in the church, why does Paul give the counsel that he does? Why does he instruct Timothy to continue on living by and proclaiming the Word of God? The only answer is that Paul is obviously convinced of the things he has just written.

First, he is convinced of the authority of the Word. He believes that when the affirmation is made that all Scripture is given by inspiration (is "breathed out" from God), that this Word is God's Word and it has the authority of the Creator and Redeemer behind it. It is God's call to us and we must give allegiance to it. We must submit our minds and our very lives to it. Paul did not doubt or equivocate on the authority of the Word of God.

Second, he is convinced of the sufficiency of the Word. He believes that this Word is enough, that this is what God has entrusted to His churches. This is what the man of God is called to understand and to handle expertly, that he might be not *partially* equipped, not helped along the way, but *thoroughly* equipped, and that not just for *some* work, but for *every* good work. The Scripture is enough for doctrine. It is enough for reproof. It is enough for correction. It is enough for disciplining ourselves in righteousness. Paul was convinced of the authority and the sufficiency of the Word.

Consequently, Paul has confidence in the preaching of the Word. These three convictions go together. Expository preaching is a necessary corollary to the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. The absence of such preaching betrays a lack of conviction in the Bible's authority and sufficiency--no matter how loudly a man may profess his allegiance to the Word of God.

Conclusion

What D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said nearly thirty years ago remains true today. "The most urgent need in the Christian church is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also."[\[3\]](#)

We need a renewed confidence in preaching the Bible today. What we desperately need are men who are fully committed to preaching the Word; men who unhesitatingly believe that God still uses the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe; men who are willing to pay the price to study and discipline themselves to become effective, faithful expositors of the Word of God.

Such preaching is God's means for accomplishing God's purposes in desperate times. Pastors must take it up as their chief duty. Churches must insist on it and settle for nothing less.

In his masterful work on preaching, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John A. Broadus said this:

In every age of Christianity, since John the Baptist drew crowds into the desert, there has been no great religious movement, no restoration of Scripture truth, and reanimation of genuine piety, without new power in preaching, both as cause and as effect.^[4]

If we hope to see genuine revival and reformation, there must be a return of power to the pulpit. Spirit-anointed preaching of God's Word by men fully committed to the task is the great need of the day.



We preachers humour fancies instead of trying to crush them. We act like a father who gives his sick child a cake or an ice, or something else that is merely nice to eat—just because he asks for it; and takes no pains to give him what is good for him; and when the doctors blame him says, "I could not bear to hear my child cry." ... This is what we do when we elaborate beautiful sentences, fine combinations and harmonies; to please and not to profit. ...

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*



¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, edited by William H. Goold; reprint edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), vol. 7, p. 93.

² Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions*, edited by C. R. Vaughan; reprint edition (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), vol. 1, p. 596.

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 9.

⁴ John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, revised by Edwin Charles Dargan in 1898 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1926), p. 3.



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¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, edited by William H. Goold; reprint edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), vol. 7, p. 93.

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How to Study Theology

Martin Luther

I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I've had practice in that. If you keep to it, you will become so learned that you yourself could (if it were necessary) write books just as good as those of the fathers and councils. This is the way taught by holy King David (and doubtlessly used also by all the patriarchs and prophets) in Psalm 119. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole psalm: prayer (*oratio*), meditation (*meditatio*), and testing (*tentatio*).

Prayer

First, you should know that the Holy Scriptures constitute a book that turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone. Therefore you should straightway despair of your reason and understanding. With them you will not attain eternal life, but, on the contrary, your presumptuousness will plunge you and others with you out of heaven (as happened to Lucifer) into the abyss of hell. But kneel down in your room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness (as David did), that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.

Meditation

Second, you should meditate not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them. Take care you do not grow weary or think you have done enough when you have read, heard, and spoken them once or twice, and that you then have complete understanding. You'll never be a particularly good theologian if you do that, for you will be like untimely fruit which falls to the ground before it is half ripe. God will not give you his Spirit without the external Word.

Testing

Third, there is testing. This is the touchstone that teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, and how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom.

David, in Psalm 119, complains often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God's Word in all manner of ways. For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the Devil will harry you and will make a real theologian of you, for by his assaults he will teach you to seek and love God's Word. I myself am deeply indebted to my critics, that through the Devil's raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much. That is to say, they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have become otherwise. And I heartily grant them what they have won (honor, victory, and triumph) in return for making this of me, for that's the way they wanted it.

Learn from David

Now, with that you have David's rules. If you study hard in accord with his example, then you will also sing and boast with him, "The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Ps. 119:72). And it will be your experience that the books of the fathers will taste stale and putrid to you in comparison. You will not only despise the books written by adversaries, but the longer you write and teach, the less you will be pleased with yourself. When you have reached this point, then do not be afraid to hope that you have begun to become a real theologian, who can teach not only the young and imperfect Christians, but also the maturing and perfect ones.

If, however, you feel and are inclined to think you have made it, flattering yourself with your own little books, teaching, or writing, because you have done it beautifully and preached excellently; if you are highly pleased when someone praises you in the presence of others; if you perhaps look for praise, and would sulk or quit what you are doing if you did not get it--if you are of that stripe, dear friend, then take yourself by the ears, and if you do this in the right way you will find a beautiful pair of big, long, shaggy donkey ears. Then do not spare any expense! Decorate them with golden bells, so that people will be able to hear you wherever you go, point their fingers at you, and say, "See, See! There goes that clever beast, who can write such exquisite books and preach so remarkably well." That very moment you will be blessed and blessed beyond measure in the kingdom of heaven. Yes, in that heaven where hellfire is ready for the Devil and his angels.

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He helps his hearers more by his wisdom than his oratory; although he himself is less useful than he would be if he were an eloquent speaker also. But the one to guard against is the man whose eloquence is no more than an abundant flow of empty words.

Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*



The Reformed Pastor

[Fred Malone](#)

Introduction

It is easy to be misunderstood when writing about "the reformed pastor." Some are immediately turned off by the term, "reformed," identifying it with certain denominations. Others might think of it psychologically--as a "reformed alcoholic" is a former drunkard who no longer imbibes, so a "reformed pastor" must refer to a former preacher who has gotten over it.

But, in following good historical precedent, I am using the word "reformed" to mean biblical. Obviously, I believe that historical reformed theology is the purest form of biblical theology. This is not a claim for perfection in either thought or practice. Rather, it is a clear admission of theological conviction. No theological expression, and certainly no pastor, can claim to be beyond improvement.

Paul himself was aware of his own inadequacies. When considering the weight of preaching as a savor of life unto life for some, and death unto death for others, he cried out, "Who is sufficient, adequate, for these things?" Then he answered himself, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who made us adequate as servants of the new covenant.... But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be from God; and not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 2:15; 3:5; 4:7). The hope of the reformed pastor is that he, with his inadequacies, is living proof that salvation is all of God, not man; a great comfort to honest men who know their own hearts and weaknesses.

The concept of the reformed pastor may be well explored in wonderful books such as *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter, *The Christian Ministry* by Charles Bridges, the exceedingly great biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Shepherding God's Flock* edited by Roger Beardsmore, and *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. Such books should not merely be read, but mastered in detail in the study and prayed through on the knees. In this article I hope to summarize some of the insights from these materials.

