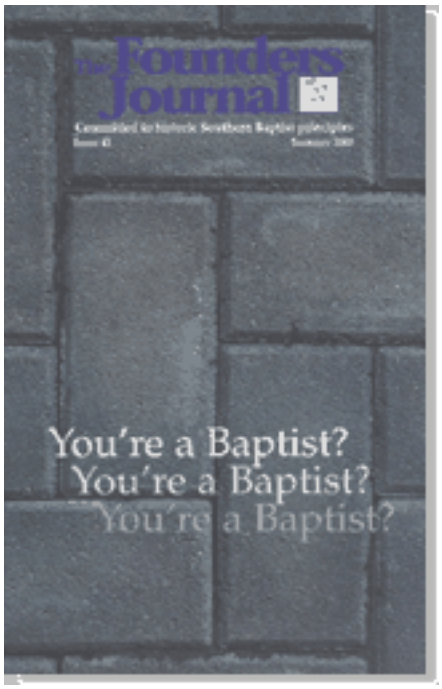

You're A Baptist?

Issue 41

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The 2000 BF&M and the Reduction of the Lord's Day

Tom Ascol

Southern Baptists adopted significant changes to the *Baptist Faith and Message* statement during the 2000 convention which met in Orlando last June. The study committee which proposed the revisions was chaired by Dr. Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee. Rogers and his committee are to be commended for their work. All of their recommendations were approved by messengers at the convention.

Most of the changes are welcomed revisions to a confession that has been used as a wax nose to fit almost any theological face among Southern Baptists over the last 30 years. Notably, the opening article on Scripture was strengthened by removing some of the neo-orthodox wiggle-room from the language. Article 6, on the Church, was also improved by specifically stating that "the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

Language in other articles, however, was unfortunately left unchanged. Thus the *BF&M* 2000 still regards justification as God's "gracious and full acquittal" based upon "*principles* of His righteousness" rather than declaring that it is upon the actual righteousness of Christ (emphasis added). Also, in article 3 man's fall into sin is still regarded as an act "whereby his posterity inherit a nature and environment inclined toward sin," keeping the language of the 1963 statement, rather than reverting back to the 1925 statement which declares man's fall as an act "whereby his posterity inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin, are under condemnation …."

These lack of changes are somewhat understandable. They represent missed opportunities, perhaps, but also must be seen in light of the political and theological context of the SBC. The convention has a long way to go before churches and pastors once again value theological precision. Leaving weak language unchanged while strengthening a few select areas may have been a most prudent decision by the study committee. When a majority of church leaders cannot even give a biblical definition of justification, it is probably wise not to bring up a discussion of imputation.

However, while allowing for the choice to leave some loose language unchanged and applauding those changes which did make the *BF&M* stronger, one cannot help but lament the inexplicable reduction of article 8 on the Lord's Day. This article remained virtually unchanged from 1925 to 1963 (with only the word "being" added in 1963 for grammatical clarification). The 1963 statement reads as follows:

> The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, works of necessity and mercy only being excepted.

The 2000 revision keeps the first two sentences intact. The third sentence is reduced by half, significantly diminishing the statement. A fourth sentence is added which articulates a principle, which if applied to the other articles, would make the whole confession (or any confession) unnecessary. The last two sentences of the 2000 statement say of the Lord's Day:

> It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Christ.

The change in this article appears to be an accommodation to culture, in stark contrast to the changes in the other articles. The rationale behind making any change at all to this article is hard to detect. No one was debating it publicly or speaking against it. The Lord's Day has not been a topic of controversy in our battle for the inerrancy of Scripture. Why was this issue brought to the forefront by the committee?

The proposal represents a definite break with our theological heritage as Southern Baptists. John Broadus, James Boyce, John Dagg, B. H. Carroll, Williams Rutherford, E. C. Dargan, and many other early Southern Baptist statesmen, in addition to numerous confessions of faith, can all be cited in support of regarding the Lord's Day as a special day to be set apart by Christians in order to take a break from typical, daily responsibilities, and to give oneself to concentrated efforts in worship, devotion and spiritual service. There are differences as to whether or not this day should be called the Christian Sabbath, but there is great consensus regarding the sanctity of the day itself.

Why the study committee deemed it wise to break with our heritage at this point, as it was adequately expressed in the 1963 statement, remains a mystery. Committee members have left this question unanswered. If it is because the committee believes our forefathers misunderstood the Bible at this point, then this should have been expressly stated in the presentation of their report. No one else in our Southern Baptist family, prior to the publication of the committee's proposed changes, has made this issue a matter of debate.

Some have suggested that the change is justified because there is no consensus among evangelicals in general or Southern Baptists in particular at this point. But if Southern Baptists are divided over this issue, then why hasn't it been a matter of public discussion? If the argument is that most Southern Baptists are not practicing what is confessed in the 1963 statement at this point, could not the same be said for personal witnessing (as numerous evangelism professors have repeatedly testified)? Surely we would not, on that basis, change article 11 (which claims that "it is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations") to fit our low level of practice in this area.

Southern Baptists have obviously been willing to take stands against mainstream evangelical currents in our statements on the family and male leadership in churches. At those points at which culture has clouded the thinking of fellow believers, we have been unwilling to remain silent, much less coalesce to their opinions. Yet, in a day and age when Sunday is regarded as just another day, the revision in article 8 fits perfectly into the secular mind set. As one columnist for *The Orlando Sentinel* put it, now that the NFL Tennessee Titans (based in the SBC's headquarters, Nashville) have made it to the Super Bowl, Southern Baptists have conveniently decided that "refraining from worldly amusements" on the Lord's Day is no longer advisable.

Some might argue that among our most theologically informed there is difference of opinion and therefore the revision is warranted. But all of our seminary professors have signed, without any apparent objections, a statement of faith (either the Abstract of Principles or the 1963 *BF&M*, which are almost identical) which affirms the sanctity of the day. Assuming, as we should, that on this side of the conservative resurgence in the SBC we now have professors who really believe what they sign, this strongly suggests that we do have a great degree of consensus (though not necessarily unanimity) on this issue among many of the most theologically informed Southern Baptists.

Article 8 should have remained unrevised. It was a good statement in its 1925/1963 form. Many messengers were prepared to make various amendments to the committee's proposal at this point during the convention in Orlando.

Due to a combination of poor planning by the committee on order of business (who originally allocated only 30 minutes for debate an ultimately led the convention to cut off discussion after 50 minutes), violation of parliamentarian procedure by the chairman (inadvertently allowing special preferences to one messenger and allowing those registering points of order to make motions) and questionable tactics by a moderate leader from Texas (who cut in front of other messengers to speak at a microphone and sent word to the platform that he should be acknowledged), no one who wished to speak to the issue was recognized (despite at least two messengers arriving at microphones two hours early and standing first in line for that purpose).

An amendment to retain the 1963 language might well have been adopted by the convention. The effort would have at least called attention to the most drastic change in the study committee's proposal--a change which clearly moved *BF&M* away from the historic Baptist position regarding the Lord's Day and toward the secularization of that day by American culture. Plans are being made for an amendment to reinstate the 1963 language into the Baptist Faith and Message to be proposed at the 2001 convention in New Orleans, if the Lord wills. Such an effort is worthwhile and is worthy of support by all Southern Baptists who want to confess our tenacious commitment to the Word of God at every point, regardless of the pervasive winds of secularism which are sweeping over our culture.

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Chicken Soup for the Baptist Soul: Theological Chaos at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Russell D. Moore

This article was written for *Perspectives: Journal of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Alabama* and is reprinted here with permission.

For the past twenty years, Baptist moderates have portrayed themselves as a baptized version of Ross Perot's Reform Party. They have insisted that they were a coalition of non-ideological dissidents pushed to the side by an evil conspiracy to "take over" the Southern Baptist Convention. The ethos at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's recent annual General Assembly in Orlando demonstrates, however, that the CBF is neither mainstream nor creedless. In the aftermath of the SBC's adoption of a new confessional statement, the CBF asserted their own theological convictions as a bizarre mix of nineteenth-century Romantic liberalism, postwar European neo-orthodoxy, 1960s protest politics, and contemporary pop New Age mysticism.

As a conservative Southern Baptist and an outside onlooker at the CBF General Assembly, I expected to find a gathering of non-theological former denominational employees who were simply misinformed about the conservative resurgence in the convention. Instead, I found myself talking with hundreds of people who have an altogether different understanding of religious authority and the Christian gospel. It may be that few conservatives understand just how radically Cooperative Baptist spirituality has evolved from its confessional Baptist roots.

