



# Reformation and Controversy

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# Reformation and Controversy in Southern Baptist Context

[Tom Ascol](#)

The winds of reformation are blowing across the Southern Baptist Convention. God is awakening many to the desperate need for renewal and revitalization in our private lives as well as in our churches. Christians within and beyond the SBC are seeing the need to reexamine popularly held opinions about the nature of salvation, the church and providence, as well as long-neglected practices such as church discipline. As any student of revival and reformation history knows, awakening never comes without controversy. Those who advocate the status quo and those who disagree with the teachings which undergird renewal will oppose the call for reformation in both belief and practice.

This happened during the two decades of the inerrancy controversy in the SBC as moderate and liberal Southern Baptists stood against the advocates of a conservative resurgence in the convention. Charges that the inerrancy movement would hinder evangelism, destroy mission work and basically unravel denominational life were frequent and vociferous. Ironically, some whose diligent efforts provoked these kinds of responses from moderates twenty years ago are now sounding similar screeds against many of their fellow conservatives who want to see reformation and renewal continue beyond a mere confession of the inerrancy of Scripture. Those who are asking what good it is to have an inerrant Bible if we are not willing to be driven by its teachings in our thoughts and actions are beginning to find themselves and their beliefs subjected to ridicule and scorn.

Being at odds with fellow believers is distasteful to every peace loving Christian. But recovering and contending for truths and principles which have been long neglected by evangelical churches always creates tension and sometimes even leads to division. As distasteful as such controversy is, it is impossible for a truth loving Christian to sit back and pretend to be in agreement with those who openly attack biblical doctrines.

It is possible, however, for lovers of both truth and peace to disagree strongly without giving vent to rancor and malevolence. Speaking the truth in love demands nothing less. Too often, however, believers tend toward one of two poles: either forsaking truth (or not defending it) for the sake of peace, or having no regard for peace out of zeal for truth. A biblically balanced Christian will have a high esteem for both truth and peace.

But truth takes priority. It did for Paul. He told Timothy to teach with the force of command those who were drifting into false doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3-4). Then he states that the goal of such teaching is love. "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). First comes doctrine--truth--then comes love.

Peter advocates the same priority. "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22). It is obedience to the *truth* that gives rise to fervent love for the brethren and the genuine desire to live in peace with them.

When Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers He did so as an expression of His larger concern for their sanctification. We become one as we are sanctified, and we are sanctified by God's truth (John 17:17). The failure of liberalism is the effort to have love and unity at the expense of truth. But "love rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). The failure of fundamentalism is the attempt to have truth without being loving or concerned with peace. Yet, it is God's truth which tells us to love one another (Matthew 22:39)--even our enemies (Matthew 5:44)--and to pursue peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14).

What does this do with the reformation that we are experiencing in the SBC and beyond? Everything. An inevitable by-

product of reformation is controversy. Every reformation and revival has had its proponents and its opponents. When the disagreements become sharp, debates arise and the parties who disagree assert their own and controvert each other's opinions.

Some controversies can be honorably avoided, and should be. It is not always necessary to contend for everything one believes, especially regarding secondary matters. Nor should all convictions be held and defended with equal vigor. Paul was ready to break fellowship with other believers over the right understanding of justification by faith (Galatians 2:1-5) but was willing to bear patiently with those who might disagree with him on other issues (Philippians 3:15).

There is a proper time and way to show deference and patience toward those with whom we disagree. Baptists have historically done this among themselves very admirably on certain details of ecclesiology and eschatology. Failure to recognize when and at what points it is appropriate to hold one's peace will lead to unnecessary conflicts. Every issue need not be viewed by truth loving Christians as a hill on which to die.

But some controversies cannot be avoided without compromising God's truth. There is a dividing character to truth. When such divisions arise, and arise because of the message and not the messenger, they are unavoidable. This fact does not make them any less painful, but it does afford comfort through knowing that God's truth has been declared and it will unfailingly accomplish His purpose. Part of the cost of reformation is the inevitable controversy which comes over the reaffirmation of truth which has been long forgotten and neglected. Unwillingness to pay that cost and to enter, however reluctantly, into inevitable controversy will short-circuit reformation efforts.

Those of us who are committed to biblical reformation meet opposition on several different fronts, but the one which is formed by fellow conservative evangelicals may be the most painful of all. These brothers and sisters, with whom we agree on many fundamental issues, are convinced that our doctrinal distinctives and spiritual goals are unwise or unbiblical or otherwise improper. What this means in the Southern Baptist context is this: those who are committed to historic Southern Baptist principles, such as a regenerate church membership, formative and corrective church discipline, and the teaching of the doctrines of grace, are beginning to be strongly opposed by fellow conservative Southern Baptists who are not committed to such practices and principles.

In fact, disparagement of the renewal of historic Southern Baptist beliefs and practices has existed from the beginning of the renewal itself. Truth always has its opponents. Hundreds of local churches have experienced this in the inevitable tensions which accompany restoration of a congregation's spiritual life. But in recent years, and especially in recent months, the frequency and intensity of opposition has dramatically increased in broader forums.

Well-known pastors and respected leaders have publicly declared their fears and concerns about the recovery of our Southern Baptist doctrinal heritage. More often than not, these public renunciations are coupled with misrepresentations and caricatures, which, if true, would be worthy of the most vitriolic condemnation. The problem is, the descriptions are completely inaccurate, misleading, and divisive.

Consider the following statements which have been made recently by two respected Southern Baptist leaders.

- In describing the historic Southern Baptist view of election, one well-known pastor said that it means this: "You are going to get saved if you are elect--no matter what--God is going to catch you, going to zap you."
- An evangelist, lamenting the fact that we baptize very few adult converts from our pagan culture, said this: "There is not a nickel's worth of difference between liberalism, five-point Calvinism and dead orthodoxy. They are all enemies of soul-winning."

Such statements, which unfortunately are being made with increasing frequency, are guilty of caricature and distortion (to say nothing of bearing false witness).

As more and more pastors and churches become committed to ongoing reformation in belief and practice, one might reasonably expect these kinds of intemperate attacks to increase. As doctrinal and spiritual renewal spreads, its opponents become more compelled to speak against it. When such opposition is coupled with gratuitous castigations (like as those cited above), there will inevitably (and rightly) be responses by those who cannot be silent while truth is under assault. Martin Luther's dictum is still valid in our day:

If I profess, with the loudest voice and clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle fields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.[\[1\]](#)

Efforts to confess Christ in this way by those who are committed to reformation are taking many forms and coming from many sectors. A survey of state Baptist newspapers will reveal that published distortions of historic Southern Baptist principles (such as unconditional election or the practice of church discipline) tend to elicit numerous letters to the editor in response. Likewise, misrepresentations that are verbally stated in public addresses are more likely to be challenged today than was true ten years ago. There are simply more Southern Baptists now than at any time in the previous generation who recognize doctrinal caricatures and historical misrepresentations when they hear them.