As suggested above, the very idea of the reformed pastor is odious to some. Historical revisionism among Baptists is at an all time high, denying that we have a reformed theological heritage. However, despite clear differences with reformed paedobaptists, it is a historical fact that both General and Particular Baptists have considered the reformation theology of Luther, Calvin and Westminster to be their basic biblical theology as well. One only has to examine the confessions and writings of early Baptists (including Philadelphia, Charleston, Sandy Creek, Separate and Regular Baptists, all of which helped shape Southern Baptists) to make this conclusion.

Baptists have never followed the reformers blindly. We clearly disagree with our Presbyterian and Reformed brothers on baptism and other ecclesiological issues. But until the twentieth century, Baptists generally embraced the heart of reformed theology, represented in the consensus of the Westminster and London Baptist Confessions, as their own biblical and historical heritage. Thus, Baptists have believed in "the reformed pastor."

Today, pastors have a harder row to hoe, in some ways, than did our forefathers. We have distractions and

hindrances that were unknown to previous generations. Of course, our forefathers did have a few small things to concern them, such as the threat of life and imprisonment! But the modern era does present many outside hindrances which make pastoral work challenging.

Today, our people are exposed to subtle forms of liberal theology and humanism in education, the errors of the charismatic movement in books and on TV, the infiltration of the higher life movement in this century with its false perfectionism and hyper-mystical expectations, the introduction of drama, dance, puppets, clowns and the pop-culture entertainment model into supposedly biblically regulated worship. Twentieth-century America witnessed the wide-scale abandonment of the Sabbath and Lord's Day. Furthermore, the pastoral office has been debased and the local church is rarely regarded anymore as Christ's only authorized organism to extend His kingdom on earth

Among the younger generation of professing Christians (who were once untaught latchkey kids,) there is the increased dependence upon the pastor as surrogate parent for quick answers via the telephone, fax machine or email. Besides all this, those who preach simple expository messages instead of exciting meet-your-needs messages are often considered boring or negative. Even our most faithful members are unknowingly affected by these influences which hinder, undermine, and distract the reformed pastor's work.

How can a pastor who wants to be biblical in his life and ministry pursue such a calling in the third millennium?

He Must Hold to Reformed Theology for Himself.

Paul told Timothy: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching (doctrine), persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

This means that the reformed pastor must believe the doctrines of grace for himself. A pastor must remember he was by nature totally depraved and without God in the world, condemned for his sins and rebellion against a good and holy God. He once deserved God's unrestrained wrath eternally. But God in mercy unconditionally elected him before the foundation of the world to be His child, and sent His own dear Son to be the particular redemption for his sins with a bloody death, bearing the guilt of and punishment due to his sins. When Christ was preached to him, the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit into his heart and caused him to be born again, granting him repentance from sin and faith alone in Christ alone for his salvation. Further, the only reason he has persevered in the Christian faith to this day is because God brought him to Himself and has kept him from falling away, preserving his faith daily in Christ, and truly causing all things to work together for his good.

This daily remembrance of God's sovereign grace alone given in Christ alone and received by faith alone gives the pastor comfort, hope, and strength to live a holy life. It enables him to love Christ and keep His commandments, and to persevere in ministering the Word of God to poor sinners and imperfect saints like himself. This sovereign grace in his life gives him hope that any other heart can be conquered in evangelism, that any other struggling saint can overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, by the power of the Word of God as applied by the Spirit of God. This alone keeps his life and ministry centered on living and preaching Christ and Him crucified, risen, ascended, and coming again. This alone keeps him praying to his risen Lord for the conversion of lost souls and the building of Christ's church, and for true revival. 2 Corinthians 4:1 reminds the pastor that "having received mercy, we faint not." This alone keeps a servant's spirit in the reformed pastor's heart.

This daily remembrance of God's sovereign grace to the reformed pastor keeps him from becoming an elitist intellectual, puffed up with knowledge. It keeps him from cultivating a haughty spirit and critical attitude toward officers, members, and other pastors who do not believe as he does with regard to the grace of God in the gospel. It

keeps him from taking rejection personally, or becoming enraged with sinful anger, and makes him willing to be persecuted for righteousness sake as His Lord was for him. After all, it is Christ's church, not his. Remembering God's grace keeps his ministry centered on the gospel and the most important things, instead of emphasizing secondary, unclear, and disputed matters, and every new thing that comes along. It causes him to give thanks for any work of God's Spirit in the human heart and to have patience and kindness toward that which is deficient and lacking, waiting upon God. It enables him to deal with temptations to sin in the ministry and with an angry spirit toward those who oppose him. As Paul said to Timothy:

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:22-26).

The first thing the reformed pastor must do is to believe reformed theology for himself, that he might insure his own salvation and the salvation of those who hear him. As Paul said, "having received mercy, we do not lose heart."

He must Form his Life and Ministry According to Reformed Theology

In the Reformation, the question of what constitutes a true church came to the forefront. In reaction to the medieval confusion spawned by Roman Catholicism's view of Scripture plus tradition as God's Word, sacramentalism, sacerdotalism and absence of true discipline in the church, the reformers called for a reassessment of biblical ecclesiology. They taught that the true church is known by (1) the proclamation of God's entire Word, (2) the right administration of the two sacraments, and (3) properly practiced church discipline. These three marks of a true church will shape the ministry of the reformed pastor as he leads a congregation to be always reforming according to the Word of God.

Word

The formal principal of the Reformation is *sola Scriptura*--by Scripture alone. The reformers appealed to the exclusive authority of Scripture over all human opinion and church tradition. The rediscovery of and recommitment to the Scripture led to everything else. The costly work of Wycliffe, Luther, and others, brought the Scripture out of the dark prison of the Roman church and gave the light of God's Word to the common man in his own language. The restoration of the Scripture to the church forms the life and work of the reformed pastor.

As the Apostles did, the reformed pastor gives himself to the Word of God and prayer. He studies that Word to be a workman not ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth. He remembers what Jesus said: "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. And if any one hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the Word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:46-48). Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (6:68). Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth, Thy word is truth" (17:17). And Paul said: "If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, **THOSE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing" (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

The reformed pastor sees himself as a herald of the King's words to men, as a steward of the King's message. He really believes that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. He believes that every day of the week (including Mondays and Saturdays). He is a man on a mission. God has spoken, and he must tell others what He has said.

He not only has an unchangeable message of revelation but an unchangeable method of proclamation. He really believes Paul is right about the cross-cultural method of bringing God's Words to men:

For since in the wisdom of God the world [every culture included] through its wisdom did not come to know God; God was well-pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. For Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we PREACH Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks [cross-cultural], Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [Why do it this way, Paul?] Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:21-25).

Do you know of a better way for God to glorify His almighty power to reverse sinful human nature than to commission an earthen vessel to proclaim God's Words to dead men who cannot see, hear, or understand? To commission us to a hopeless task, humanly speaking, so that He may receive all the glory in the salvation of every human soul? To force us to our knees as men of prayer because we have tried everything we know to do?