Jesus vs. the Bible?

"This is what it all comes down to," said Southern Seminary president R. Albert Mohler Jr. during the SBC's debate over the new *Baptist Faith and Message* confessional statement. Mohler found overwhelming agreement from the convention floor as he responded to Texas moderate Anthony Sisemore's infamous claim that the Bible is "just a book." Ironically, despite the twenty-year moderate insistence that the controversy is not about two different visions of biblical authority, I could not find one Cooperative Baptist at the General Assembly who would disagree with Mohler.

"Al Mohler is right," said CBF member and head of the Alliance of Baptists Stan Hastey. "It has been a battle for the Bible and is about the inspiration and authority of the Bible."

Calling the Bible "everything it claims to be, but nothing more," Hastey suggested that Baptist adherence to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* has proven not to provide "an adequate basis of authority for Baptists." The inerrantists in the SBC, he said, "cannot abide the discomfort of the discrepancies in Scripture."

Several CBF participants were breathtakingly honest with me in their agreement with Sisemore's assessment of the Bible. Rev. Kristina Yeatts, associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Clayton, N.C., disagreed with SBC conservatives who say the Bible "is God's word, fully inspired, everything it says we should do." Instead, she insisted, the Bible "is a book with the biases and traditions of biblical days." "It is a book to guide us, but it's just a book," she said.

As the outrage over the new *Baptist Faith and Message*'s clear affirmation of biblical inerrancy and a male pastorate swirled around the CBF convention hall, it became clear that the most reviled fundamentalist at the General Assembly was not Paige Patterson or Paul Pressler, but the apostle Paul himself. The Baptist Women in Ministry worship service held in conjunction with the General Assembly included jokingly derogatory references to Paul from the pulpit. I could find few CBF participants willing to take issue with conservative exegesis of passages such as I Timothy 2:9-14. Instead, a

surprising number of them bluntly suggested that Paul was wrong.

"We are taking Jesus' view of women over Paul's," said Rev. Yeatts. "Adrian Rogers and Al Mohler are focusing way too much on the apostle Paul's letter rather than Jesus… We're talking about the Son of God vs. a biblical writer."

A book published by moderate publishing house Smyth and Helwys revealed a similar dismissal of the apostle Paul's credentials. Alan Neely's *A New Call to Mission: Help for Perplexed Churches* is a CBF resource for churches trying to decide between supporting the SBC International Mission Board and the CBF global missions agency. It includes an endorsement and a foreword by CBF Coordinator Dan Vestal. In establishing a biblical model for missions, Neely warns about "flaws" in the teaching of the apostle Paul. These "flaws" include the biblical mandates regarding male leadership in the home and church.

"Paul's views on marriage expressed to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 7:1-6) are troubling to most of us today, and they were significantly less elevated than what is attributed to him in his letter to the church in Ephesus (5:21-32)," Neely writes. "Furthermore, his comments in various letters about women simply cannot be reconciled, and his views on these thorny issues should not be taken as contemporary directives."

Neely approves of Paul's assertion in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, but he calls the biblical prohibition on the church's women teaching men in 1 Corinthians 14:34 a "troubling mandate." The prohibition on women pastors in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 is "even more inconsistent," but Neely contends that this biblical passage was not written by the apostle Paul.

CBF participants did not simply posit a divide between the Pauline epistles and the words of Jesus, however, but also between the words of Scripture and the believer's experience with Jesus. CBF Baptist Principles Coordinator Gary Parker labeled as "heresy" the new *BF&M*'s affirmation of the Bible as "God's revelation." Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, for instance, said that the Southern Baptists and Cooperative Baptists have two different authorities since Southern Baptists claim the Bible as their authority while Cooperative Baptists claim their experience with Jesus. Crumpler said that while "the Bible may introduce us to Jesus," we know about Jesus through our personal experience with Him.

Mrs. Crumpler may claim to know about Jesus apart from Scripture, but literature at the CBF General Assembly bookstore may give a glimpse of what kind of extra biblical "Jesus" some of her colleagues have in mind. Another Smyth and Helwys volume, *The Apocalyptic Resurrection of Jesus* by Ernest Lee Stoffel, argues that the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances are examples of symbolic "apocalyptic" literature and are not to be taken literally. Instead, Stoffel argues, the biblical accounts of a rolled-away stone and angels announcing that Jesus has risen just as He said are to be understood as symbolizing that God has exalted Jesus and will triumph over the darkness in our lives. Stoffel writes that he was prompted to write the book because of how difficult Easter sermons are both for preachers and their congregations. His book, he concludes, puts the Resurrection accounts in terms that are "believable and relevant."[1]

The CBF General Assembly's counter-offensive against the inerrantist *Baptist Faith and Message* seems to be a muddled combination of Southern-fried Schleiermacher and class notes from the 1970s-era Southern Seminary. Do they really believe most Southern Baptists believe the apostle Paul, the author of the "Roman Road," is a confused misogynist who doesn't understand Jesus? Do they really believe that calling for a battle between the Scriptures and the Christ is going to be persuasive to Southern Baptists who learned in the cradle roll that Jesus loves them, for the Bible tells them so?

Back to Evangelism and Missions?

For years, Baptist moderates have insisted that the "battle for the Bible" is distracting Baptists from their primary goal of evangelism and missions. The CBF General Assembly highlighted what has been increasingly obvious in recent days--the SBC and the CBF mean two very different things when they speak of evangelism and world missions. CBF participants were livid at Southern Baptist attempts to evangelize Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. One CBF participant told me

that the "arrogant" evangelization of these groups is a violation of the Golden Rule since she "would take great offense" if she were told that she needed Christ to avoid hell. Non-Christians, she said, are "missing out" if they do not know Christ, but are not under the wrath of God.

Perhaps the saddest moment of the General Assembly was the awkward silence that followed my question to Alliance of Baptists director Stan Hastey as to whether unbelievers across the world who never come to Christ will go to hell. Finally, he answered--"I don't know." What he was sure of, however, was that Baptists, should not "be aggressive in evangelizing those in world religions."

These responses were not atypical of the CBF gathering. I could not find one participant who would tell me that personal, explicit faith in Christ is necessary to escape eternal damnation. Not one. Indeed, the CBF *Call to Missions* book, prominently displayed at the meeting and warmly endorsed by the coordinator, was written by a former missions professor at Southeastern Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary infamous for his rejection of the exclusivity of Christ. Alan Neely has written that those around the world who never come to faith in Christ are not "lost" and in danger of hell. In a 1990 article, Neely said the idea that personal faith in Christ is necessary for salvation is "not my theology" because "it reflects arrogance, ignorance, and superficiality." The idea that unbelievers need to hear of Christ or they will die and go to hell, Neely claimed, is not a "sound and wholesome reason" for responding to the Great Commission.[2]

Perhaps this is why, despite all the pomp and circumstance of missionary appointments and missions funding mechanisms, there was no "Crossover Orlando" at the CBF General Assembly. Perhaps this explains why I never saw a gospel tract at the General Assembly. Perhaps this explains why the CBF missions book defines "missions" broadly enough to encompass alcoholics anonymous meetings, sex education for teenagers, and funding for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

There might be some Baptists who give their Lottie Moon offerings so that sincere Buddhists won't have to "miss out" on knowing just how much more saved they can be. Most Southern Baptists, however, give their Christmas offering because they know the SBC International Mission Board believes the same gospel that sent Miss Moon across the oceans: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:17).

Authentic Baptists?

The CBF leadership has tried for years to portray themselves as the "authentic Baptists" valiantly protecting the "historic Baptist" heritage from "independent fundamentalists." This year's General Assembly was no exception. The only attempt at a biblical exposition I heard at the meeting was an attempt to demonstrate the principles of soul competency, priesthood of the believer, and church/state separation from Jesus' interaction with the thief on the cross.

Despite all this, however, the CBF's logo "A New Way to Be Baptist" seems more than ever to speak of more than just funding mechanisms. The CBF worship services, for example, resembled everything from a D. C. Talk concert to a Deepak Chopra relaxation seminar. Assembly-goers could choose from seven different services including liturgical, blended-style, seeker-sensitive, contemporary, Celtic-mystical, and two kinds of traditional services.