Some find these responses and challenges disconcerting and even accuse the challengers of stirring up controversy. Yet, the controversy which results is due to the initial attack on the truth and not to the response to that attack. Asking a lover of truth to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear when doctrines which he holds dear are misrepresented or repudiated is asking him to violate his own conscience.

The controversy which erupted between John Wesley and George Whitefield illustrates this point. These two great revival leaders worked together during the First Great Awakening though Wesley was an Arminian and Whitefield was a Calvinist. Their differences were known to them and others, yet did not pose a barrier to their fellowship or shared labors. It was only when Wesley began to berate the doctrines of God's sovereign grace publicly that a breach occurred in their relationship.

Wesley's first salvo was his infamous sermon against predestination (entitled, "Free Grace"). He preached this message against the counsel of several friends, including Whitefield. In the sermon, Wesley said that predestination "is a doctrine full of blasphemy" which portrays Jesus Christ to be "an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity" and God "as worse than the devil." And those are some of the milder statements!

These and similar comments in other sermons provoked the ire of many who had been converted under Whitefield's ministry. Several wrote to him, encouraging him to return to England and address the issue. Initially, Whitefield's response consisted of private pleadings with Wesley. Upon hearing about the sermon against predestination, Whitefield wrote to his friend urging him not to put it into print: "Dear honoured Sir, if you have any regard for the peace of the church, keep in your sermon on predestination." Wesley disregarded this plea and went to some pains to insure its wide distribution.

After more than a year of forbearance, Whitefield finally responded publicly by publishing his open letter to John Wesley on election. In a private letter to both John and his brother, Charles, he informs them of his intentions and laments the cause which has induced this action.

Why did you throw out that bone of contention: Why did you print that sermon against predestination? Why did you, in particular, my dear brother Charles, affix your hymn and join in putting out your late hymn-book? How can you say you will not dispute with me about election, and yet print such hymns, and your brother send his sermon, against election, to Mr. Garden and others in America?

Do you not think, my dear brethren, that I must be as much concerned for truth, or what I think truth, as you? God is my judge, I always was, and hope I always shall be, desirous that you may be preferred before me. But I must preach the Gospel of Christ, and this I cannot now do without speaking of election.[\[2\]](#)

Because the truth of election had been directly attacked, Whitefield was compelled to "confess Christ" by plainly and openly proclaiming the biblical teachings on election, as he understood the doctrine.

It is tragic to see Bible believing Southern Baptists, whose lives and ministries are in many ways commendable, turn their cannons on fellow conservatives by attacking doctrines which are sincerely believed and which are at the very heart of our denomination's theological heritage. Such conduct not only fosters mistrust and disunity it also plays right into the hands of the liberals and moderates who are hanging on in the SBC.

The left wing in the convention has been dramatically reduced in size and its influence has been greatly diminished over the last ten years. But there are still some who are convinced that conservative Southern Baptists cannot go very long without turning against one another. Like hyenas hiding in the shadows, they are waiting for conservative infighting in hopes of gaining an advantage in the wake of an injurious melee.

So, what should be done? How should those who are committed to reformation in church life proceed when controversy swirls around them? First, recognize that there will be no reformation without some controversy. Avoid the naïveté of thinking otherwise. By all means, do not seek it! But when it occurs, do not be overwhelmed or dismayed and do not give up the goal of seeing biblical renewal spread in our generation.

Secondly, ruthlessly adhere to the high standard of speaking the truth in love.[\[3\]](#) Commitment to truth requires a commitment to love. Christ calls us to love even our enemies and we are especially to love the brethren. Being misrepresented or attacked provides no license to be unloving. Neither does being outnumbered or intimidated provide a license to be untruthful, or to leave truth undefended when it is subjected to caricature or distortion. When called on to confess Christ in controversy make sure that you do so in the spirit of Christ.

Thirdly, remember that if what we contend for is the cause of God and truth, then the battle is the Lord's. It is His glory and honor which are at stake. This should both energize and humble us. What higher calling can there be than to speak, live and promote the truth which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ? It is worthy of every Christian's full commitment. And why should servants complain if, in pressing their Master's cause, they are opposed by those who do not or will not understand? What matters is the increased recognition of His majesty and greatness through the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.



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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Parker Williamson, *Standing Firm: Reclaiming Christian Faith in Times of Controversy* (Springfield, Pennsylvania: PLC Publications, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>This quote and the previous information can be found in Arnold Dallimore's excellent 2 volume, *George Whitefield* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970, 1979), 1:316-19; 2:19-41. The actual quote is found on 2:41.

<sup>3</sup>See the two excellent articles which have previously appeared in this journal: Timothy George, "[Speaking the Truth in Love](#)" (*Founders Journal* 4):25-26, and Roger Nicole, "[Polemic Theology: How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us](#)" (*Founders Journal* 33): 24-35.



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# Will Calvinism Kill Evangelism?

*Ernest C. Reisinger*

The answer to the question is yes and no. Yes, it will kill unbiblical man-centered evangelism and some of the carnal unbiblical methods employed in man-centered evangelism.

No, it will not kill God-centered evangelism where biblical methods are employed in the great work of carrying out our Lord's clearest command.

Before discussing evangelism and Calvinism, it may be wise and helpful to make a few general comments in respect to some misconceptions about Calvinism. The subject is one that immediately arouses diverse feelings. There are bigots both for Calvinism and against Calvinism. The subject is also one that poses some vitally important questions that are very relevant at the present time in the SBC. I hear many sincere voices of inquiry, especially among seminary students and young pastors.

There is no doubt that the founders and faculty of our first seminary as well as the majority of early Southern Baptist ministers, were committed, experiential Calvinists.

## **Calvinists are not followers of John Calvin**

The root principles of the two great systems of theology are to be found embedded either in Calvinism or in Arminianism. However, these systems were in existence eleven hundred years before John Calvin was born. Then, these two systems were called Augustinianism and Pelagianism, so named after the two men of the fifth century who defined them. Yes, we call it Calvinism. We could, with justice, call it Augustinianism which would not mean we are following Augustine into the Roman Catholic Church but rather that we are following the principles of theology that Augustine taught. Indeed, John A. Broadus, a great Southern Baptist of the last century, was right when he said that this system goes back to the Apostle Paul. Hence, Broadus called Calvinism "that exalted system of Pauline truth."