Then why do some want to alter the message or the method? Why do some argue that drama, movies, puppets and music are the same as preaching Christ and Him crucified? Committed to *sola Scriptura*, we study God's Word more than we study the reformers' words. That's the way they would want it. However, we master sound literature in general in order that we may be instructed by those whom the Lord has given to the church to be teachers. We study God's Word for ourselves first before we apply it to other men. We become obsessed with it. We believe *sola gratia* insures the effectual application of God's Word to every heart God chooses to bless. And we believe that the Word of God is the divine seed which springs up into *sola fide* in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not fill our proclamations with manipulative, tear-jerking stories, or become pulpit comedians in order to keep attention. No, we are reformed pastors who obey Paul: "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching... Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

The reformed pastor forms his life's work and ministry on the study and proclamation of God's Words to men, both the unconverted and the converted. He really believes that the message and method is of God. He studies church history and theology to avoid the mistakes of the past. And he teaches and preaches "the whole counsel of God" in biblical exposition.

Sacraments

Another element of the reformed pastor's work is the right administration of the ordinances, or sacraments. The reduction of Rome's seven sacraments to two by Luther and Calvin was a great service to the future generations of evangelicals, especially to Baptists. The issue of the sacraments brought to the forefront the question of what is proper worship.

The Lutherans followed the normative principle that whatever God commanded for Christian worship was to be done

and whatever was not prohibited was permitted. This is why Lutheran worship continued to permit the accoutrements of the Roman liturgy. Calvinists followed the regulative principle of worship, that only that which God has commanded should be an element of worship. Thus preaching, reading, congregational singing, prayers, baptism, the Lord's Supper, thanksgivings, and vows, these things alone, were permitted to be elements of Christian worship.

Commitment to biblically-regulated worship will lead the reformed pastor to order corporate worship by what the Word prescribes. Practices involving clowns, puppets, drama, dance, weightlifting displays, musical pop-culture bashes, high-wire acts, mud wrestling (all of which have done during "worship" services) or any other such thing will not be allowed. Nor will he substitute a twenty-minute inspirational talk for the reading and preaching of God's Word. The reformed pastor will try to lead God's people into the glorious experience of simple worship, which must be performed by faith in the unseen risen Christ to be edifying. He will eschew vicarious performances by professional worshippers who keep things interesting and moving for the spiritually-bored.

Baptists believe that the true reformed pastor will apply the regulative principle not only to determine the number and meaning of the ordinances, but also to conclude that the only subjects of baptism and the Lord's Supper are "disciples." This fits the 1689 Second London Confession's statement that,

the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture (chapter 22, paragraph 1. See also the Westminster Confession's nearly identical statement in chapter 21, section 1. But notice how section 5 specifically includes "the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ" as part of "the ordinary religious worship of God.")

Discipline

The third work of the reformed pastor is biblical church discipline. This includes more than dealing with major upheavals and sins in the church (corrective discipline). It also includes formative discipline which results from the pastor's public and private ministry. The public ministry of the Word forms the minds and thinking of the whole people of God together, but the private ministry of the reformed pastor forms his bond and ministry to individual saints. Paul taught from house to house (Acts 20:20). Philip Doddridge said:

I have many cares and troubles: may God forgive me, that I am so apt to forget those of the Pastoral office! I now resolve, 1. To take a more particular account of the souls committed to my care. 2. To visit, as soon as possible, the whole congregation, to learn more particularly the circumstances of them, their children, and servants. 3. Will make as exact a list as I can of those that I have reason to believe are unconverted, awakened, converted, fit for communion, or already in it. 4. When I hear any thing particular, relating to the religious state of my people, I will visit them, and talk with them. 5. I will especially be careful to visit the sick. I will begin immediately with inspection over those under my own roof, that I may with greater freedom urge other families to the like care. O my soul! Thy account is great: it is high time that it be got into better order. Lord, I hope thou knowest, I am desirous of approving myself a faithful servant of Thee and of souls. O watch over me, that I may watch over them; and then all will be well (Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, p. 349).

But the work of the pastor does include corrective discipline as well. As our Lord commanded: "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he repents, you have won your brother. If he does not repent, go to him with one or

two others that every fact may be confirmed by two or more witnesses. If he does not repent, bring it to the church. If he does not listen to the church, let him become to you as a Gentile and a taxgatherer" (Matthew 18:15-17). The pastor must lead the way. He must first disciple his officers, teaching them the doctrine of the church, calling them to holiness in life, and then teaching them church discipline. He must be patient and do what he can while he waits upon God to move in the church so that he can do what he should. He must not take things into his own hands or rush the work of the Holy Spirit, yet he must deal with gross sin in a loving and determined way.

No wonder Paul said "who is sufficient for these things?" No one is sufficient, yet God has chosen earthen vessels and made them sufficient to proclaim and to apply God's Word to His church. The cost will be great and require great patience and wisdom (see *Reforming a Local Church* by Ernest Reisinger). But it is worth it when we remember that we are serving our Lord Jesus Christ. It is His church, not ours.

Conclusion

Paul gave the model for the reformed pastor in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 which must ever stand before us as we seek to restore Christ's church to its biblical model:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.



My mother went to church twice a day; she went in the morning and evening without ever allowing anything to keep her away, and she went not to hear idle tales and the gossip of old women, but that she might hear Thee, O Lord, in Thy sermons, and that Thou might hear her in her prayers.

Augustine, *Confessions*



The Cross: The Primary Content of Preaching

Conrad Mbewe

(This sermon was preached at the 1998 Southern Baptist Founders Conference in Birmingham, Alabama)

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Those of us who are pastors should know something of the weight of responsibility that has been placed upon our shoulders as we have responded to God's call to minister to a lost world. Passages such as the words spoken to Ezekiel, when the Lord said to him that He was going to require the blood of men at his hand, should surely make us tremble. We may not know the full meaning or implication of those words. Nevertheless, the very thought that the eternal God should require at our hands an accounting for the souls of men makes us tremble.

This sense of responsibility should be heightened even further when we realize that no church can rise higher than its pulpit. The spiritual well-being of the people that darken the doors of our churches week after week is tied up with the spirituality that will come, not only from our private lives, but also as we stand before them to proclaim God's Word in all its fullness. Surely that ought to convince us of the weight of responsibility that God has placed upon us.

Pastors are called primarily to be preachers. Consequently, whatever it is that we might be losing faith in, let us make sure that we do not lose faith in preaching. Regardless of the world's opinion of preaching, pastors must be fully persuaded that it is the most important and the most urgent need of the world until our Savior returns.

And the primary content of that preaching is the cross of Jesus Christ. Just as the death of Jesus is central to the message of the Bible, so it must be the center-piece of our expositions of the Bible.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, humanly speaking, is part of the apostle Paul's slight detour in the midst of his handling the problem of division in the Corinthian church. But, of course, Scripture is divinely inspired. The Holy Spirit deliberately ensured that the apostle Paul took this backward step to reflect upon the general thrust of his ministry in Corinth for our instruction. In these verses, for instance, we see the primary content of Paul's preaching in Corinth. In his own words, he says, "I have resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." If we are to be imitators of this great apostle then we too should be distinguished in our preaching by the proclamation of Christ and Him crucified. We are called to be proclaimers, not of a method, but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. This has been the distinguishing feature of the Christian pulpit across the ages.