Most interest seemed to lie with the "Celtic" service, which had a standing room only attendance and a line waiting outside the meeting room. The Celtic service, billed in the CBF resource book as "a mystical contemplative style" featuring "ancient poetry, intentional silence and music in the style of the British Isles," was led by the Pastor Jim Baucom and musicians of Rivermont Avenue Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA. Baucom was chosen by this year's General Assembly to serve as the CBF's moderator-elect.

The Celtic service featured a darkened room lit only with candles. The ministers wore white robes and stood beneath a Celtic cross before a large altar. Worshippers were invited to "light candles at the prayer table to signify any personal

prayer concerns." After singing Celtic songs, worshippers were asked to sit in silent contemplation. At the sound of different bells, they were asked to contemplate such specific images such as "the mysterious depths of the ocean" and "the peaceful serenity of the seashore."

Unfortunately, the meeting room's partition walls were unable to shield the mystical contemplation from the throbbing music of the "seeker-sensitive" service next door. The haunting gong of a bell in the Celtic service was accompanied by the sound of the enthusiastic band of youths next-door encouraging worshippers to sing lyrics such as "Ooh La La" during the lively praise choruses. The seeker service, led by the First Baptist Church of Deland, FL, also featured a comedy skit, which the CBF resource book described as designed to "lead the audience to think about their responsibility for their feelings as well as their behaviors."

Similarly, the worship service sponsored June 29 by Baptist Women in Ministry differed remarkably from most Baptist services, even apart from the fact that a woman preached the morning's message. The worship leaders wore vestments and served "communion" to the participants. An interpretive dance was performed during a solo rendition of Twila Paris' "How Beautiful." In what might be described as an invitation, participants walked forward during a closing hymn to select a swath of tapestry fabric, attaching it to a banner of the cross in order to demonstrate their unity in following God's call. An "affirmation of faith" reading by BWIM president Raye Nell Dyer made the claim that "there is no way for God to act if we, and other created beings, are unwilling or unable to give substance to God's yearnings, God's energies, God's will."

The closing session of the General Assembly featured perhaps the most surprising worship service of the week, as the "shadow denomination" served "communion" to itself on the floor of the convention center. The CBF members were able to choose from breads from around the world as they took of the Supper. Remarkably, instead of wine or grape juice, each CBF member was given a single grape and told to "take and eat."

Where Baptists have historically called baptism and the Lord's Supper "ordinances" because they do not convey salvific grace, a significant number of CBF members at the General Assembly referred to baptism and the Lord's Supper as "sacraments." This is perhaps part of a larger movement among moderate Baptists to embrace a more mystical, sacramental view of the ordinances.[3]

Southern Baptist conservatives have hardly achieved consensus on all matters of worship or ecclesiology. We range from Purpose-Driven church planters to Isaac Watts-singing traditionalists, and not always without controversy between us. Still, Southern Baptists have a common authority from which to examine these issues. Severed from their confessional heritage, the CBF veers recklessly from the beautiful to the bizarre. Indeed, the CBF's worship services seemed only to serve a dual purpose--to achieve mystical communion with Jesus and to fit in with the National Council of Churches. The second seemed easier achieved than the first.

From Female Pastors to Gay Seminarians?

The moderate reaction to the *BF&M* article on women in the pastorate has focused largely on the argument that no one has the right to question a woman's internal call from God, even if such a call conflicts with apparent biblical revelation. This year's General Assembly revealed that a growing number of Cooperative Baptists are willing to take this theological conclusion to its logical next step.

In a panel session on the *BF&M,* CBF leader Annette Hill Briggs, pastor of University Baptist Church in Bloomington, Indiana, suggested that the issue of female ordination is only the beginning before Baptists must address the gay and lesbian issues in which Baptists are "a few steps behind other denominations." Becca Gurney, an official with Baptist Women in Ministry, said that the same issue of the indisputable internal call that leads her to support women pastors also leads her to support the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians.

"In terms of God's calling gays and lesbians, when we start limiting God's call we're in dangerous territory," Gurney said.

No such dangerous territory was broached at the General Assembly. The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, a pro-gay pacifist group funded by the CBF, distributed in the exhibit hall a curriculum advising churches on how to implement same-sex marriages and gay ordinations. The curriculum denies that the Bible condemns gay sex and affirms homosexuality as an unchangeable sexual orientation. CBF leaders such as Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler had written endorsements of the curriculum at the exhibit. Baptist Peace Fellowship executive director Ken Sehested and Alliance of Baptists director Stan Hastey hailed same-sex marriage and other gay issues as defining social justice issues to be embraced by Baptists.

The issue was not controversial at the General Assembly. Even after Baptist Press published my article on the pro-gay nature of the Peace Fellowship's literature, the CBF voted the next day to give the Fellowship a $5,500 grant to produce even more congregational resources. There was not a single dissent from the floor.

In the CBF book exhibit, a volume written by CBF leaders James Dunn and Grady Cothen decried opposition to same-sex marriage as an attack on soul competency. Cothen, former president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and New Orleans Seminary, criticizes the SBC for refusing to cooperate with churches that perform same-sex marriages or ordain practicing gays to ministry. He then condemns as too conservative the liberal mainline American Baptist Churches in the USA for their recent decisions to expel "welcoming and affirming" churches that perform same-sex unions or ordain practicing gays and lesbians. The ABC's action, he writes, is proof that "deBaptistification is alive beyond the Southern clan."

Some CBF leaders such as Carolyn Crumpler and Annette Briggs were uncomfortable addressing the issue publicly. Even after having made their affirmations of gay rights public in smaller settings, both Crumpler and Briggs refused to speak to the press about the issue of homosexuality. CBF leaders have called SBC concerns about the pro-gay curriculum "yellow journalism," but they have not denied that the curriculum exists and is promoted by the CBF. Why not? If same-sex marriage and adult gay sex are causes of social justice to which the Holy Spirit is calling the church, as Sehested and others maintain, then shouldn't the CBF forthrightly say so?

The theological and political commitments of the CBF leadership will not allow them to stand against the contemporary gay liberation movement. The mystical spirituality to which they appeal for ammunition on the women's ordination issue is carrying them to the left of the mainline denominations on the homosexual ordination issue. The CBF is hurtling toward a difficult quandary, however, because CBF leaders know they cannot afford to lose their "mainstream Baptist" image. It is one thing to scare church members with rhetoric about soul competency in danger from SBC conservatives. It is quite another to tell grassroots Baptists honestly that you believe soul competency means they must cooperate with churches that ordain practicing homosexuals to the gospel ministry.

Grounds for Divorce?

Over and over again at this year's meeting, Cooperative Baptists called for a "divorce" from the SBC. Their plight, however, is less like an innocent party trapped in a loveless marriage than like the angry ex-husband who peers in the windows despite the court restraining order. The CBF is not simply another denomination that Southern Baptists can ignore, however. At this year's meeting, CBF leaders led a seminar to train activists to use "mainstream Baptist" and "Baptists Committed" organizations to launch stealth campaigns to recapture their state conventions. They could then siphon money from the SBC to the CBF. Activists were warned not to identify themselves as related to the CBF. They were given tips of winning church members to the CBF cause by subscribing individuals to the Texas newspaper, the *Baptist Standard*, and by spreading rumors of low Cooperative Program giving by SBC leaders.

The theological agenda brewing beneath the political machinations of the CBF leadership should awaken Baptist conservatives from any temptation to complacency. I realized at this year's CBF General Assembly what Presbyterian theologian J. Gresham Machen cautioned regarding the liberals in his denomination earlier this century. "The religious teacher, in his heart of hearts is well aware of the radicalism of his views," Machen warned. "But he is unwilling to relinquish his place in the hallowed atmosphere of the Church by speaking his whole mind."[4] Cooperative Baptist leaders

are only very carefully beginning to speak their "whole mind," while vast numbers of Baptist churches are still oblivious to the real issues involved.

Jesus died for Cooperative Baptists too. There are perhaps many Bible-believing individuals and churches sending checks to the CBF simply because they are confused by the issues involved. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the theological agenda of the CBF leadership is not simply "a new way to be Baptist." After all, being Baptist is more than just knowing the definition of "Acteen."

The Baptist left, it would seem, is making the same errors that led Southern Baptists to toss them out of leadership twenty years ago. The conservative churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have made clear their convictions on biblical authority, the exclusivity of Christ, and the sexual libertarianism of contemporary culture. The Cooperative Baptist leadership is offended when Baptists ask the same of them. Do CBF leaders believe grassroots Baptists are too unsophisticated to understand their enlightened positions on biblical errors, same-sex marriage, or heaven-bound Buddhists? The Baptists in the pews do not exist to feed money to anyone's bureaucracy. They have the right to know the worldview they are paying to send around the globe. They have a right to decide whether it fits with what they believe the Bible teaches. That may not be what they call a "new way of being Baptist," but I think someone once called it "soul competency."