John Calvin may well have been the man who first formulated that doctrinal principles into a formal system, but as I have said, the doctrinal principles did not originate with John Calvin or Augustine but with the apostle Paul. Therefore, Calvinists are not followers of John Calvin, but rather, we hold to the doctrinal principles that he formulated into a system of Christian doctrine. (The same thing is true of the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed; the biblical truths of the creed were systematized many years after the Apostles were gone to their reward.) Therefore, it is a serious mistake to say or imply that we are followers of John Calvin. We do not baptize infants or have anything to do with burning heretics. We can safely say Pelagianism is the ancestor of Arminianism, so Paulinism and Augustinianism are the ancestors of Calvinism.

## **The Doctrinal Foundation Upon Which Calvinism Rests Is Not Predestination**

Moreover, the foundation principle upon which the whole doctrinal system of Calvinism rests is not predestination. No, the primary teaching of Calvinism rests on a much broader basis and one which, it is not too much to say, touches the very nature and character of God. The one rock upon which Calvinism builds is that of the absolute and unlimited sovereignty of God. It is, indeed, this doctrine of divine sovereignty that is held and emphasized by Calvinism, and which forms the source from which every other principle of Calvinistic teaching is founded.

It is important that we understand that Calvinism does not center primarily on its doctrine of predestination separately considered. Predestination is simply the outworking or application of God's divine sovereignty to salvation. Calvinism asserts that the sovereignty of God is supreme in salvation as in everything else.

## Our Calvinist Baptist Heritage

In looking back to the rock from which we are hewn we cannot overlook some of our great Southern Baptist Convention fathers and leaders who were committed, articulate Calvinists.

Take Basil Manly, Sr. for example. One historian said of Manly that he played the part of a concertmaster in orchestrating the events that resulted in the call for a conservative convention of Baptists. Manly produced a strongly worded six-point resolution which led to the separation of Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists. This resolution was "passed standing and unanimously." Basil Manly was a Calvinist of the first order.

In one sermon entitled "Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity," Manly told a group of ministers:

Let us not then give up either the doctrine of human activity and responsibility, or that of the divine sovereignty and efficiency. Why should they be thought inconsistent? Or why should those who cling to one be disposed to doubt, or disbelieve, or explain away the other?

Manly continued:

The greatest reason . . . why the Christian family is divided on one or the other side rejecting one or the other of these great doctrines is that the doctrine of dependence on the Divine being, throws us constantly into the hands, and on the mercy of God. Proud man does not like it; [he] prefers to look at the other side of the subject; becomes blind, in part, by gazing at one view of the truth, alone; and forgets the Maker, in whom he lives and moves and has his being.

Consider James P. Boyce, the principal founder of our first seminary (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary). Long after Boyce's death, one of his former students, Dr. David Ramsey, gave a Founders Day address on January 11, 1924, entitled "James Petigru Boyce: God's Gentleman." A few lines from Dr. Ramsey's address will tell the story that Boyce was a committed Calvinist and that, at the same time, he loved the souls of men.

My contention is that no other theology than that of an overwhelming and soul consuming love for men will account for James P. Boyce and his career. This passionate love was the motif that directed his thinking in those early conferences and in the preparation of those papers which led to the establishment of the seminary. This purpose to help his fellow men ran through all his plans, through his conversation, his writings and his preaching and teaching as the scarlet thread that runs through every foot of cable of the English Navy. This zeal for souls called out the finest of his being as the morning sun causes the dew-laden flowers and plants to bend toward the god of day.

His love for his fellow man was such that, after Boyce died, Rabbi Moses of Louisville said about him,

Before I came to Louisville, I knew Christianity only in books, and it was through such men as Boyce that I learned to know it as a living force. In that man I learned not only to comprehend, but to respect and reverence the spiritual power called Christianity.

Boyce not only loved men, he loved God. Ramsey said, concerning this point,

Let the thought embrace both the subjective and objective love; man's love for God and God's love for man." Boyce's close friend and fellow founder of the seminary, John A. Broadus, expressed his own feelings about the theology of Boyce which we call Calvinism: It was a great privilege to be directed and upborne by such a teacher in studying that exalted system of Pauline truth which is technically called Calvinism, which compels an earnest student to profound thinking, and when pursued with a combination of systematic thought and fervent experience, makes him at home among the most inspiring and ennobling views of God and the universe He has made.

Boyce's legacy to us and to our posterity is the biblical theology expressed in the *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, which is nothing other than his classroom teaching. It is pure Calvinism.

In defense of Boyce's Calvinism, William A. Mueller, author of *A History of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, said,

As a theologian, Dr. Boyce is not afraid to be found 'in the old paths.' He is conservative, and eminently scriptural. He treats with great fairness those whose views upon various points discussed, he declines to accept, yet in his own teaching is decidedly calvinistic, after the model of 'the old divines.' Difficulties as connected with such doctrines as the federal headship of Adam, election and the atonement he aims to meet, not so as to silence the controversialist, but so as to help the honest inquirer.

Rev. E. E. Folk, in the Baptist Reflector commented on Boyce's abilities and fruits as a teacher of theology:

You had to know your systematic theology, or you could not recite it to Dr. Boyce. And though the young men were generally rank Arminians when they came to the seminary, few went through this course under him without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views.

Boyce and Manly were strong Calvinists. They were not alone. Their theology was no anomaly in early Southern Baptist life. W. B. Johnson, first President of the SBC, was a Calvinist. R. B. C. Howell, second President of the SBC, was a Calvinist. Richard Fuller, third President of the SBC, was a Calvinist. Charles Dutton Mallary, first recording secretary of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, was a Calvinist. So was B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Patrick Hues Mell, President of the SBC for seventeen years, longer than any other man, was a polemic defender of Calvinism.

Mrs. D. B. Fitzgerald, a member of Mell's Antioch Church in Oglethorpe, Georgia and a resident in Mell's home for a number of years, recalls Mell's initial efforts at the church:

When first called to take charge of the church, Dr. Mell found it in a sad state of confusion. He said a number of members were drifting off into Arminianism. He loved the truth too well to blow hot and cold with the same breath. It was a Baptist church and it must have doctrines peculiar to that denomination preached to it. And with that boldness, clearness, and vigor of speech that marked him, he preached to them the doctrines of predestination, election, free-grace, etc. He said it was always his business to preach the truth as he found it in God's Word, and leave the matter there, feeling that God would take care of the results. (*The Life of Patrick Hues Mell*, pp. 59.)