The Cross in the Gospels

"What has Jesus done that He should become the center of our attention?" We answer, "He died for us." Granted,

there are many other things that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. As you make your way through the Gospels you see the Lord Jesus Christ in His birth, His upbringing, His preaching, His feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead, and so on. But if you are sensitive to the narratives of the Gospel writers as they proceed, you cannot miss the fact that as the Lord Jesus Christ approaches the cross there is the slowing down of the narration. We are made to realize that we have finally arrived at that which is the most important of all. The narratives slow down from years into months, from months into weeks, and then to days, hours and minutes. Why? God would have us pause and take in every single event as our Lord Jesus Christ gets to the cross and dies.

As it is in the Gospel narratives, so should it be with our preaching. It must be very clear to any person who takes time to sit under our ministry that we are a people that preach Christ in His person and when we come to His work the emphasis is on His death. Thus it was with the apostle Paul, as he testified to the Corinthians. "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Again and again Paul speaks of the preaching of the gospel as a preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:17, 18, 2:7, etc.).

It is striking that, despite the miraculous nature of the Lord's birth and the wonders He performed, Paul should choose His shameful death as the center and summary of his preaching. We need to take special note of this because the cross is being emphasized less and less in the ministries of many who still consider themselves to be preachers of the gospel.

Today's preaching seems to be revolving around the Jesus who is able to heal your body, because He healed so many other bodies as he walked upon the face of the earth; a Jesus who can insure that there is money in your pocket by virtue of the fact that He fed so many people when He was here on earth. Where is this certain note of a crucified Savior? How many ministries today can say with Paul, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1.) For preaching to be biblical it must center on the cross and where this emphasis has been lost it must be recovered.

The Doctrinal Interpretation of the Cross

You may be saying to yourself, "So what if I do not have Paul's emphasis? Why should that become a big deal?" That question is best answered after answering another question, namely, "What exactly was Paul saying about the cross?" It is crucial that Paul's understanding of the cross should be our understanding of the cross, as well. God's proclamation of it, as found in His Word, should be our proclamation. Otherwise, we may be repeating the same religious clichés but meaning something totally different from the apostles. Every pastor would claim to be a preacher of the cross, but what exactly is being preached about it?

We need to begin here, because in Paul's day to say that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified a few months or years ago was not news to anybody. Everyone knew all about that. That is why the unsuspecting disciples could say to Jesus on the road to Emmaus, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Luke 24:18). It was a well-known historical fact. However, whatever Paul was saying about the cross must have been more than a mere mentioning of the event because his message was offensive to his Jewish hearers (Galatians 5:11). The offense must have been caused by Paul's doctrinal understanding of that historical event when Jesus of Nazareth hung upon the cross and died. What did Paul see in the cross?

To Paul the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was an *atonement sacrifice*. The cross of Christ was the substance prefigured in all Old Testament offerings and sacrifices that took place in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. The high priest, on the Day of Atonement, sprinkled the blood of a slain bull upon the altar for his sin. Then he took a goat and offered it for the sins of the people and proceeded to release the scapegoat into the desert having placed the sins of Israel on its

head. With all this done in fear and trembling, he would announce to the people of God that their sins had been atoned for and they could now go with the blessed shalom of God. That was the shadow. What transpired when the man Christ Jesus hung upon the cross was the reality--the eternal reality that truly satisfied the thrice-holy God.

As the book of Hebrews puts it, if what was happening throughout the Old Testament pages was sufficient to procure the favor of God, it would not have been necessary for those sacrifices to be repeated over and over again. Their repetition proves that they were not effectual in themselves. They were pointing forward to the one great sacrifice of God's own Son. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross, He was the one, sufficient, sacrificial, substitutionary atonement for our sins.

To Paul, it was not a mere man that died on the cross but the immortal Son of the living God. Therefore, that one death was a sufficient payment for a million, million worlds if such needed to be redeemed. This infinite Being took upon himself human nature because He was paying the price in place, not of angels, but of human beings. Consequently, as we look at that cross we are seeing Him, Who from all eternity was God, is God and will always be God. Yet, we are also looking at One who is man at the same time so that he might be punished in our place.

This is what Paul saw on the day that Christ died. He allowed the full beams of the Old Testament Scriptures to shine on that event. Thus, he could speak about the cross and its fruit in such glowing terms as, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was not just telling people about a Jesus who had died. No! He was speaking about a blessed exchange. The righteous One has taken our place. The wrath of God that ought to have sunk us deeper than the grave, into the depth of hell itself, was poured out upon God's own Son until He cried "It is finished!" and died. We who deserve that wrath, because we have sinned against God times without number, can now be clothed with His righteousness and be looked upon by God with the splendor of the second Person of the blessed Holy Trinity. Amazing!

This is what gripped Paul and made him go into the various cities of Asia Minor with only one message--the message of the cross, the message that Jesus has indeed died, the Son of God has borne the full brunt of the wrath of God for us. I ask, has this gripped you, too? Has it gripped you to the point where you are fully satisfied to spend the rest of your days playing upon the one-string banjo of Christ and Him crucified?

This truth of the cross utterly overwhelmed Paul even at the personal level. To the Galatians he spoke of "Christ who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). He understood the atonement to be particular. To Paul, Jesus did not go to the cross to die for some nameless mass of humanity. He was basically saying, "I was on His mind as He hung there. His love went out to me and He died for me." Because of that great assurance upon his soul, Paul was willing to sacrifice anything for the cause of Christ. The apostle's love was but a feeble reflection of the great love portrayed by the Son of God for him when He went from the infinitely high station of divinity to take upon Himself, not only the humiliation of humanity, but the wrath of God to its very dregs. Again I ask, has this gripped you as well?

The Abiding Relevance of the Cross

Let us now go back to the question that was asked earlier on. So what if I do not have Paul's emphasis? Why should that become a big deal? Why should we abandon our calling and live for only one message in a world that is ever-changing? If the headlines of our newspapers have been changing over the years, why shouldn't the headlines of our pulpits do the same? Is it not the height of irrelevance that in today's computer age people should come to church and still find us preaching the same old message of Christ and Him crucified that has been preached for about two thousand years?

The answer to all this is that while there is a God in heaven with Whom we have to do, nothing can be more relevant and urgent than this message of Christ and Him crucified. There is a great and infinite Being who has created the entire universe and continues to govern its every detail. He has made humanity as moral creatures and before Him each one of us will have to one day stand to give an account. On that great day He will allot to each one of us our eternal existence. If His word be true--and it is!--our eternal inheritance will either be in a place of excruciating agony or indescribable bliss forever. The whole of humanity is heading toward this eternal destiny. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor, slave or free, white or black. It doesn't matter what the circumstances of your life might be. There is an appointment that each one of us has around the corner.

God, though not exposed to our natural human eyes, has revealed Himself so sufficiently that, if you stop to think and meditate, you will be moved to tremble. He has revealed himself as a holy Being and One Whose very nature detests sin. He has revealed Himself as a righteous Judge who must punish sin. He has given signal demonstrations of this already across history, but these are nothing compared to what lies ahead for humanity. It is because of such a God that we dare not overlook the cross. We should join Paul in declaring, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:11, 20.)

The cross is God's idea of dealing with this vital need that we all have to be reconciled to God before we meet Him on the awful throne of judgment. It is not human ingenuity which has figured out a way of getting around the wrath of God. It is God's own wisdom that has come up with this one way by which sinners can be pardoned.