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[1] Ernest Lee Stoffel, *The Apocalyptic Resurrection of Jesus* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 1999): xiv.

[2] Alan Neely, "Baptists and Peoples of Other Faiths," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17.3 (Fall 1990): 233.

[3] See, for instance, theologian Molly T. Marshall's call for a Baptist sacramentalism in *Why I Am a Baptist: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century*, ed. Cecil P. Staton Jr. (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 1999): 92-3.

[4] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 17-18.

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Why I Am A Baptist

Donna Ascol

This article will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming book, *Why I Am a Baptist*, edited by Tom Nettles and Russ Moore for Broadman and Holman.

"A preference for our own faith is reasonable and righteous" J. P. Greene[1]

"Why are you a Baptist?" Though I have been in Baptist churches all of my life, until recently, no one has ever asked me nor have I paused to ponder that question. My Baptist roots go deep. My maternal great-grandparents and grandparents were Baptist. My Baptist parents raised six children, all of whom have professed faith in Christ, been baptized as believers and are active in Baptist churches. I have a brother who is a Baptist student minister and cousins who are serving in Asia, Great Britain, and Africa with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

I married a Baptist pastor, who was raised in a Baptist home and we are now raising our six children in the Baptist faith. It would be easy to plead tradition, convenience or even laziness as a reason for remaining a Baptist. But the truth is, I just cannot help myself, I am a Baptist by conviction.

Scripture

This conviction is founded on the fact that Baptists have always been a people of the Book, a confessing people, a people who openly believe the Bible. As R. M. Dudley, a noted 19th -century Baptist pastor, editor and professor stated,

> The fundamental principle of the Baptists is their belief in the supreme authority and absolute sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures; and their separate existence is the practical and logical result of their attempt to apply this principle in all matters of religion. This is the bedrock on which the denomination rests.[2]

J. M. Frost, founding president of the Baptist Sunday School Board echoes that sentiment:

> Baptists at different times in their history, and to meet impending claims and conflicts, have issued their confession of faith, and have always given this primal and decisive place to the Word of God as their one authority. This is the bedrock of their faith, the one rule of their practice.[3]

> As a mother of six, my belief system and denominational standing do have an impact on future generations. I do not want my children simply to "fall" into the Baptist beliefs and confessions out of tradition or convenience. Rather, I want them to embrace Baptist principles out of commitment to truth. We have a rich denominational history and a promising denominational future and I would love to bequeath this heritage and prospect to my children and grandchildren. I desire to teach them about great Baptist men and women of the faith that believed the Bible and were satisfied in the roles laid out for them. They need to know about people such as Charles H. Spurgeon, William Carey, Adoniram and Ann Judson, Lottie Moon, John Broadus, and John Bunyan. I want my daughters to enthusiastically embrace their calling to be women wholly devoted to Jesus Christ like their heroic Baptist sisters who have gone before them. I want my son to be inspired and challenged by the testimonies of former Southern Baptist statesmen like James P. Boyce, P. H. Mell, John Dagg, and other founders of the SBC. I am persuaded by J. P. Greene, who in 1923 ended three decades of service as the president of William Jewel College in

Liberty, Missouri, when he issues this challenge to all Baptists:

> We have an honorable and even glorious history, and our children should know it. We keep them in touch with our family history; why not also with our denominational history? . . . If they knew their own history, they would rejoice to belong to such a noble company.[4]

I want my children and their children to believe that the Bible is the unchanging Word of God. I yearn for them to be committed to spreading the saving message of the Book through the work of missions and evangelism, and to be submissive to the authority of the Bible both in doctrine and practice.

My earliest introduction to the Baptist life came through the study of God's Word in Sunday school. I grew up believing that the Sunday school hour was a necessary, integral and non-negotiable part of our Lord's Day observance. My parents faithfully accompanied their six children each week to the teaching hour prior to worship. It was during this time that many loving teachers opened God's Word to me. It was in Sunday school that I learned to love and revere the Scripture as God's holy and unchanging Word. I discovered the exciting and adventurous stories of the Old Testament. I was taught the importance of the observance of the Ten Commandments. I was captivated by the God-breathed words of the major and minor prophets, the poetry of the Psalms and the wisdom of the Proverbs. I was inspired by the testimony of the apostles in the book of Acts and in their letters.

As I have matured in my faith and, through the ministry of God's Word and Spirit, discovered more of His supremacy over all of life, I have come to a deeper appreciation of the role that Sunday school played in my early years. It was there that I was taught from both the Old and the New Testaments that God has a people whom He loves and calls His own. As I continued to study the biblical teachings on God's sovereignty in creation, providence and redemption, I realized that these grand themes were first introduced to me by faithful Baptist Sunday school teachers.

More importantly, my Sunday school experiences and the many sermons I heard as a child were used of God to convince me that I was a sinner who needed Jesus Christ as my Savior. It was in Sunday school that my mind was engaged to know who God is, who I am before Him and what I must do. Coupled with that, it was my mother's Baptist experience that convinced her that her daughter needed to be converted. She was under no delusions (nor was I) that the fact that I was a child of believers in any way made me automatically a child of God. I am grateful that Baptists have historically placed a strong emphasis on teaching the Word of God through the means of Sunday morning Bible study. My life has been forever changed by the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which was taught to me by my mother and my Sunday school teachers.

Currently, I have the privilege of teaching God's Word to a Sunday school class of teenagers at my church. It is a job that makes me tremble. To help these young people formulate their thoughts of God and to teach them about His purposes is a responsibility I find very sobering. I am grateful that I belong to a Baptist church that puts primary emphasis on the authority of the Scripture, thereby encouraging me to approach my task with great confidence. There is no hesitation on my part that what God's Word says is true and right and relevant to these young people. T. T. Eaton, a 19th century Baptist pastor and editor of the *Western Recorder*, the Baptist paper in Kentucky, said it well, "What we must believe, what we must be, and what we must do, are set forth in the Bible with a clearness and a completeness found nowhere else. Not a doctrine, nor an aspiration, nor a duty is omitted."[5]

Evangelism and Missions

Because I am a Baptist and do believe that the Scripture is the supreme and infallible rule for my life, I can trust what it says about evangelism and missions. Baptists believe in missions. They have a long-standing and constantly developing system of sending the gospel into the entire world. From my first recollections of church life I have known that evangelism and missions are important to Baptists. I have been involved in various mission organizations such as Girls in Action, Acteens and Women's Missionary Union.

Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, where I am a member, is a missionary church. Because my pastor has such an acute interest in evangelism and missions and desires to see God's Word spread, he has whetted our appetites to pray for the work of Christ around the world. As we have prayed we have been led to support, teach and encourage those that are called into missionary work. We recently sent one of our finest families to a country in Central Asia where they are today trying to proclaim the gospel among an unreached people group. Our goal as a Baptist church is not only to pray but also to send our very best as our representatives into the uttermost parts of the world.

As a Baptist I have been taught and believe that every Christian ought to be actively involved in spreading the gospel. I agree with Curtis Lee Law's observation, stated in an article he wrote while pastoring the First Baptist Church of Baltimore, when he said, "the clearest vision that the world has of God is in the life of God's representatives. When the world shall see the Christ life in us, then will the Father be glorified."[6]

Believers' Baptism

One of the most distinguishing principles of our faith is the doctrine of believers' baptism. As a Baptist, I have never doubted the biblical basis for my baptism. I am convinced by Scripture that only those who are saved by God's grace are scriptural candidates for baptism. In Romans 6:4, Paul says, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* Newness of life can only mean one thing, namely, a life that has been changed. Baptism, in the New Testament, is an external sign of an internal work of grace already attained in the heart of the believer. Consider the account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. His baptism was warranted only after he had professed his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

> Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38)

The same is true for the Philippian jailer and his household, who were all baptized because they all believed. This connection is sometimes missed if the account is not read in its entirety. Acts 16: 30-33 says:

> And he [the jailer] brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they [Paul and Silas] said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

These four verses on their own might be used to support the baptism of unbelieving children who belong to believing parents. But when verse 34 is included in the account, it becomes clear that the ones who

were baptized with the jailer also believed with him. *"Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced having believed in God with all his household.*"

As J. G. Bow, author of *What Baptists Believe and Why They Believe It*. rightly puts it, "There is not the slightest evidence that anyone received the ordinance of baptism who did not profess faith in Christ; hence Baptists have ever held to believers' baptism."[7] Baptism is an act of obedience to the Scripture in response to the authoritative command of Christ. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19).