I could go on and on giving names and biographical sketches of our Founding Fathers who were equally committed Calvinists and strong on evangelism, but I will just name one more. Dr. John A. Broadus, a great preacher and one of the founders of our mother seminary said,

The people who sneer at what is called Calvinism might as well sneer at Mont Blanc. We are not bound in the least to defend all of Calvin's opinions or actions, but I do not see how anyone who really understands the Greek of the Apostle Paul, or the Latin of Calvin or Turretin, can fail to see that these latter did but

interpret and formulate substantially what the former teachers taught.

Let me summarize by pointing out five things that Calvinism is not.

1. Calvinism is not anti-missionary, but gives the biblical foundation for missions. John 6:37; 17:20, 21; 2 Tim. 2:10; Isa. 55:11; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15.
2. Calvinism does not destroy the responsibility of man. Men are responsible for whatever light they have, be it conscience (Rom. 2:15), nature (Rom.1:19, 20), written law (Rom. 2:17-27), or the gospel (Mark 16:15, 16). Man's inability to do righteousness no more frees from responsibility than does Satan's inability to do righteousness.
3. Calvinism does not make God unjust. His blessing of a great number of unworthy sinners with salvation is no injustice to the rest of the unworthy sinners. If a governor pardons one convict, is it an injustice to the rest? (1 Thess. 5:9).
4. Calvinism does not discourage convicted sinners, but welcomes them to Christ. "Let him that is athirst come" (Rev. 17:17). The God who convicts is the God who saves. The God who saves is the God who has elected men unto salvation. He is the same God who invites.
5. Calvinism does not discourage prayer. To the contrary, it drives us to God, for He it is who alone can save. True prayer is at the Spirit's prompting; and thus will be in harmony with God's will (Rom. 8:16).

Calvinism is authentically, historically Baptist. Unlike the liberal movement, the Charismatic movement, the Dispensational or the Keswick movements, Calvinism is the only one that can claim to be endemic to our Baptist history, heritage, and teaching. Until this last century with its pragmatism, Southern Baptists and their progenitors have always been Calvinists. The present day resurgence of Calvinism is simply an effort to restore our theological past, which will have a profound effect on our evangelism.

## **What About Calvinism and Evangelism?**

First, what is evangelism? Evangelism is the communication of a divinely inspired message that we call the gospel. It is a message that is definable in words, but must be communicated in word and power. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance..." (1 Thess. 1:5). That message begins with information and includes explanation, application and invitation.

The information is how God, our Creator and Judge, in mercy, made His Son a perfect, able and willing Savior of sinners. The invitation is God's summons to mankind to come to that Savior in faith and repentance, and find forgiveness, life and peace.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment (1 John 3:23). Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:29).

One definition of evangelize is as follows: "To present Jesus Christ to sinful men, in order that they may come to put their trust in God, through Him to receive Him as their Savior and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church."[\[1\]](#) You will notice that this definition includes the church. Our Lord gave the commission to the church.

# Evangelism Must Have a Doctrinal Foundation

The doctrinal foundation for biblical evangelism is as important to the work of evangelism as the skeleton is to the human body. Doctrine gives unity and stability. It is the doctrinal foundation that produces the spiritual strength that enables evangelism to endure the storms of opposition, hardship and persecution that so often accompanies true evangelism and missions. Therefore, the church that neglects the true doctrinal foundation for biblical evangelism will soon find its efforts weakened and spurious conversions will be produced. The lack of a doctrinal foundation will work against unity and will invite error and instability in all evangelistic efforts. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of a sound biblical foundation for true God-centered evangelism.

Doctrine shapes our destiny, and we are presently reaping the fruits of unbiblical evangelism. The great apostle, instructing a young minister to do the work of an evangelist, tells him that doctrine is the first purpose of Scripture. 2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for DOCTRINE." Evangelism without a doctrinal foundation is building on the sand (cf. Matt. 7:24-26). It is like cut flowers stuck in the ground without doctrinal roots; they will wither and die. Calvinists have a doctrinal foundation for evangelism.

The doctrinal foundation of God-centered evangelism guarantees its success. First, because God the Father has some chosen ones:

- John 1:18 "I know whom I have chosen"
- John 15:16 "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."
- Eph. 1:4 "Even as He chose us in Him."
- 1 Thess. 2:13 "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation."
- John 6:37, 39, 44, 64, 65: "All that which the Father gives me shall come to me... this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he has given me I should lose nothing... No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him..."

That sounds to me like a guarantee of success!

The second guarantee of success is found in the fact that God the Father gave his Son, the Great Shepherd, some sheep and the Great Shepherd made atonement for the sheep that the Father gave Him.

The atonement that we are considering is a planned atonement--the cross was not an accident. God planned it. He was not sleeping or caught off guard at the cross. He had an unchangeable, immutable plan, and it was being carried out. The apostle Peter preached this as part of his first message: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

The apostles not only preached it; they prayed it. Hear their prayer in Acts 4:27-29: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, *for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*". God was the master of ceremonies at the cross.

Jesus also taught that God the Father had an unchangeable, immutable plan and power to execute it:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the

Father's will which hath sent me, that *of all which he hath given me*, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:38, 39).

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the *sheep* (John 10: 11).

I know my *sheep* (John 10:14-15).

Jesus makes clear why some do not believe on Him. Have you ever wondered why some do not believe? Well, Jesus answers that question here:

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my *sheep*, as I said unto you (John 10:26).

He describes two characteristics of His *sheep*:

My *sheep hear* my voice [a disposition to know His will], and they *follow* me [a disposition to do His will] (John 10:27).

This truth, that the atonement was for the sheep, is underscored by our Lord's prayer found in John 17. Hear His prayer: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal *life to as many as thou hast given him*" (John 17:2). "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but *for them which thou hast given me*, for they are thine" (John 17:9). "Father, I will that they also, *whom thou hast given me*, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast *given* me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

This view of the extent of the atonement makes the cross a place of victory, because what the Father planned, the Son purchased, and these He prays for. This is consistent with that great declaration in that messianic prophesy of His coming: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11).

Jesus teaches the same thing in John 6:37: "All that the Father *giveth* me *shall come* to me..." Not, maybe they will come, or, it would be nice if they came, or, if they decide they will come, but rather, "*shall come*." This, then, is an important element of the message of the cross, the message of evangelism. This means that Christ's death was not in vain, but rather, everyone for whom He savingly died, *will come*. It is interesting to note that when the angel announced His birth to Joseph, the angel was straight on this point: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name *Jesus*: for he shall *save his people* from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Please note the text says, "*save his people*," not every single individual, but *His people--the sheep*.