Through the cross those who are going headlong toward hell can have their destination utterly changed. Who are you, O preacher, to question divine wisdom!

Conclusion

If your congregation was asked to summarize the general thrust of your sermons, would they say that you have taught them the height and depth and breadth and length both of the content and the implications of that great historic act when the Son of God took frail flesh and died? Does it pulsate in you? Does the cross thrill you? Have you been there at the foot of the cross? Is there, in your experience, a time when you were heavy laden because of your sins and nothing in the entire world could lift it from your shoulders? Did you, like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, fall at the foot of the cross and see the burden on your back roll away into the blessed sepulcher? Like him, did you leap into the air with three shouts of joy, knowing that here at last God had answered the million-dollar question on your heart? "How can I, born and raised a sinner, ever enter into the blessed heaven where the thrice-holy God reigns upon his glorious throne?" Has the cross fully satisfied that question?

It is when the cross has spoken peace to your screaming conscience that it becomes a lifelong passion. It is the person who sees the Son of God bleeding, crying, dying for him who can say, "There go I but for the free, matchless and sovereign grace of my Creator." Only if you have had such a view of the cross can you say,

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin--not in part but the whole--
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it not more,
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh my soul!

If Christ's death overwhelms you this way, then my plea is that you never graduate from that experiential knowledge

and love of the cross. To do so is to hand in your resignation from the pulpit because you will become useless after that. Oh, let those who have no souls to save consider the preaching of the cross as foolishness, irrelevant, and outdated. But while you and I stand before souls--precious souls that must either get to heaven or perish forever--we must do what Paul did. We must lift up the cross so clearly that all who sit before us will, by the grace of God, see in it their only hope of salvation. May our hearts be filled with the love of the cross until we can say with Charles Wesley,

Happy, if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all and cry in death,
Behold! Behold the lamb!



Book Notes

Shall We Read Jonathan Edwards?

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I am asked whether, in my judgment, it is profitable for the minister of today to read the writings of Jonathan Edwards, and (I suppose) those of other similarly notable theologians of the past. The question may perhaps have been suggested to my friend by my own remark that I had recently been re-reading *Edwards on the Will*. I may as well indicate at once, as later, that I shall make an affirmative answer to this question, for I certainly believe that it would be decidedly advantageous, not only for the modern minister but if possible for the layman also, to devote at least some portion of his time to authors of this class. The advantage would consist in the quickening of spiritual impulse, in the acquisition of intellectual stimulus and power, and in much needed theological definiteness.

For the purpose of this paper Jonathan Edwards will be taken merely as one of a group of men to whom the universal church is immensely indebted, and who have severally been "beacon lights" along the path of its history--great names which will never be allowed to die so long as the church shall live, and which, to the minister at least, ought to be something more than mere names of otherwise unknown personalities. I have mind, among others, John Calvin, author of the famous *Institutes*, which systematized the doctrines of the "Reformed" churches with a literary skill that, it is said, exerted a marked influence on the formation of French prose, and with a logical power that led his opponents to stigmatize his book as *The Koran of the Heretics*. There are also Augustine, whose *Confessions* and *City of God* are classics in the literature of religion; and Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed orator and prince of preachers in the sub-apostolic Church. Surely it is well to become as intimately acquainted as circumstances may permit with men who consecrated intellects of the highest order to the services of the Christian faith, who laid the foundations and reared the edifice of the Christian church wherein we minister, who secured for us our noble heritage, and who are even now--to quote a sentence from Lord Byron:

The dead but scepter'd sovrans
Who rule us from their urns.

Of course, I know that a minister's time is limited. He cannot read everything. There are only twenty-four hours in a day for any man, really less, and the range of literature is vast. But if time be limited, there is all the more need to husband it well, and to use what one has in the wisest way, while, as to literature, we might well throw most of our magazines and papers into the fire for the sake of those books which have been creative in their influence, or which have won the controversial battle for those principles we so justly prize. Using our time with a wise economy, we may find that we really have more time for forming these noble acquaintances than we thought.

But taking up now the three points of advantage I have already suggested, and only using Jonathan Edwards as illustration chiefly, let us consider first, the gain in the quickening of spiritual impulse. These men, besides being master-minds of the Church, great scholars, and great thinkers, were great saints as well--great Christians; and I know no method of securing spiritual impulse superior to that of getting one's own soul in as close and sympathetic contact as possible with some other soul whose nobility and moral power have become recognized as of the highest order.

We may know some men whom we have never seen better than others who walk the streets with us, and men who are dead may be nearer to us than others whom we meet every day. Such, to us, are the most truly alive of any. To me no one is more truly living today than Jesus of Nazareth, and after Him the Apostle Paul; and the more of such as these we can people our world with, the better it will be for us; for every man is known by the intellectual company he keeps. And noblest company leaves noblest impressions. We should covet high converse with high souls. Such an one was Jonathan Edwards. He is commonly thought of as a great logician, and as a redoubtable champion of the Calvinistic theology. What one has said of him is indeed true, viz.: that "Calvinism had probably never so powerful a defender," and Robert Hall asserted that "he ranks with the brightest luminaries of the Christian church, not excluding any country or any age, since the apostolic." It is, however, not so generally known that after laboring as a pastor with, as one says, "intense zeal" for more than twenty-three years, his labors being rewarded with large accessions to the church not only of persons of mature years but also of young people, he became a missionary to the Indians. Edwards was a great scholar and a great student, but he was also a great preacher. His congregations often filled the church, and they were not infrequently deeply moved by his power. Earnestly evangelical, he was at the same time quite as earnestly evangelistic. His sermons have been described as "plain and searching," but they were delivered with that "manifest depth of feeling and conviction which has been likened to 'white heat.'" Professor George P. Fisher records that "his piety was most profound and sincere." He says that "he mingled logic and the utmost ardor in theological inquiry with a devout and contemplative turn of mind characteristic of the mystic. His diaries record heavenly visions--or experiences that almost deserve this name--of the glory of God and the beauty of Christ." "In Jonathan Edwards," asserts Professor Fisher, "we find an enthusiasm of devotion, for a parallel to which we must resort to the lives of the holiest of the medieval saints." One of Whitefield's sermons so impressed and affected him that he wept during the entire time of its delivery. He was a most remarkable man--one of those whom it is well worth while to know. At seventeen he graduated from Yale University; at twenty-four he became assistant pastor at Northampton as colleague to his maternal grandfather, Stoddard; and two years later, at his grandfather's death, full pastor. A few years afterward in this same pastorate a powerful revival occurred in the church and parish, which under himself and the Tennants, extended throughout New England. In regard to his own personal religious experiences (for he did not live in an atmosphere solely intellectual), take the following passages quoted from his diary:

Once as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. ... The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception--which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to be in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone. ... I have, several other times, had experiences of very much the same nature, and which have had the same effects.

Of another occasion he records:

As I was walking there, and looking up in the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I knew not how to express it. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was a sweet and gentle and holy majesty, and also a majestic sweetness; a high and great and holy gentleness. ... I often used to sit and view the moon for a long time, and in the day spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky to behold the sweet glory of God in these things, in the meantime singing forth with a low voice my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer.

It is unquestionably of incalculable spiritual advantage to know any such man as this. Indeed we can hardly afford not to know him.