I do not believe in baptismal regeneration nor do I believe that baptism bestows any earthly privilege or advantage. It is not essential for salvation. Rather, baptism is a testimony of God's grace in bringing the believer into union with Christ through repentance and faith. It symbolizes this union by depicting burial and resurrection to newness of life.[8]

So, why is all this important to me? Because historically Baptists have held that only those who have a credible profession of faith are candidates for baptism and, consequently, church membership. The new covenant spoken of in Hebrews (8:8-13, 9:15, 10:16-17, etc.) includes only those who know the Lord savingly. If I were not convinced of this, I could easily belong to a conservative Presbyterian or Reformed church. I agree with their regard for the sovereignty of God and their high view of worship but I do not agree with their view of the covenant and how that applies to our children. Like my mother before me, I realize that my children need to be converted. I too am under no delusion that my child because of his or her standing in the Ascol home will be made a child of God. It is all of grace. I do not find presumptive regeneration, infant baptism or confirmation in the New Testament. What I do find is that there is only one entrance into the New Testament Church and that is through believers' baptism. As Acts 2:41 says, *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."*

Baptism is not the most important doctrine for Christians, including Baptists. It is important enough, however, to warrant a separate congregational identity. As an ordinance of Christ, one should take seriously how baptism is to be administered. Differences among Christians on this issue are unfortunate and inevitable in a fallen world. As J. C. Ryle, a famous 19th-century Anglican Bishop, laments, "the difference is a melancholy proof of the blindness and infirmity which remain even in the saints of God."[9] Nevertheless, maintaining a separate identity because of our insistence on believers' baptism is justifiable.

Consider the testimony of Ann Hasseltine Judson, wife of Adonirum Judson and missionary to Burma. As a newly appointed congregational missionary, her study of the Scripture led her to forsake pedobaptism and embrace believers' baptism. In her journal, dated 1812, she writes:

> Sept. 1. I have been examining the subject of baptism for some time past, and, contrary to my prejudices and my wishes, am compelled to believe, that believers' baptism alone is found in Scripture. If ever I sought to know the truth; if ever I looked up to the Father of lights; if ever I gave up myself to the inspired word, I have done so during this investigation. And the result is, that, laying aside my former prejudices and systems, and fairly appealing to the Scriptures, I feel convinced that nothing really can be said in favour of infant baptism or sprinkling. We expect soon to be baptized. O may our hearts be prepared for that holy ordinance! and as we are baptized into a profession of Christ, may we put on Christ, and walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith we are called. But in consequence of our performance of this duty, we must make some very painful sacrifices. We must be separated from our dear missionary associates, and labour alone in some isolated spot. We must expect to be treated with contempt, and cast off by many of

> our American friends--forfeit the character we have in our support, wherever we are stationed.[10]

The Judsons submitted to believers' baptism by immersion in Calcutta on September 6, 1812. William Ward, a colleague of William Carey, conducted the service. It was costly for the Judsons to become Baptist. They had to give up their association with their own mission support group and seek support elsewhere. It was a great step of faith that was born out of deep conviction.

Regenerate Church Membership

Of similar importance to me in my Baptist walk is the too often neglected principle of a regenerate church membership. Baptists have historically believed that the membership of their churches should be made up of only regenerated, converted people. Unfortunately, the concept and practice of a regenerate church membership has been practically abandoned in many contemporary Baptist churches.

Membership today has been so substantially diluted in many Baptist churches that anyone who desires to join need only walk an aisle or express a desire to be accepted as a member. When the unregenerate are allowed to join the church four things often occur; the unregenerate person is misguided spiritually, the church is seriously weakened, church discipline is overlooked and the cause of Christ is undermined. It is hard to distinguish some Baptist churches from social clubs because they are filled with unconverted people. A study done by the North American Mission Board in 1996 found that the typical Southern Baptist Church had only 30 percent of its total membership who actually attended the worship service on Sunday morning. This is a significant and sad discovery. True converts desire to be under the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Tom Ascol, my husband, pastor and editor of the *Founders Journal* has observed, "Those who do not demonstrate a real, saving relationship with Christ and who show no interest in growing spiritually have no business being received into a church's membership. This is not false idealism nor an argument for perfection in Christians. Rather, it is a simple recognition that where there is life, there will be at least some demonstration of it. … Spiritual fruit cannot be cultivated where there is no spiritual life. What does not exist cannot be 'formed' or shaped."[11] Belief in and application of the principle of a regenerate church membership will lead a church to exercise preventive or front-end discipline. This is essential before corrective discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5 and other places in the New Testament, can ever be restored.

Edward Hiscox, author of *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* describes what should be the distinctive characteristics of a Baptist church and its members this way: "They [Baptists] hold that a church is a company of disciples, baptized on a profession of their faith in Christ, united in covenant to maintain the ordinances of the Gospel, and the public worship of God; to live godly lives, and to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ as the Saviour of men."[12] Obviously, this would be difficult to accomplish in a church filled with unregenerate people. He further comments on the class of people that should be admitted as members, "Baptists say that godly persons, baptized on a profession of faith, are the only proper and suitable persons. That all others should be denied admission, and if already within the Church should be cast out."[13]

The newly revised *Baptist Faith and Message* speaks of the church as the body of Christ consisting of all of the redeemed of the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation. While church membership should be very broad in its inclusion of every race and tribe of believers, it should be very narrow in its exclusion of all but professing believers. To do otherwise would be to diminish the separation between the world and the church. J. G. Bow reiterates this point by saying,

> The Churches of Christ are not reformatory schools, are not organizations into which natural men are to be taken and by the process of law, ceremony, or ordinance made children of God, but each ought to be a congregation of God's people, separated from the world. No unconverted man or woman can meet the duties and obligations of a church member, and should not assume such responsibilities.[14]

Conclusion

So why am I a Baptist? Pastor Dudley expresses well what is in my heart, "I am not a Baptist because Baptists practice restricted communion, or immersion, or refuse infant baptism. I am a Baptist because by the fundamental principle of Protestantism I am bound by the Word of God in all matters of faith and practice."[15] The emphasis on teaching, the love of missions and evangelism, the doctrine of believers' baptism and the historical commitment to a regenerate church membership all revert back to a belief in the centrality of Scripture alone. I will say it again, Baptists are a people of the Book. Article I of the Baptist Faith and Message concerning "The Scriptures" was recently and appropriately strengthened by the 2000 Southern Baptist Convention. It reaffirms our desire to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ by submitting to the authority of the Bible.

> The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for is matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is himself the focus of divine revelation.[16]

God desires every area of my life to be governed by His Word. As I pursue this goal through the various callings that God has placed on me as a wife, mother, teacher, etc. I derive both strength and encouragement from fellowship with the people known as Baptists.

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[1] Timothy and Denise George, editors, *Baptist Why or Why Not*, "Why Education by Baptist Schools," Broadman & Holman, Nashville, TN, 1996, p. 77

[2] *Ibid*, "The Distinctive Baptist Way: Our Reasons for the Separate Existence of the Baptists," p. 26.

[3] *Ibid*, "The Confession of Faith," p. 196.

[4] *Ibid*, "Why Education by Baptist Schools," p. 78.

[5] *Ibid*, "Why the Bible and Not Other Standards," p. 34.

[6] *Ibid*, "Why Missionary and Not 'Omissionary.'" p. 75.

[7] J. G. Bow, *What Baptists Believe and Why They Believe It*, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, TN, n.d., p. 36.

[8] Paul Clarke, et al, *Our Baptist Heritage*, Reformation Today Trust, Leeds, England, 1993, p.18.

[9] J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1985 (reprinted from an1857 edition), p. 204.

[10] Sharon James, *My Heart in His Hands*, Evangelical Press, Durham, England, 1998, p. 55.

[11] Tom Ascol, *Founders Journal*, "Bill Clinton and the Discipline of our Churches," Issue 34, Fall 1998, p. 3.

[12] Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970 (formerly published by Judson Press, 1894), p. 15.

[13] *Ibid*, p.17.

[14] Bow, p. 23.

[15] George, "The Distinctive Baptist Way: Our Reasons for the Separate Existence of the Baptists," p.30.

[16] Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000.