God used the fact that He had some people, some sheep, to encourage the evangelizing of that wicked city of Corinth. The great apostle was afraid to go to Corinth, and God encouraged him by saying, "...be not afraid... for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much *people* in this city" (Acts 18:9, 10).

1. His coming was *for His people* (Matt. 1:21): "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."
2. His purchase on the Cross was for the *sheep--His people* (John 10:11, 14, 15): "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."
3. His prayer was for *all that the Father gave Him* (John 17:2, 9): "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that

he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him... I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast *given* me; for they are thine."

Is this the message of the cross that you have heard? A Christ whose death is not in vain and will not fail to accomplish all that was intended? Or, have you heard the message of a poor, impotent, pathetic, and sometimes, effeminate Jesus who died just to make salvation possible and who is standing impotently by, waiting to see what these mighty, powerful sinners are going to do with Him?

This is not just a different emphasis. It is a different content of the message of evangelism. The biblical gospel is God-centered, God-honoring, and good to sinners. God-centered evangelism has a doctrinal foundation, and this foundation guarantees its success. If your concept of Calvinism kills evangelism, I suggest that you examine your understanding and study J. I. Packer's book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, Walter Chantry's, *Today's Gospel* and my book, *Today's Evangelism, Its Message and Methods*. These books can be obtained from Christian Gospel Book Service, Cape Coral, FL.



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<sup>1</sup>J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press). This book is highly recommended.



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# Outward and Effectual Calling: A Doctrinal Study

*James P. Boyce*

The following article is adapted from [Chapter 31](#) of Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. This book is based primarily on Boyce's classroom lectures on systematic theology delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the first twenty-five years of its existence.

The atoning work of Christ was not sufficient for the salvation of men. That work was only Godward, and removed only all the obstacles in the way of God's pardon of the sinner. But the sinner is also at enmity with God, and must be brought to accept salvation, and must learn to love and serve God.

The first step here is to make known to man the gospel, which contains the glad tidings of this salvation, under such influences as ought to lead to its acceptance. The Gospel is, therefore, commanded to be proclaimed to every creature, inasmuch as there is in the work of Christ a means of redemption for every one.

This is the external call of the Gospel. This proclamation, however, meets with no success because of the willful sinfulness of man, although, in itself, it has all the elements which should secure its acceptance.

God knowing that this is true, not only of all mankind in general, but even of the elect whom he purposes to save in Christ, gives to these such influences of the Spirit as will lead to their acceptance of the call. This is called Effectual Calling.

## **1. The Gospel is commanded to be preached to all. This is proved.**

1) By such passages as show that the outward privileges of God's word are no longer to be confined to Israel, but are to be extended to the Gentiles also. This had been foretold in prophecy (Gen. 18:18; 26:4; Psalm 2:8; Isa. 42:1-4; 49:6, 7, 8; 55:5; 60:3; 65:1-12; Jer. 16:19; Mal. 1:11). It is also taught in the New Testament in various ways (Matt. 8:11-13; 12:18-21; 21:33-41; 22:1; 28:19; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 4:20-27; 14:16-24; 20:9-16; John 3:16; 4:20, 21, 39).

2) By the history of the extension of this gospel to the Gentiles by the Apostles and their contemporaries, who so preached it, as to show that the Gentiles were not first to become Jews in order to be made partakers of that gospel.

- Acts 10th Chapter. Peter sent to Cornelius.
- Acts 11:1-18. Peter's report of that visit.
- Acts 11:19-30. The gospel sent to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.
- Acts 13th Chapter. The labors of Paul and his companions.
- Acts 15th Chapter. The conference at Jerusalem.

- Rom. 1:13-16, and generally the whole of the epistle and of Paul's other epistles to the churches, especially Galatians.

The above two classes of passages serve to show how the universal preaching of the gospel was impressed upon the early Christians, and consequently that they would be led to give full meaning to other unlimited expressions.

3) By such passages as directed the gospel to be preached to all (Mark 16:15; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13).

4) By such as show the freeness with which salvation was offered to all as individuals (Acts 2:39; 11:14; 16:31; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 1:15; Tit. 2:11; Rev. 22:17).

5) [The fact that] [t]he restrictions which separated the Jews and the Gentiles being removed, the universal offers of salvation made previously to the Jews, may now be applied to all men in general (Isaiah 1:18; 55:1-7; Ezek. 18:21, 32; 33:11).

6) ) [The fact that] [t]he language of Christ to those to whom he spoke may also be thus applied (Matt. 11:28; John 7:37).

The above classes of passages show that this call of the gospel is made indiscriminately to all men. No differences of nation, or class, or condition; no question as to election, or non-election, nor as to the purpose to make it effectual, enters into this call. It is made to every one. Nothing is known to those who are to proclaim the gospel which can make its offer to one any more sincere than to another. Whatever differences men may make from personal feeling, or national sympathy, or local attachment, are not only not commanded by it, but are often inconsistent with it.

## **2. This offer of the gospel meets of itself with no success.**

1) The testimony of all who have preached it has been that, without special influence of grace from God, the preaching has been in vain. The prayers made to God constantly for such aid furnish universal evidence of such convictions.

2) The same testimony is as universally given by those who have received the gospel. Each one ascribes his salvation to the special influences of God.

3) This also is the teaching of the Scriptures which declare this fact. Eph. 2:8 is only a specimen of the universal teaching, which will appear more fully elsewhere.

## **3. This failure is not due to any deficiency in the gospel.**

1) None can doubt the fullness of the scheme of redemption contained.

2) None can question the facts as to personal sin and need of Christ which are made known.

3) None can deny the freeness with which it is offered.

4) No one can deny that he is one of those to whom it is offered.

5) All persons admit that God will give it to any who will forsake sin and strive to lead a new life trusting him for help.

6) Every one is convinced that he can turn away from all acts of sin and live the contrary life of holiness and obedience, if he will.

7) It is universally acknowledged that God is worthy to be believed in every statement he makes.

It is because of the above and kindred facts that our Lord says, [in] John 12:48, "The word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day."

**4. The Scriptures teach us why this word is rejected. It is not from want of evidence, nor from intellectual doubt, but always because of something sinful, either in the heart or will.**

Some of the reasons which the Scriptures thus give are presented in Hill's Bible Readings, p. 99, as follows:

1) Pride, which may be national, Matt. 3:9; John 8:33; Acts 13:45; 17:5; 22:21, 22; intellectual, Matt. 11:25; John 9:39-41; Rom. 1: 21, 22; 1 Cor. 1:19-21; or social, John 7:48.