The second advantage mentioned was that of *intellectual stimulus*. Books are dangerous as well as helpful. Much that is read would be just as well, or even better, unread than read. The result of reading them is mental dissipation, and the result of *that* is intellectual paralysis. The larger part of our current literature is the product of no higher motive than the income which is expected to accrue to the authors and publishers. Such as they are "worldlings in the world of books," as Mrs. Browning calls them, and they are to beware of by all who are and would be wise.

"For the wicked there," she says,

Are winged like angels; every knife that strikes
Is edged with elemental fire to assail
A spiritual life; the beautiful seems right
By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong
Because of weakness; power is justified,
Though armed against St. Michael.

But then fortunately we are not limited to such as these. For on the other hand, she says:

In the book-world, true,
There's no lack neither, of God's saints and kings,
That shake the ashes of the grave aside
From their calm locks, and, undiscomfited,
Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask.

And so we are to take our choice; but the wise man will choose comradeship with "God's saints and kings," and secure for himself the manifold advantage that comes thereby.

In the realm of art there is no greater or more illustrious name than that of Michael Angelo, at whose feet every genuine artist is glad to sit, and whose inspiration and power he is glad to acknowledge. Sir Joshua Reynolds, at the close of his course of lectures before the Royal Academy, expressed his own estimate of the value of the continued study of the works of this greatest of the masters, by saying: "I should desire that the last word which I should pronounce in this academy, and from this place, might be the name of Michael Angelo." The famous English portrait-painter confessed his indebtedness to the influence of the Italian; and what other painter of eminence would not? for his own eminence depends upon the imprint which his work may carry of the Master's hand, and to the stimulus to endeavor which he has received from him. Soon or late every artist must stand (to use a phrase of Tennyson's) "at the bar of Michael Angelo."

The same is true in our own peculiar domain as ministers--the domain of theology and religion. The author, whom we cannot look up to as standing to us in a relation of master to scholar, the author whom we recognize as being merely on our own intellectual level, the author who does not make us think, and who is easy to read, is the one whom it will not injure us to pass by. Dr. Shedd somewhere remarks that we ought not, as a rule, to spend any time on books that we feel that we ourselves could have written. That a book is difficult may be its excellence. It *is* its excellence, if its difficulty compels us to grapple with it as one athlete with another. The book, hard to understand at first reading, is not on that account to be thrown aside, any more than the sunshine is to be ignored because our eyes are at first pained by the light. Presently they will become adjusted to it and the pain will cease. The study of geometry is

valuable to him who may never become a surveyor or civil engineer as well as to him who enters those professions, for the study itself is a sharpening of the mental faculties and similar in value to a course in logic. On the other hand, "Euclid without a master," or "Geometry made easy," would be worth nothing. My own experience is that those authors which I have come to prize most are those which I have been compelled to read twice or three times in order to make the first reading of much profit, or perhaps to read over and over paragraphs and sentences when reading them for the first time. I valued Principal Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, not only because it grappled with my mind and made me think. It was not easy to read. But it was not obscure. Edwards on the Will constituted no intellectual pastime; rather it was an intellectual gymnastic. And in that lay no small part of its value. It is the grit of the grindstone that puts the edge on the knife. I have never had the opportunity of reading Calvin's *Institutes* but I would covet it if I had; and I would not expect to find it "light reading" either.

The third and last element of advantage I noted was that of *theological definiteness*. Theology has come to be too generally undervalued, and, I fear, even by ministers. It is discounted in favor, as they say, of "religion," but only by those whose religion is largely a matter of sentiment and emotion. A balloon sailing overhead may be a pretty and quite interesting spectacle, but it is at the mercy of every current of air that blows, and nobody can tell where it will land. To be dogmatic in the proper way I consider no opprobrium, and to have a definite theology--which simply means to know what one believes and why he believes it, and to be able to state it in clear and intelligible terms--is, I think, an element of power, and something to be coveted by every preacher. It makes his preaching positive; it furnishes him with a form of doctrine which secures a certain harmony of one sermon with another; it anchors him against the various drifts of opinion which he cannot avoid, and which otherwise would be likely to carry him along with them; it keeps him in line with the mighty men who, in the fierce doctrinal controversies of the past, were compelled to examine every aspect of their faith and to state it in terms of precision, and thus to determine definitely just what the Scripture teaching is and what it is not. Thus were created the creeds of the Church. It is well for us all to understand that in the course of twenty Christian centuries certain things have been settled for all time in the domain of orthodox belief, and that such men as Athanasius and Augustine, Anselm and Bernard, Calvin and Grotius, Edwards and John Owen, did not live in vain. What is needed today, I venture to assert, is not less theology but more, and especially in view of the fact that there were never more "fads" and vagaries current in religion than at the present time, one cause of which--possibly the chief cause--is the lack of a definite and clear-cut theology. At any rate, surely the preacher ought to know something of the history of doctrine in the Church; something of the way in which the great doctrinal symbols have been formed; something of the splendid and heroic men who shaped them at the peril, not infrequently, of their lives; and distinctly what those symbols are.

Is the will free, or is it not? and if it be free, in what sense is it free? What vastly important questions these are, and how they go down to the roots of things in religion! Are we Calvinists or Arminians, which? Does it make any difference which? If we are Calvinists, why are we? I think we ought to know--ought to know not merely because of an intellectual interest, but because we *need to know*; for how can we be strong preachers otherwise? Such stalwarts in the faith as Jonathan Edwards and others will help us in answering such questions as these.

Professor Shedd says of the now scarcely known *Reformed Pastor* of Richard Baxter, whom he describes as a "wonderful and successful minister," that "it should be read through once in each year by every clergyman," while this same Baxter, writing the narrative of his own life and times, says that "next to practical divinity, no books so suited with my disposition as Aquinas, Scotus, Durandus, Ockham, and their disciples; because I thought they narrowly searched after truth, and brought things out of the darkness of confusion. For I could never, from my first studies, endure confusion."

I conclude this discussion with an additional quotation from Dr. Shedd, because it has reference particularly to Jonathan Edwards. He says that as a theologian "he was equal to any that have been mentioned, whether we consider the depth and subtlety of his understanding, the comprehension and cogency of his logic, or the profundity and purity of his religious experience," and he adds that "he deserves the patient study of the American clergyman, in particular,

because more than any other American theologian, he forms an historical connection with the theologians of the past, and stands confessedly at the head of our scientific theology."

Shall we follow this counsel? By all means say I, if possible. If it be not possible, let us not boast of it, but rather let us lament the impoverishment we must necessarily suffer, even though we cannot avoid it.

Be Sure What You Believe

By Joe Nesom (Founders Press, 1999); 176 pp.

Reviewed by [Fred A. Malone](#)

It is a pleasure to review and to recommend *Be Sure What You Believe: The Christian Faith Simply Explained* by Dr. Joe Nesom. The subtitle aptly describes the heart and soul of this book: "the Christian faith simply explained." Dr. Nesom's many years as a teacher at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and as a faithful pastor have successfully meshed into a theologically sound work that is easily read by the layman. His simple style is reminiscent of early Baptist pastor-theologians like Norvell Robertson, William Bullein Johnson, and John L. Dagg. We need more pastors who can write and preach theology simply.