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On Being Baptist

Terry A. Chrisope

My obligations as a teacher of Baptist history recently led me to examine a volume entitled *Beyond the Impasse: Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life*. This collection of essays was edited by Robison B. James and David S. Dockery and was published by Broadman Press in 1992. As I read through the essays in this volume, a disturbing pattern gradually became evident: it seemed that those who were advocating greater freedom or looseness in doctrinal and theological matters were grounding their position in the claim of being Baptist. For example, Robison James takes to task Albert Mohler for not including any particularly Baptist distinctives in Mohler's suggested imperatives for the current situation among Southern Baptists (p. 120). James then goes on to set forth several of what he calls "nonnegotiable features of Baptist identity," such as "the equal priesthood of believers," "democracy within the church," "free cooperation," and "the right of individual interpretation." One gains the uneasy feeling in reading such statements that the alleged freedom of the Baptist position is being used to bolster a stance that is not at all Baptist because it ultimately serves to undermine historic Christianity. In response, I believe that several observations need to be made.

In the first place, it desperately needs to be pointed out that the most important thing about being Baptist is being Christian. A Baptist is, by definition, simply a variety of Christian. It follows that a Baptist's identity as a Christian is more fundamental than his identity as a Baptist: he is first a Christian, then, as it happens, a Christian of Baptistic persuasion. A Christian, in turn, is a person who, adhering to a particular world view (in this case, the belief system set forth in the Bible), commits himself to God in repentance (a turning from the anti-God mentality and lifestyle of the fallen world to a mentality and lifestyle of submission, obedience, and service to God) and in faith (trust in Jesus Christ as God's means of forgiving human sin and restoring people to a right relationship with God). The Christian is expected by God to publicly identify himself with Jesus Christ and with a local community of Christian believers. It is with regard to this latter question--the nature of public identification with Jesus Christ and the nature of the local Christian community--that Baptists hold distinctive views. The former--what it means to be a Christian--belongs to the essence of Christianity. What is disturbing is that some leaders in Baptist circles seem willing to use Baptist "distinctives" to undercut essential Christianity.

It is Christianity in its essence, as a religion of supernatural revelation and redemption, that is under attack in the centers of Western culture at the end of the twentieth century. The bases of this attack are naturalistic philosophical assumptions leading to an evolutionary and relativistic view of history (this view is sometimes known as historicism or historical consciousness) and, deriving from this outlook, the received conclusions of a certain type of biblical criticism. The great danger in Southern Baptist circles--and it is a genuine danger in SBC academic life--is that a spirit of accommodation or capitulation to the philosophical commitments of the surrounding culture will prevail. This would result in the evaporation of any distinctively Christian content from Christianity, leaving only a culture religion. The process of accommodation and capitulation may be observed at work historically in the so-called mainline Protestant denominations, several of which no longer adhere to anything resembling historic biblical Christianity. The same process has been at work in SBC life during the twentieth century, and the outlook which it promotes did gain dominance in some SBC agencies and institutions for a while. Some individuals and factions seek for themselves the freedom to continue propagating this outlook in Southern Baptist life. Arguably what is at stake in these developments is the very essence and existence of Christianity as originally conceived (and not just Baptist distinctives): is Christianity a supernatural religion of divine revelation and redemption or is it something else? If the essence of Christianity is misconceived, the continued existence of historic Christianity is put in jeopardy wherever the misconception prevails.

If the nature or essence of Christianity is at stake in the modern intellectual struggle, it is disingenuous to use planks from the superstructure of alleged (or genuine) Baptist distinctives--as some are doing--to seek the freedom to promote views which will alter, undermine or destroy the underlying foundation of historic Christianity. The superstructure will not stand without the foundation. Yet it is not uncommon to find the claimed "freedoms" of the Baptist position set forth and utilized

in such a way that divorces them from the full content of historic Baptist belief and life.[1] A Baptist is not merely a person who happens to believe in "soul competence," the priesthood of believers, baptism by immersion, or other "distinctives"; a Baptist is first of all a person who receives in faith the revelation which God has given in Scripture and the redemption which God has provided in Jesus Christ. A Baptist will of course go on to affirm other truths as well, but without this foundation, one's position is not Christian and therefore cannot be authentically Baptist. For the most important thing about being Baptist is not adhering to Baptist distinctives but being Christian.

Secondly, it should be noted that several of the Baptist distinctives to which some make their appeal do not lie at the center of the Christian faith. Rather, they constitute the desirable conditions under which the Christian faith is best adhered to and promoted. For example, religious freedom or separation of church and state may be dearly-won and dearly-held Baptist convictions, and one can hardly be considered Baptist without them. Yet these convictions--and the political realities to which they point--do not lie at the heart of biblical Christianity; the gospel does. Christianity may flourish in their absence, as the New Testament itself bears witness. The early English Baptists of the seventeenth century certainly did not enjoy the conditions of freedom of religion and separation of church and state (though they themselves adhered to these convictions, and their own churches were independent of the English state), but they founded their churches and multiplied in number nevertheless. These conditions were not necessary to their existence as Baptists but would have provided a more favorable environment in which to live and minister, not only for themselves but for others as well.

Not only do these convictions not lie at the heart of Christianity (one does not find them explicitly set forth in the New Testament), but it is also true that one may adhere to them and not be a Christian at all. Benjamin Franklin probably would have agreed with both these ideals, and Thomas Jefferson fought to put them into practice in Virginia, yet neither man was a Christian. It is thus possible to be supportive of these civil conditions for which Baptists have long struggled without being either Baptist or Christian.

Some authors, however, seem to confuse convictions about these ideal civil conditions with the heart of the Christian faith or Baptist belief. A recent example is provided by H. Leon McBeth's book, *The Baptist Heritage*.[2] McBeth's third chapter is entitled "Defending the Faith," but the chapter does not deal with the defense of the Christian faith, as one might be led to expect by the chapter title. The chapter rather treats the Baptist struggle for religious liberty in England during the seventeenth century. This is most peculiar, for religious liberty does not define the heart of the Christian faith in general nor of the Baptist version of it in particular, both of which have flourished in its absence. It is uncertain, however, whether McBeth recognizes this, for his chapter title suggests that he has elevated this single element of Baptist Christian conviction to the point where it constitutes "the faith." What Baptists in England were struggling for in the seventeenth century was the advantageous civil condition of liberty to adhere to, practice, and propagate the Christian faith in a way that differed from that of the established church (the Church of England). What these Baptist churches regarded as constituting the Christian faith my be found in their confessions of faith, such as the Standard Confession of 1660 or the Second London Confession of 1677 and 1689. In these confessions there will be found much about God and man, sin and salvation in Jesus Christ, and the proper constitution of gospel churches. There will also be found articles dealing with liberty of conscience as involving freedom from coercion or persecution by the civil and religious authorities. But the latter could hardly be said to form "the faith" as Baptists understood it. "The faith" was the Christian faith, which Baptists held in common with other Christian believers. Civil liberty of conscience, in contrast, was that condition which Baptists believed should be enjoyed by all people as providing the most favorable environment for the exercise and propagation of Christian faith and for the making of personal faith commitments. Thus liberty of conscience was a civil condition in which Christian faith could best be exercised (at least in human judgment); it did not itself constitute Christian faith. It is therefore dangerously reductionistic and belies a serious misunderstanding of Baptist belief and of the Christian faith (and perhaps indicates an underlying agenda) to speak of the struggle for religious liberty as "defending the faith." The freedom which Baptists sought was freedom to believe and practice the Christian faith in a biblical way; but "the faith" was something more than the freedom they sought for its exercise. And it is extremely doubtful that these Baptists would have regarded liberty of conscience as allowing church members to be recognized as faithful Christians while rejecting the historic content of the Christian faith, in the fashion of some proponents of this Baptist distinctive in our own day.

Third, it should be observed that it is not unbaptistic (i.e., it does not violate the "priesthood of believers" or "freedom of conscience") to require adherence to definite doctrinal standards in order for Baptists to associate together or cooperate in

the work of God's kingdom. If it is true that any professing Christian or church is free to believe as he or it sees fit (under God), then it is also true that any Christian or church is free to associate or cooperate with those of "like faith and order." For support of this position, appeal may be made not only to a figure like theologian James P. Boyce, but also to his twentieth-century successor E. Y. Mullins.