2) Self-righteousness (Mark 2:16; Luke 7:39; 18:10-14; Rom. 10:3).

3) Love of praise (John 5:44; 12:43).

4) Love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15).

5) Love of money (Mark 10:17-24; Luke 16:13, 14; 1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

6) Cares of the world (Matt. 13:7-22; Luke 10:40).

7) Fear of man (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42).

8) Worldly self-interest (Mark 5:16, 17; John 11:48).

9) Unwillingness to separate from impenitent friends (Luke 9:59-62).

10) Unwillingness to believe what they cannot understand (John 3:9; 6:52-60; Acts 17:32; 1 Cor. 2:14).

11) Unwillingness to have their sins exposed (John 3:19-20).

12) Unwillingness to submit to God's authority (Luke 19:14; 20:9-18).

13) Prejudice against the messenger (Matt. 12:24; 13:57; John 1:46; 6:42; 7:52; 9:29).

- 14) Spiritual blindness (Matt. 13:15; 1 Cor. 2:14).
- 15) Unfaithfulness to the light which they had (John 12:36).
- 16) Waiting for a convenient season (Acts 24:25).
- 17) Frivolous excuses (Luke 14:18).
- 18) Lack of deep convictions (Matt. 13:5; 22:5).
- 19) Lack of earnestness (Luke 13:24).
- 20) Neglect of the Bible (Luke 24:25; John 5:39; 7:27; Acts 17:11-12).
- 21) Neglect of religious meetings (John 20:24).
- 22) Blindness to special opportunities (Luke 19:44).
- 23) Desire for special signs (Matt. 12:38, 39; 16:1-4; John 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22).
- 24) Regard for human traditions (Matt. 15:9; Mark 2:23-28).
- 25) Insincerity (Matt. 15:7-8; 21:25-31; Acts 24:26).
- 26) A controversial spirit (Matt. 22:15-40).
- 27) A murmuring spirit (Matt. 25:24).
- 28) Having no desire for God (John 5:42; Rom. 1:28).
- 29) Hatred of God and of Christ (John 15:22-25).
- 30) Hatred of the truth (Acts 7:51-54; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:3).
- 31) The power of the devil (Matt. 13:4-19; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:3, 4).

##### **5. The offer of the gospel thus referred to is denominated the External Call.**

It is made to man through the senses, and consists in a declaration of the nature of salvation and an offer of it upon the conditions of faith and repentance. It is enforced by statements as to the sinful condition of man and his need of a Saviour; by the command of God to repent and believe; and by exhortations and threats, as inducements to the acceptance of salvation through it. It is spoken of in the Scriptures, as a call, in passages which have no reference to

its becoming effectual, and in some which contrast it with the effectual calling of others (Prov. 1:24; Isa. 65:12; Matt. 9:13).

**6. But, in contrast with this usage, is the more common one, by which the called in the Scriptures are those who are actually brought to the reception of the truth and participation in salvation.**

1) In those passages which speak to church members of their calling as something different from the mere outward call (Rom. 8:30; 9:11-24; 1 Cor. 1:9-26; Gal. 1:6-15; 1 Thess. 2:12; 5:24; 2 Thess. 2:14; Eph. 1:18; 4:1-4, 5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-10).

2) Christian believers are spoken of as the called (Rom. 1:6; 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:24; Heb. 9:15; Rev. 17:14).

**7. The effectual call of these is due to the purpose and act of God (Matt. 11:25; Rom. 8:29, 30; Rom. 9:15, 16; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).**

**8. The agent by which this is accomplished is the Holy Spirit by whose influences the saved are led to the exercise of repentance and faith (John 6:44, 46; 1 Thess. 1:5, 6).**

**9. Such an agency is necessary to overcome the moral condition of man as "blind" and "dead in trespasses and sins" (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1, 5).**

**10. In connection with this doctrine of the Effectual Calling of some, has arisen a question as to the sincerity of God in making the outward call to those who do not accept. It is said that the fact that it is made by him, knowing that men will not accept it without his efficient grace, and yet not purposing to give that grace, argues insincerity in the offer.**

**To this the following replies may be made:**

1) If it be true that he does make the outward call, and does not give to all, but to some only, the efficient grace, the very character of God is an assurance of his sincerity. The real question here, then, is an inquiry into these two facts. If they be taught in the Scriptures, it is impious and blasphemous to doubt God's sincerity.

2) This inquiry would never have arisen, had God only made the general offer and left all men to perish in its rejection. But, if so, his additional grace to some does not in any respect argue his insincerity in the partial grace thus shown to others.

3) The very nature of the gospel offer, as before stated, shows God's sincerity. It is one which has all the inducements for its acceptance which one can imagine, and that acceptance depends simply upon the willingness of each man to take it.

4) Lest any should doubt the sincerity of God, he assures us of that fact in his word. Paul describes him, 1 Tim. 2:4, as one "who willeth that all men should be saved." God himself says, Ezek. 33:10, 11: "And thou, son of man, say unto the house of Israel: Thus ye speak, saying, Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we pine away in them; how then should we live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Compare this with Heb. 6:13-18: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men swear by the greater; and in every dispute of theirs the oath is final for confirmation. Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

**11. The attempt has been made by Lutheran theologians, and adopted by some others, to harmonize the sincerity of God's External Call with the salvation of some only, by supposing that God gives equally to all his Spirit, which makes salvation effectual in some, but that those who reject the gospel resist the Spirit given to them, and thus refuse, while the others yield to it, and thus are saved. They say, therefore, that it is thus true that all have the Spirit equally, and yet that the salvation of the saved may be said to be by the grace of God.**

The natural objection to this explanation is that not only is the salvation of men ascribed to grace, but to grace alone, to the exclusion of all merit and work. See Rom. 3:27 to 4:25; 9:11 and Gal. 2:16. But if some do not resist and others do, however much of grace there is, there is certainly some merit in those not resisting by which they can boast over others who resisted. Notice especially Rom. 4:16, "For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed."

Another objection is that the salvation of the saved is distinctly based in the word of God on the Election of some: "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:4, 5, 6).



# Whom He Did Foreknow: Observations on Romans 8:29

*Roy Beaman*

(This article was given to the Associate Editor by the author nearly twenty years ago on the campus of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee.)