In twenty chapters, the book is a survey of the major doctrines of the Christian faith in the order of most confessions and systematic theologies. However, the simplicity of explanation, coupled with the absence of theological jargon, makes it a very good introduction to the body of truth historically believed by Protestants and, particularly, Baptists. The study questions at the end of each chapter are useful for personal reflection, Sunday School class discussions, and other venues.

The occasional references to historical Baptist confessions add to its flowing heartfelt presentation out of the personal beliefs of the author. Nesom's explanations align well with the 1833 New Hampshire Confession, the 1689 London Baptist Confession, the Abstract of Principles of Southern Seminary, and the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message.

The chapters dealing with the Trinity, and the divinity and humanity of Christ, are simple and masterful in their presentation. To the trained reader, one notices his incorporation of the historical councils as they hammered out the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ. However, his presentation is so simple that the untrained reader may not know that they have just read a survey of the historical controversies which culminated in an orthodox view of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Those who wish for extended historical references and footnotes in a technical volume must go elsewhere, but that was not Dr. Nesom's purpose in writing.

The doctrines of grace are well explained throughout the book without a heavy use of theological jargon. This makes the book even more useful to the pastor who wishes to introduce untaught church members to these biblical doctrines without the stumbling blocks of common misunderstandings of certain theological terms.

A welcome explanation is Dr. Nesom's reference to Article IV of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message on the new birth. While most Southern Baptist pastors today believe that regeneration occurs after repentance and faith, Dr. Nesom shows that the 1963 BF&M teaches that faith is a sovereign gift of God which is given in regeneration. The sinner responds to the gospel with the gift of faith. In other words, regeneration precedes repentance and faith as a

gracious work of God, not man, according to the election of grace. As the 1963 BF&M states:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. *It is a change of heart*, wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the *sinner responds* in repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of *grace*.

Dr. Nesom's explanation of the doctrines of grace in the 1963 BF&M will be a useful tool to pastors who wish to teach their people that salvation is "all of grace." He also gives a balanced explanation of God's sovereign election and the full responsibility of people to respond to the gospel.

Included are two chapters touching subjects which are rarely found in a systematic treatment of doctrine: singing God's praise and prayer. The author's love for sound doctrinal hymns comes through the entire book but is especially emphasized in a chapter designed to warm the layman's heart to great hymnology. This can be a welcome help to a pastor who is dealing with the shallow theology and flippant tone of many contemporary songs. His use of the Lord's Prayer to teach prayer to the reader is a helpful remedy to the feeble prayer lives of many churches.

Dr. Nesom's discussion of the return of our Lord is a good, simple discussion of the essentials that are clear in Scripture in a day when God's people are confused by their exposure to convoluted schemes of His return and the erroneous interpretation of many texts of Scripture. He deals with such speculative views by pointing out simple clear passages which eliminate the erroneous ideas which are so popular today. One example is the imminent return of Christ at any moment--a clear truth which contradicts certain elaborate schemes.

Finally, two things are interspersed throughout the book which make it a delight to read as a work of theology: it is thoroughly Christ-centered in content and warmly devotional in tone. It is one thing to understand sound doctrine, it is another to sum up all things in Christ Jesus. It is one thing to explain sound doctrine, it is another to be so caught up in the truths of God's Word as an author that the reader's heart is warmed in the reading.

I heartily recommend *Be Sure What You Believe* for pastors as a model of simplicity in preaching the great doctrines of the faith, for laymen as a study manual, for new Christians as an introduction to the Christian faith, and for Baptists as a faithful summary of what our forefathers lived and died for.

Introducing Christian Focus Publications

[Ray Van Neste](#)

A few years ago at an annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting, I purchased an inexpensive copy of a Spurgeon book for which I had been hunting. I did not realize I had just had my first encounter with Christian Focus Publications, a UK-based publisher with distribution in the US.

Since that time I have moved to Scotland and have become quite enamored with the legacy of spiritual giants from this area. In the periods of reflection amidst post-graduate research, I have determined to read the works of Scottish preachers like Thomas Boston, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and Horatius and Andrew Bonar. Alas, some of these works were hard to find. From a reference to Thomas Boston I discovered that he had written a book (originally a

record of personal reflection) on evangelism. I was quite interested to read this reportedly passionate call to evangelism and eventually found a copy in the Special Collection Archives of the University of Aberdeen. After reading through it, I was amazed that I had never before heard of it!

It was absent from extensive bibliographies on evangelism I had received from evangelical seminaries (SBC and non-SBC). I assumed it had not been republished, at least not recently and not in the US. I began to mull over ideas of how to get it republished when I returned to the US. Then, as if by chance, a student who was leaving handed me several catalogues he had accumulated. Being a bibliophile I naturally thumbed through the catalogues and my jaw literally dropped as I saw an advertisement for *The Art of Manfishing*, by Thomas Boston, recently republished with an extensive introduction by J. I. Packer! I was dramatically and convincingly reintroduced to the valuable work of Christian Focus Publications, Ltd.

Many of the readers of this journal may already be aware of this company but perhaps there are others who are not. I am simply like a little child who has discovered treasure and wants to tell others about it. Christian Focus Publications publishes a wide range of materials under three imprints. A brief look at the three imprints gives one a feel of where this publisher is coming from.

The Christian Focus imprint provides Christian books which are easy to read but profound in their content. This wide-ranging imprint provides an excellent venue for North American readers to gain access to leading evangelical expositors in the UK. It also includes quality children's books like *The Big Book of Questions and Answers*, by Sinclair Ferguson, which is basically a modern catechism for children.

The Mentor imprint has as its stated goal "to provide academically sound books which hold to scriptural inerrancy and uphold the uniqueness of Christ for salvation." This includes books by people like Richard Gaffin, Douglas Kelly, Gerald Bray and a commentary series.

The imprint which has most attracted me, however, is their 'Christian Heritage' series. The stated purpose of this imprint is to gather together the best titles from the past, those which have been of proven blessing to the church. Most of these titles are out of print elsewhere or are unique compilations of material. In this imprint I have found material for which I have searched but found nowhere else. There is a series entitled "Puritan Viewpoints," which includes works by Thomas Boston (such as the one just mentioned, subtitled *A Puritan's View of Evangelism*), Stephen Charnock, Thomas Watson, Thomas Manton, John Owen, and John Bunyan. Each book has an introduction to set the context of the author and the original publication, and if certain portions are written in a manner unclear to modern readers, it is clarified by helpful notes or alternate expressions. Included in this series is the devotional classic (little known in my circles), *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal, once a lecturer in the University of Aberdeen.

Additionally, the Christian Heritage imprint offers other hard to find material. For example, they publish *Searcher of Hearts*, a discussion of Romans 8 by John Newton which was a previously unpublished work lost in an Oxford museum! Newton preached these at mid-week meetings of his church, St. Peter and St Paul in Olney. Also, they have quite a collection of sermons by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the highly influential Scottish pastor, known for his godliness and evangelistic zeal who died when he was only 29. M'Cheyne's biography and letters compiled by Andrew Bonar pulses with purity and passion for God and these sermons promise more opportunity to learn from this servant of Christ. One recent M'Cheyne book in this series, *The Passionate Preacher*, is a collection of sermons never before published. These are fine resources reminding us that strong belief in the sovereignty of God need not, ought not, must not lead to cold orthodoxy but should yield deep love for Christ and urgent yearnings for others to come to know this Christ. May the Lord bless Christian Focus Publications to this end.