James Petigru Boyce (1827-1888) was one of the founders of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, eventually located at Louisville, Kentucky. In proposing the establishment of a seminary for Baptists in the South, Boyce argued in 1856 that such an institution should be (among other qualities) confessional. That is, the seminary should adhere to a definite standard of doctrinal belief and all faculty should be required to subscribe to it without mental reservation. In making his case, Boyce articulated three points. First, the obligations imposed on churches by Scripture to uphold true apostolic teaching presupposes the use of something like creeds. Only in this way can truth be distinguished from erroneous interpretations of the Bible. Second, Christ and the apostolic churches seem to have utilized doctrinal confessions in order to express or test declarations of faith. This practice may be observed in the New Testament. Third, Baptists have historically used confessions of faith in this same two-fold way. Despite appearances or claims to the contrary, the Baptist position has been simply that liberty of conscience requires that civil disabilities not be imposed as a means of dealing with differences of belief. Boyce then applied his argument to the situation at hand, urging the adoption of a test of doctrine for the new Baptist seminary:

> You will infringe the rights of no man, and you will secure the rights of those who have established here an instrumentality for the production of a sound ministry. It is no hardship to those who teach here to be called upon to sign the declaration of their principles, for there are fields of usefulness open elsewhere to every man, and none need accept your call who cannot conscientiously sign your formulary.

In accord with Boyce's recommendation, an Abstract of Principles (a brief doctrinal statement in twenty articles) was adopted for the seminary, which opened in 1859 in Greenville, South Carolina. It is still in use.[3]

A successor of Boyce as professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was E. Y. Mullins (1860-1928). Mullins also served as president of the seminary and as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1921-1924. In his presidential address at the Southern Baptist Convention held in Kansas City in May 1923, Mullins treated the question of the relationship between science and religion (Darwinian evolutionary theory was a matter of heated controversy at the time). After noting the theoretical nature of evolutionary thought, Mullins went on to affirm the supernatural aspects of Christianity:

> We record again our unwavering adherence to the supernatural elements in the Christian religion. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself through man moved by the Holy Spirit, and is our sufficient certain and authoritative guide in religion. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was the Divine and eternal Son of God. He wrought miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead. He died as the vicarious atoning Saviour of the world and was buried. He arose again from the dead. The tomb was emptied of its contents. In His risen body He appeared many times to His disciples. He ascended to the right hand of the Father. He will come again in person, the same Jesus who ascended from the Mount of Olives.

Upon making this forthright declaration in support of revelational, redemptive, and supernatural Christianity, Mullins applied his principle to Southern Baptist educational institutions:

We believe that adherence to the above truths and facts is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist schools … We do insist upon a positive content of faith in accordance with the preceding statements as a qualification for acceptable service in Baptist schools. The supreme issue today is between naturalism and supernaturalism. We stand unalterably for the supernatural in Christianity. Teachers in our schools should be careful to free themselves from any suspicion of disloyalty on this point … We pledge our support to all schools and teachers who are thus loyal to the facts of Christianity as revealed in the Scripture.

According to the record of the proceedings, "that part of the President's address referring to 'Science and Religion' was adopted as the belief of this body and ordered printed in the Convention Annual."[4]

Two years later, when the convention met in Memphis, the Committee on Statement of *Baptist Faith and Message*, of which Mullins was the chairman, presented its report. Claiming that "any group of Baptists, large or small, have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so," the committee offered a revised version of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith for adoption by the convention. Appended to it was the statement on science and religion which Mullins had presented in 1923. Other members of the committee recommending adoption of the confession were S. M. Brown, W. J. McGlothlin, E. C. Dargan, and L. R. Scarborough. After rejecting an amendment to the confession, the convention adopted the Baptist Faith and Message on May 14, 1925.[5]

This history certainly demonstrates that the leaders and people of the Southern Baptist Convention have regarded it expedient at times to publish a statement of their beliefs and to require teachers at educational institutions to adhere to such a statement. Indeed, the requirements set forth by Mullins sound very much like the "creedalism" which some proponents of "freedom" in the convention profess to abhor. Yet it is instructive to note a strange inconsistency here. Robison James has insisted on several "nonnegotiable features of Baptist identity." Walter Shurden has identified "four freedoms" which constitute Baptist identity. Do we not have here what may perhaps be called (not without some irony) a "liberal fundamentalism"? These men have specified several alleged features of Baptist life on which they are unwilling to compromise. Is there any difference between such a stance and that of the so-called fundamentalists who have specified several elements of Christian belief on which they are unwilling to compromise? If there is any difference, it is difficult for some observers to discern it.

It is doubtful whether the Baptist distinctives really serve the purposes to which some proponents put them. In any case, the central question becomes clear when it is put in this form: is it truly "Baptist" to allow individuals and organizations the freedom within professing Christian circles to promote with impunity that which will undermine and eventually destroy historic biblical Christianity? Or, to put it another way, can individuals and organizations abandon historic Christianity and still legitimately call themselves Baptist? If Baptists are truly Christian, the answer ought to be self-evident.

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[1] See, e.g., Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993). The four freedoms which Shurden finds at the heart of Baptist identity are Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom, and religious freedom. These emphases are drawn from sermons delivered at the meeting of the Baptist World Alliance from 1905 to 1980 (pp. 4-5). For Shurden the essence of being Baptist is thus found in the "style," "posture," "attitude," and "spirit" of freedom (p. 2). Besides deriving his points entirely from the twentieth century (when the corrosive effects of historical consciousness had ample time to be felt), and from an organization which eschews doctrinal definition, Shurden's treatment itself seems to allow for a sharply diminished theological content of the Christian faith. This is only to be expected, since freedom without form results only in an amorphous and undefinable entity. If it is objected that in this

context there is indeed form and that the freedom is not absolute, then one would like to ask: Where do you draw the theological line? When does an aberrant theological view reach the point of being outside the pale of historic Christianity? The reluctance to offer concrete answers to such questions leads one to suspect that the freedom being sought is in reality absolute.

[2] H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Hundred Years of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987).

[3] Timothy George, ed., *James Petigru Boyce: Selected Writings* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), pp. 48-56, citation from p. 56. Excerpts from this address may also be found in Robert A. Baker, *A Baptist Source Book: With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), pp. 132-137, and the Abstract of Principles, pp. 137-139.

[4] *Annual* of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1923, pp. 19-20.

[5] *Annual* of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1925, pp. 71-76. See also Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, pp. 200-205.

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Book Notes

The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23 Second Edition by John Piper, Baker Book House, (1993), 245 pp. paperback

Reviewed by Brian G. Hedges

Former staff member of Life Action Ministries, Brian Hedges is currently engaged in itinerant preaching. Brian and his wife, Holly, live in Lubbock, Texas

In a sermon entitled "I Will Be Gracious to Whom I Will Be Gracious," John Piper confessed that when a junior in seminary, "Romans 9 came on me … like a tiger and consumed me. And I live in the belly of that tiger. It has captured me. And when I finished my studies, I was so bound by this chapter, I took seven years to write a book on it" [Dr. John Piper, "I Will Be Gracious to Whom I Will Be Gracious" (Desiring God Ministries: Minneapolis, MN, Sept 23, 1984 AM)].

That book is *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23,* and Christian academia owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Piper for his effort.

The author begins by stating his aim, which is "an attempt to understand how Paul defends the righteousness of God in Romans 9:14-23" (p. 15). This necessarily brought him face-to-face with the great theological task of understanding Paul's own theology regarding election and whether it pertains to the historical roles of nations or the eternal destinies of individuals. And what follows is a penetrating exegetical and theological masterpiece of scholarship in defense of the reformed doctrine of election.

Chapter two commences with a thorough exegesis of Romans 9:1-5, which sets the context of the entirety of Romans 9--the argument of which, Piper states, "is so tightly woven that understanding one stage depends on understanding the others" (p. 17). His conclusion as to the meaning of these first five verses is that "it appears that what God has guaranteed is in fact not happening--the end-time salvation of Israel. Has then the word--the reliability--of God fallen, and with it the Christian hope as well?" (p. 46). In other words, the integrity of God in keeping His covenant promises is at stake.

This necessitates Paul's argumentation in the following verses. Piper picks that argument up in chapter three as he examines verses six through thirteen and "The Purpose that Accords with Election." The key question is: what is "the purpose of God … which stands" (Rom. 9:11) in spite of the damnation of most of ethnic Israel? The answer is, of course, the purpose "according to election." But then the big question is "predestination of whom to what" (p. 56)? Nations to certain historical roles, or individuals to eternal destinations? Piper does not arrive at his answer quickly. He carefully constructs his arguments with detailed exegetical consideration and honest interaction with modern New Testament scholarship.