These words suggest three distinct ideas--the objects, the Author, and the act of foreknowing. The first and third of these are especially debated. The second is clear. Yet the fact that God is the One Who did it proves that man did not do it. It could not, therefore, refer to some condition or act foreseen in the creature. No theory of the meaning of the other parts must be allowed to nullify the positiveness of this.

Some claim that "foreknow" means those He foreknew would repent and believe. Some, too, claim that this is general, not specific and individual. They say that He foreknew a nation or class, as the class that would repent and believe. The issue is: Does the word mean mere foresight or prescience?

Even a casual reader can see that the same "whom" that He foreknew, He predestinated, called, justified, and glorified. Stifler says, "This verse presents an argument by means of the recurring words 'whom' and 'them.' These are also links in the chain, forged in with it. 'Whom,' He did foreknow, 'them,' all of them, He did 'predestinate.' The next 'whom' takes up the same persons and carries them to the next stage, and so on to the end. The argument, when condensed, comes to this: that the very ones He foreknew, these, without the loss of one, He glorified." The chain of grace continues through its five links, and the iteration of the word "whom" shows that it affects the same persons in every particular phase of its work.

We may safely interpret the acts of eternity past by what we experience in time. The calling and justification are individual and personal; so will our glorification be. This shows that the foreknowing and the predestinating, two phases of election, are personal.

The word "foreknow" cannot mean mere foresight or prescience. To claim such is to face the inescapable dilemma: either limit the omniscience of God or teach the glorification of all men. The absurdity of universal salvation is evident. If our word, therefore, means mere prescience, God does not know all things and persons, for all He foreknew will be ultimately glorified. No truth is more assuredly taught in Scripture than that God knows all things--previously, intuitively, instantly, perfectly, universally. Abandon your view or accept one horn of your own dilemma.

To read "whom He did foreknow would repent and believe" is to commit two grievous sins. They are: reading into the passage what is wholly without warrant in the context; contradicting Pauline teaching that we are called "not according to our works but according to His Own purpose and grace" 2 Tim. 1:9.

We repeat: To condition foreknowledge on foreseen repentance and faith is to ground it on character and subvert the whole and chief contention of Romans. Shedd, "God's electing love is His compassion and not His complacent delight in spiritual excellence and holiness." Stifler, "What His prescience saw in all men was enmity and helplessness in sin because of a love of it." Plainly, He foresaw that none would repent and believe and graciously provided in "His purpose" (verse 28) for this. The following links in the chain of His purpose secure what man had

not and could not produce, that is, repentance and faith. Had not the acts of predestination, calling and justification procured these to a numberless multitude, all men would still be seen as inpenitent and unbelieving.

We submit a safe principle of interpretation. If the obvious meaning of a word will not make sense, seek another meaning from passages using the same word. "Foreknow" as prescience falls down here; nothing is plainer to a candid mind. Romans 11:2 uses the same word, "God hath not cast away His people Whom He foreknew." But an omniscient God knows beforehand all nations. He knew Israel as the nation which He had loved and upon which He had lavished His love and care. Deuteronomy 7:7-8, "Jehovah did not set His love upon you nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because Jehovah loved you and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath Jehovah brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt." Nothing is plainer than that nothing foreseen in them led Him to choose but His sovereign love. Such is the meaning of "foreknow" in our text.

It means the same as Exodus 2:25, "And God looked upon the children of Israel and God had respect unto them (margin, knew them)." The reason for God's lovingly foreknowing is found in Himself alone, not at all in the one foreknown.

"Foreknow" means the same as "know" in Psalm 1:6. "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." No one would claim that there is a blank place in the mind of God in not foreseeing the way of the wicked. He knows beforehand all things good and bad. He knows the way of the righteous in the sense of caring for and setting His affection upon their way. All that they do concerns Him. Therefore, God foreknew some in the sense of making them objects of His love and concern and will finally bring the same number to salvation in time through repentance and faith and to glory in the future.

"Foreknow" and "know" in the New Testament passages given below are manifest Hebraisms. That is, the mind of Paul was influenced in this use of "foreknow" by the Hebrew and Septuagint meaning of "know." "Know" often in the Old Testament means "to care for, to regard favorably, to manifest concern in." Turn to these and read them. Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Genesis 4:1; Jeremiah 1:5; Hosea 13:5; Amos 3:2; Matthew 7:23; 1 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:19.

We conclude our study by quoting from fourteen scholars who tell us what "foreknow" means in Romans 8:29.

Brown in Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown, "His peculiar, gracious, complacency in them."

Godet, "Those on whom His eyes fixed from all eternity with love; whom He eternally contemplated and discerned as His." Pareus, "To love, to care for."

Shedd, "To fix the eye upon ... with the additional notion of a benignant and kindly feeling toward the object." Charles Hodge, "The fixing the mind upon."

Stifler, "Took note of them." Forrester, it "carries with it the idea of fellowship or approval."

Cremer, "To unite oneself before with some one." Hovey, "An approbation or choice from beforehand."

MacKenzie in *The Westminster New Testament*, "To regard favorably." W. H. Griffith Thomas, "God fixed His

regard on them, noted them with favor."

Haldane, "Before loved or acknowledged." Garvie, "Looked favorably on and marked out for blessing."

Denney in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, "Foreknow has the pregnant sense that 'I know' often has in Scripture; e. g., in Psalm 1:6; Amos 3:2; hence we may render, 'those of whom God took knowledge from eternity.'"

Note several translations and one extra commentary. I place the Williams translation last because I think it most nearly catches the Greek idea.

"Those whom He chose from the first" (Beck). "For those whom He had marked out from the first" (Goodspeed).

"For He decreed of old" (Moffatt). "Foredecision--no more foreknowledge of what they would do, but rather what He would do for them" (Moule).

"Because those whom He gave His first recognition" (New World). "For whom He fore-approved" (Rotherham). "For those whom God chose from the first" (*Twentieth Century New Testament*).

"Those whom God had already chosen" (*Today's English Version*). "For those He had in view" (Schonfield). "For those on whom He set His heart beforehand" (Williams).



## Book Review

*Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, edited by Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson; Baker Books, 1999, 271 pp. \$19.99.

Reviewed by [Stephen Haines](#)

This large format book (8.5" x 11") offers the reader a convenient way to compare seven of the most important Reformed confessional standards in parallel columns. From the Swiss family of documents, Beeke and Ferguson have chosen the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566; the Dutch-German tradition is represented by the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618-1619). The editors have chosen from the Scottish-English heritage the Westminster Confession of Faith and the related Shorter and Larger Catechisms (1647).

The brief historical introduction to the Reformed confessions is an aid to those of us not as familiar with the Swiss and Dutch-German traditions as we are with the English confessional history.