To obtain materials or a catalogue from Christian Focus Publications you may contact their new US distributor:
Riverside, 636 South Oak, Iowa Falls, IA 50126, Tel: 1-800-822-4271; e-mail - rvintl@fnc.com



News

Founders Breakfast at the SBC in Orlando

The 2000 Southern Baptist Convention is scheduled to meet in Orlando, Florida June 13-14. Before the opening session on Tuesday morning, June 13, Founders Ministries will host a Founders Fellowship Breakfast at 7:00 AM. A full, sit down meal will be served. The theme for the meeting is *Church Priorities for Y2K*. Dr. Fred Malone, pastor of First Baptist Church in Clinton, Louisiana, will speak on "Preaching Christ in the New Millennium," and Mr. Jim Elliff, president of Christian Communicators Worldwide, will speak on "Evangelism with Integrity." For more information visit our website at www.founders.org.

Regional Founders Conference in OK

The first Heartland Regional Founders Conference is set to meet at Providence Baptist Church in Ponca City, Oklahoma, April 6-8, 2000. The theme for the conference is "Evangelism," with Don Whitney of Midwestern Baptist Seminary, David Goff of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Edmond, OK, and Tom Ascol of Founders Ministries among the speakers. For more information contact Steve Harden by phone; (580) 762-2762.

Two YOUTH Conferences

The Southern Baptist Founders YOUTH Conference will convene in two locations this summer. June 19-23, Toccoa Falls Bible College in Toccoa Falls, Georgia will be the venue. June 26-30, the camp will meet at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. Themes for both conferences will be, "Living By the Book," with featured speaker, Tom Nettles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. For more information contact Bill Ascol by phone: (318) 798-7088.



Letters

Thanks for another great issue. I had been checking the web site for over a month everyday anxiously awaiting your publication. Once again your publication gave me a word of encouragement just at the right time. I have recently re-enrolled in one of our SBC seminaries to conclude my M.Div. studies. I consider your publication a must-reading for my academic studies. It constantly reminds me that ministry is more than growth techniques, new paradigms, human ingenuity, and creativity but rather is a sovereign act of God as we submit ourselves to Him.

I'm now faced with the dilemma of trying to decide which Founders conference to attend! I plan on being at the convention in Orlando, and I'm hoping and praying that you guys will have the Founders breakfast again. It was the highlight of my convention experience last year in Atlanta. I wish you guys were responsible for the Pastors Conference! It sure could use some help in the area of focusing on God instead of human efforts. I always feel guilty after the Pastors conference since I pastor a small SBC church (50 in SS). I'm looking forward to attending one of the Founders Conferences this next year. When will information be available on the summer conference? It will help me determine whether to go to a Spring or Summer conference.

Thanks again for lifting high our Lord as revealed in the Scriptures and not fearing to speak out on the "Doctrines of Grace."

Your fellow servant in Christ,
S. H., via e-mail

There will be a Founders Fellowship Breakfast at the SBC this year. See the news items for details. Check the website for information on the Birmingham Founders Conference. The theme is "Providence" and the keynote speaker is Ligon Duncan of Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Dear *Founders Journal*,

An internet friend of mine gave me the web address of the Founders movement and I just couldn't believe there was any type of movement to bring reformed doctrine into the SBC. While still a young teenager my parents started going to a Southern Baptist Church and being a minor I had to go along. Some years later I came to embrace the doctrines of Sovereign Grace and left the SBC because they were totally at odds with what I came to believe in.

In fact, many of the pastors in the SBC hate reformed doctrine with a passion as I found out. When I first understood these doctrines I wanted to share them with other people so I brought the subject up with the pastor of the local SBC where my family had attended for a number of years. I soon was sorry I did because his fierce hatred of these doctrines was clearly evident throughout the conversation. It was soon evident to me that the SBC denomination was with VERY few exceptions a denomination with an "ultra-arminian" bias. I even came to see that the adult Christian education/Sunday School material was slanted to this bias as well as the structure of the average worship service.

Of all the SBC church services I've ever attended all of them had what was called an "invitation" at the end of the services which, quite often was longer than the sermon itself. It was apparent that the various pastors who held the pulpit believed that salvation was really a matter of "arm twisting" and that if the pressure was put heavy enough on people some would yield and walk the aisle. Almost always this meant that the congregation would sing the lines of the closing hymn over and over again and the pastor would say something to the tune of, "I know there's someone out there who needs to make a decision." We'd repeat the lines of the hymn over until the pastor was at least somewhat satisfied with his results of getting people to "walk the aisle"....

At any rate I find it quite interesting that there is this movement attempting to make a difference. I had considered the SBC a lost cause however, maybe there's at least a small ray of hope. I wish you and others well in your endeavors, however knowing where the huge overwhelming majority of SBC churches and leaders are I'm sure you'll encounter strong walls of opposition.

God's Speed,
R. H., via e-mail

Dear Tom,

I enjoy reading your articles in the *Founders Journal* on the web. I didn't know Baptists were Calvinist. The preachers for the most part that have been at the church I go to have been Arminian or just afraid to preach sound doctrine. One day when I was at the Baptist Book Store, I saw a book titled *Have the Baptists Changed Their Doctrine?* It looks like they have.

A friend gave me a book by Arthur W. Pink, on the sovereignty of God, and when I read about election, I put the book down and didn't read it for a couple of years. When I picked it up to read again it started to make sense. Thank you for putting the articles on line, they've been a great help to my understanding of the Word.

Sincerely,
M. T., via e-mail

Thank the Lord that some are willing to defend the truth of scripture. I have been a Christian for 60 years and only recently have been made aware of the doctrine of Election. The Scriptures of God's sovereignty were skipped over even though they are so obvious. May the Lord bless and strengthen you as you continue to proclaim the truth of the Word!

L. L., via e-mail

I must tell you that the information on your website has been very interesting and enlightening to me. My family recently left the SBC church we had belonged to for nearly 9 years, and last Sunday we joined an Independent

Methodist Church. I never knew there were Baptists who thought like I did, and I never even knew there was a name for it, "election". That concept explains all the observations I have made of unregenerate church members. It became increasingly difficult to teach among people who see no need for discipleship, and church leadership that did nothing to support it.

All efforts were toward evangelism, with little or no follow-up, with disastrous consequences. Though I loved the people, I always felt like I was beating my head against the wall there. I cannot help but wonder how many families, like mine, who are willing to serve, the SBC churches are losing. They lost us due to their lack of attention to Christians that need mentoring so they can mature in the Spirit, and their narrow focus on "saving" souls that exhibit no changed lives after the altar. I came to feel that we were doing a disservice to the name "Christian" by pumping out so many fruitless trees.

I want to thank you for your efforts, and I hope you are successful in bringing the denomination around.

Sincerely,
J. C., via e-mail



If we would preach well to the souls of men we must acquaint ourselves with their ruined state, must have their case always on our hearts both by night and day, must know the terrors of the Lord and the value of the soul, and feel a sacred sympathy with perishing sinners. There is no masterly, prevailing preaching without this.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