His conclusion is "that God's purpose has not failed because it is an 'electing purpose' by which God aims to preserve his complete freedom in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his *saving* promises, the 'Israel' within Israel (9:6b). "It is therefore a "purpose maintained by means of the predestination of individuals to their respective eternal destinies" (p. 73).

The next question to be tackled by Piper is the main one, namely, what does Paul mean when he defends the righteousness of God in verses fourteen through eighteen? Chapters four through nine are devoted to finding the answer to this question. This Piper does by examining Exodus 33:19 (quoted in Rom. 9:15) in it's Old Testament context (chapter four), posing the problems of verses fourteen through eighteen (chapter five), looking at the concept of God's righteousness in the Old Testament (chapter six), and closely studying Paul's conception of God's righteousness in two other key passages from Romans: Romans 3:1-8 (chapter seven) and Romans 3:25-26 (chapter eight).

Chapter four, which deals with Exodus 33:19, reveals a stunning insight into the nature of God's name and glory, which "consist fundamentally in his propensity to show mercy and his sovereign freedom in its distribution" (p. 88). Or, stated in its most precise form, *"it is the glory of God and his essential nature to dispense mercy (but also wrath, Ex. 34:7) on whomever he pleases apart from any constraint originating outside his own will. This is the essence of what it means to be God. This is his name"* (p. 88-89).

Chapter nine concludes the exegesis of verses fourteen through eighteen. The stunning conclusion of these chapters reveals the heart of the book and the uniqueness of Piper's contribution in the interpretation of Romans 9:14: God's righteousness is "his absolute faithfulness to act for his name's sake and for the preservation and display of his glory" (p. 150).

Chapter ten is called "The Rights and Purposes of the Creator" and deals with verses nineteen through twenty-three. "The basic concern of this chapter is to inquire whether the thought of Rom. 9:19-23 coheres with the interpretation of Rom. 9:1-18" (p. 183) developed in the previous chapters. But it also adds further insight into the whole question of theodicy and why God sustains and endures the "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). Piper concludes that the ultimate purpose of God in this "double predestination" is that his glory might be displayed in the showing of mercy. He rejects a symmetrical view of reprobation and election, inferring from verse 23 that even the wrath of God is made to serve the glorious display of God's mercy.

Offering a possible explanation for the passive *katertismena* in verse 22 (after affirming the Divine agency in the preparation of vessels for destruction), Piper says that God's "heart is engaged differently in different acts, loving some deeds in themselves, and inclining to others only as they are preferable in relation to greater ends (cf. Lam. 3:33). If this is the case, Paul would be implying that not wrath but mercy is the greater, over-aching goal for which God does all things" (p. 213-214). The final conclusion reached is that in God's desire to display His glory in showing mercy, "he must place it against the backdrop of wrath" (p.220).

Chapter eleven is a helpful conclusion which summarizes in four pages the argumentation of the entire book. It would be advisable to read this chapter first and last, for it serves as a roadmap to the rest of the book.

The merits of this book cannot be overstated. It is both a logical and deductive study of what has been called "the most neglected chapter in the Bible," as well as a passionate plea to be centered on God in all of our theology. Those who know Piper's other more popular books (*Desiring God, The Pleasures of God,* etc.) will see in this book the rock-solid foundation for his God-centered worldview. The one possible demerit is that the Greek and Hebrew are not transliterated. This might make the book intimidating or uninteresting to many a pastor or layman. But even so, the work to get through it is well worth it, and the value of Piper's scholarship will be felt for many years to come by exegetes, theologians, and pastors.

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News

Reformed Theological Seminary serves the church inter-denominationally with consistently biblical, graduate-level theological training for pastors, deacons, elders, missionaries, counselors, teachers and other Christians in various vocations. We believe that the principles from the Word of God are sufficient for preparing men and women to serve our Lord in the church and community (1 Timothy 3:16, 17). Thus, all of our teaching and administrative practice must use the Bible as the standard.

The Virtual Campus is the distance education initiative of Reformed Theological Seminary. Courses are offered in a variety of formats including audio-tape, notebook, internet, and video-conferencing. Earned credits can be applied to all degree programs at RTS, including the new MA/Distance, a Master of Arts degree providing accredited graduate training in theology for in-depth vocational and ministry preparation as well as spiritual growth and service to others. Other RTS programs (M.Div., M.A.T.S., M.A.B.S., Th.M) may accept up to 36 credits of distance education coursework. Certificate programs are available for those who do not have the necessary undergraduate prerequisites. For more information visit us on the web at http://www.rtsvirtual.org or email Willie Mangum, Director of Student Services at distance.education@rts.edu or call 800-227-2013.

The first Annual Heartland Regional Founders Conference: In early April men and women assembled in Ponca City, Oklahoma for this meeting. This initial gathering was well received and was the best attended inaugural regional conference to date. The Conference commenced with David Goff giving an exposition of Psalm 40. Tom Ascol, Don Whitney, and R. F. Gates spoke on biblical evangelism. A well-balanced presentation of the subject was given presenting both theological and deeply personal challenges to share the good news of the gospel. Ordering information for cassette tapes of the conference are available by contacting Steve Harden at (580) 762-2762 or at srharden@hit.net.

Plans are being made for a second Heartland Regional Conference to be held on April 19-21, 2001. The theme of the conference will be "The Ministers Self-Watch" and will address pastoral issues facing leaders of the local church. For more information contact Providence Baptist Church at the above number or watch Founders Online for further news.

Heritage Baptist Church is hosting the John L. Dagg Sermon Series which began July 16, 2000 in Lee's Summit, MO. Dagg (1794-1884) was a prominent Southern Baptist theologian of the nineteenth century who played an instrumental role in expositing Baptist doctrine. In the preface to his *Manual of Theology*, he wrote that his aim was "… to present the system of Christian doctrine with plainness and brevity; and to demonstrate, at every point, its truth, and its tendency to sanctify the heart." This is the theme of this on-going sermon series. Don Whitney, professor of Spiritual Formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City spoke on July 16, 2:00 PM. Jim Elliff, founder and president of Christian Communicators Worldwide, spoke on September 10. For more information, contact Heritage Baptist Church at (816) 920-3588 or visit our website at www.toto.net/heritage.

Upcoming Conferences:

- Southwest Regional Southern Baptist Founders Conference (Sept. 28-30, 2000)
  Heritage Baptist Church, Mansfield, TX
  Contact: Larry Vincent (817) 551-6337
  Theme: "Reforming the Local Church"

- Mid-Atlantic Regional Southern Baptist Founders Conference (Oct. 19-21, 2000)
  Old Forest Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, VA
  Contact: R. Wayne McCraw (804) 385-7413
  Theme: "The Sufficiency of Scripture"

- Founders YOUTH Winter Ski Retreat-East (December 27-29, 2000)
  Winterplace, WV
  Contact: Todd Wilson (901) 758-1213
  Theme: "Redemption Planned, Purchased and Possessed"

- Founders YOUTH Winter Ski Retreat-West (December 26-30, 2000)
  Monarch, CO
  Contact: Bill Ascol (318) 798-7088
  Theme: "The Sovereignty of God"

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Letters

Greetings from Port Elizabeth.

I wish to take this opportunity to praise the Lord for the work that you are doing at Founders. My prayer is that the Lord will continue to prosper the work you do. I have always enjoyed reading and being challenged by the *Founders Journal* which I download from the web whenever they are posted.

I am a lecturer at the Bible Institute Eastern Cape, an interdenominational college seeking to address the years of neglect of Bible teaching amongst the historically deprived in South Africa. The bulk of our student body is drawn from the local Xhosa population with many of them coming from African Initiated Churches. We would value your prayers for us in our ministry.

Your brother in the service of the King of Kings,
D. M., via e-mail

Dear Brother Ascol,

Your article "Reformation and Controversy" is outstanding! What good does it do us to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture if we are not willing to bow to the supreme and final authority of Scripture?

My prayer is that conservative leaders like Adrian Rogers and Paige Patterson will have their eyes opened to the truth of the doctrines of God's sovereign grace and become preachers and promoters of these teachings. This would get the attention of Southern Baptist pastors all over the United States.

Keep up the excellent work!

Your friend in Christ,
J. K., via e-mail

Dear Friends,

Know that I love you and am with you in my prayers.

The *Founders Journal* -- Honesty, Integrity, Selflessness. Where could I go but to the Lord?

In the Name of Christ Jesus,
J. R.

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