The harmonization follows the order of subjects of the Belgic Confession, the oldest confession used in the comparison. The most standard English translations have been used with minimal updating of spelling and punctuation. The editors believe that "this harmony will promote easy access to the content of great Reformed confessions and will also help Dutch Reformed, Hungarian Reformed, English Presbyterian, and other Reformed Christians gain a deeper appreciation for one another's confessions." The major divisions are: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

Theology includes the being and attributes of God, Scripture, the Trinity, and God's decrees and predestination. Anthropology includes the harmonization of sections dealing with free will and inability. Soteriology includes the sections dealing with the law, assurance, and Christian liberty.

The parallel columns include the Scripture references and footnotes that appear in the various confessions and catechisms. By necessity the page layout is not uniform, as the seven documents treat subjects with differing emphases and elaboration.

The 24 page Selected Bibliography is especially welcome and useful. Beeke offers his opinion on the relevant literature for each of the 37 articles of the Belgic Confession. Each article ends with several suggested works that provide a sound starting point. Perhaps the author will publish this bibliography separately to help all of us quickly locate the most helpful works on each subject.



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## News

### Boards don't send missionaries

"Two years ago I came to work for the North American Mission Board and, as a lifelong Southern Baptist, I presumed that sending missionaries to the field was the agency's primary work. Now I know I had things a little backward. It's not the role of a national agency to send missionaries--that's the job of individual churches. The national agency just helps with things like salaries, health benefits and building the infrastructure that helps make possible the mission work accomplished so effectively by others."

--Michael Ebert, Publishing Director for *On Mission* ("Who Needs a Mission Board?" *On Mission*, March-April 2000, p. 27).

### Resolution Affirming the Unlimited Atonement

A group calling themselves Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists wrote a resolution with the above title for the purpose of submitting it to the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma during their annual meeting last November (1999). For reasons unknown, the MOB did not present the resolution to the convention, though they did print it in its entirety in their newsletter, the *Mainstream Messenger* (Vol. 2, No. 5, Nov. 1999). The fifth of six "whereas" clauses states this: "And whereas, an increasing number of Baptists are promoting the doctrine of limited atonement through the 'Southern Baptist Founders Conference.'" The resolution goes on to call for assurance "that no Oklahoma Baptist University faculty member or Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma employee shall be required to affirm the doctrine of limited atonement." One is left to wonder if such a requirement has ever even entered into the imagination of anyone outside the MOB.

Elsewhere in the newsletter an attempt is made to identify the doctrines of "five point Calvinism." The editor is "0 for 5" in his effort. Unconditional election is explained by claiming that "God chose some to be saved (the elect) with no regard to faith. Salvation is not received by faith as a response to God's love." Regarding particular redemption, readers are told, "L = limited atonement. Christ did not die for everyone. His atonement was limited to the elect. Some people are predestined to be 'damned'" (p. 3). Such incredible misrepresentations ought to serve as a strong warning against MOB theology.

### Wanted:

God-centered pastor/church planter to found a new work in the Orlando metropolitan area. A network of historic Southern Baptist sponsoring churches is being formed. If God is leading you to explore either leading your church to partner in this reformation effort or if you know of a man of God to lead such a work, please contact Rod Fultz, Greater Orlando Baptist Association (407) 461-3155, [rfultz@goba.org](mailto:rfultz@goba.org).



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## Letters

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We received three boxes of materials today. I was blown over by your generosity. Some guys came by today and picked up some of the journals and were like kids in a candy store. You will never know what good will come from this material that you supplied. We will try to be good stewards of your confidence. Will also get some of the ads for the SBFC onto the campus and mail some to the pastors we know in the area. We had to make a trip to Mt. Zion again this week and get more material. The Spurgeon's catechism seems to be well received as well as Pink's works and C. H. Spurgeon. Several have expressed thanks for the starting of this ministry. We had 14 at a Bible study on Wednesday and are planning a fellowship meeting tonight (Saturday). Who knows what the Lord has in mind?! There seems to be a real hunger and openness for the Historic Baptist doctrines on the campus. Continue to pray for us that we may have wisdom in all we do. Again, our sincere thanks for your help.

By His grace,  
C. P., via e-mail

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... I do appreciate the *Founders Journal* for the stand that is taken on Evangelical and Reformed truth. I find the articles relevant to the spiritual trends of the times. It is very refreshing and stimulating in today's secular humanism to have a magazine that is sound biblically, and that brings us back to the truth.

To all your contributors, be encouraged, your words do not fall to the ground, nor is your labor in vain.

God bless you all.

Yours warmly  
Through grace alone,  
B. S., Sydney, Australia

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*Founders Journal,*

Please take me off of your mailing list. I no longer embrace the heretical teaching. I "study to show myself approved, and RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD OF TRUTH." Do not send me anymore materials.

Thanks.

T. H., Brazoria, TX

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I am sending this check to purchase a copy of Dr. Nesom's new book *Be Sure What You Believe*. I will soon be starting as an Associate Pastor at my local church, and I have been searching for a good book to use for doctrinal training. Our church is unfortunately typical in its neglect of doctrine: neglect of the Word. (God, forgive us!) But our pastor loves God and is preaching His Word to the church--so, God is at work. Pray for us as we seek to become obedient to Scripture and more faithful in our witness. I praise God for your ministry.

S.A., North Carolina

P. S. There really are fellow Calvinistic Baptists here at Southeastern Seminary! Not a majority by any means, but there are some of us!

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Dear Sirs,

I received my first issues of *Founders Journal* and read through both at one sitting. These articles completely reflect my own heart on Scripture and the interpretation thereof and where we as Baptists need to go if we recover our power, effectiveness, and heritage.

As a pastor, I was/am very interested in securing *Be Sure What You Believe* by Joe Nesom. I feel this book will help me to articulate the Doctrines of the Faith to those whom God has given me charge.

Thanks.

In Christ Jesus,  
R. S., Dallas, TX

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Just a note to let you know how impressed I am in the midst of my first visit to your magnificent website. I know that I shall return again and again until I have down-loaded, printed-out, and/or memorized every nook and cranny thereof.

... I just recently acquired an on-line computer and ISP service about the first of February and have spent a lot of time breaking things and getting lost. Now I am beginning to feel like I can put away my white-tipped cane and do some serious searching and studying. I have already found Family Radio, Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin, Ligonier (R. C. Sproul), and another one or two that I've forgotten, but *Founders* seems just like home.

In Christ's service, and may God bless all of you at *Founders Journal*.

R. D. A., via e-mail



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