



## 2001: A Spiritual Odyssey

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# The Founders Journal

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Contributors:

**Dr. Thomas K. Ascol** is Pastor of the Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

**Dr. James P. Boyce** was the principal founder of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

**Iain Murray** is an author and co-founder of the Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Book Reviewer:

**Dr. Roger Nicole** is Visiting Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

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*Editor:*

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*Graphic Design Editor:*

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## 2001: A Spiritual Odyssey

[Tom Ascol](#)

On the brink of the true new millennium the question of evangelicalism's future remains open. Numerous books and articles have addressed this question from the more optimistic *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, by Alistair McGrath to the more pessimistic trilogy by David Wells (*No Place for Truth, God in the Wasteland* and *Losing Our Virtue*).

Analysis and debate on this issue from within the camp can be very profitable. Self-criticism, in the best sense, is an important ingredient of growth and development. This is true of both individuals and movements. The inability to see blemishes, or the unwillingness to admit them, is a sure sign of weakness and is more appropriate for a triumphalistic spirit than for that spirit of humility which ought to mark the followers of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, every Christian and movement is an easy target for narrow spirits for whom carping and complaining is second nature. Just as healthy self-examination can quickly degenerate into morbid introspection so too can helpful self-criticism easily give way to the "chicken little complex." Even an abundance of dropping acorns does not mean that the sky is falling.

In this issue of the *Founders Journal* we are privileged to have two leading evangelical scholars address the trajectory of the evangelical movement over the last fifty years. Iain Murray's excellent book, *Evangelicalism Divided, a Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (an excerpt of which appears in the following pages), is reviewed by Roger Nicole, a contributing editor of the *Founders Journal* and one of the founding members of the Evangelical Theological Society. Though the reviewer is obviously more encouraged and hopeful about evangelicalism than is the author, both have expressed their views with cogent arguments marked by meekness and desire to serve truth.

As is his custom, Dr. Nicole sent a copy of his review to Mr. Murray before its publication. Mr. Murray has graciously consented to have a portion of his response published along with the review. The result is a rare opportunity to listen in on the conversation between two confessional theologians as they discuss the hopes and concerns of evangelical Christianity.

In addition to this exchange, the following pages also contain an interview with Paige Patterson, one of the main architects of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. Over the last twenty years Dr. Patterson has been both loved and hated, but rarely ignored, by those who care about the SBC. His observations on the direction and opportunities of the SBC will be of keen interest to journal readers.

Part of impact of the conservative resurgence has been registered in the work of international missions. The anonymous article by one International Mission Board missionary signals the new day which has dawned on that missions agency. With a renewed commitment to the authority and integrity of God's Word has come a renewed concern to orient all mission efforts toward the God-centered perspective of that Word. Be encouraged by the insights and admonitions of this writer, and pray that this kind of influence will spread to missionaries around the world.

Of course, James Boyce looms like Mount Everest on the landscape of Southern Baptist theological heritage. His influence on theological education in the 19th century is unsurpassed. By extracting portions of his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, though being dead, Boyce is allowed to speak to us in this issue.

Christ has called us to a life of hope. No matter where we are in God's eschatological program, or where you are in your own personal history, for the Church and for the Christian, the best is always yet to be. So let's press on in the new year with joy and confidence, abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).



# What is the Gospel?

[Iain H. Murray](#)

*The following is taken from the book, Evangelicalism Divided, a Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000, published by Banner of Truth and reviewed elsewhere in this journal. It is used by permission.*

The case I want to set out in this chapter is that the either/or of comprehensiveness or isolation was an understandable but wrong presentation of the alternatives. There *was* another choice open. It is the course to which the New Testament's own definition of Christianity points and the one which has been repeatedly followed at the great turning points of church history. When churches lose their influence, when the Christian message ceases to arrest the indifferent and the unbelieving, when moral decline is obvious in places which once owned biblical standards--when such symptoms as these are evident, then the first need is not to regroup such professing Christianity as remains. It is rather to ask whether the spiritual decline is not due to fundamental failure to understand and practice what Christianity really is.

To think in this way leads very quickly to a subject which has always been unpopular with the world and which is now far from popular in the church.

Is it not offensive and intolerant to suppose that anyone can distinguish true Christians from others? Are there not, it is said, many kinds of followers of Christ and does not love demand that we regard them all as 'fellow Christians'?

This objection often proceeds on the basis of another argument--usually unstated--namely, that the New Testament itself does not give us enough light to be definite. And if Scripture does not resolve the question, 'What is a Christian?' then we must tolerate and justify a breadth of opinion on the subject. But if the New Testament *does settle the question* then we have no liberty to redefine 'Christian' in terms which neither Christ nor his apostles ever authorized. Evangelicalism has historically been distinguished by its conviction that Scripture speaks plainly on this fundamental issue; it gives us all the light we need to discern between the true and the false, between the nominal and the real.

We turn, then, first to Scripture. There we read one common theme: to become a Christian is to experience the power of Christ in the forgiveness of sin and in the receiving of a new life. It is a change accomplished by God and altogether apart from human effort or deserving, for the very faith which is the instrument in uniting the sinner to Christ is itself a gift: 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God' (Eph. 2:8). Further, while obedience and love result from the gift of faith, these graces *follow* rather than contribute anything to our acceptance with God. It is Christ's finished work alone which secures forever the believer's status of righteousness and of 'no condemnation'.

Scripture shows various ways in which an individual gives evidence of having been thus brought 'from death unto life'. The foremost has to do with the content of the faith which is exercised, for true faith rests on knowledge. 'To be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth', is one and the same thing in apostolic Christianity (1 Tim. 2:4). To be 'saved', according to the New Testament, necessarily involves believing a *message*. Thus Luke sets it down as the first mark of the infant church at Jerusalem that 'they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine' (Acts 2:42); and he tells us that it was through knowledge of the same message about 'the Lord Jesus' that 'the disciples were called

Christians first in Antioch' (Acts 11:36). Christianity means knowing and trusting Christ as a living Person; it is a relationship which so captures both the mind and the heart of the believer that henceforth to know Christ, to esteem him and his words, becomes the very object of existence: 'To you who believe he is precious' (1 Pet. 2:7)--more precious certainly than all earthly goods or even life (Luke 14:26). A Christian is someone who no longer lives for himself but understands, with Paul, why Christ is his righteousness, his life, his all.

Opinions already stated in these pages express the possibility of a person not receiving the Christian message, or even being opposed to it, and yet being judged to be a Christian.<sup>[1]</sup> This is surely contrary to the New Testament. The first and invariable result of the new birth, according to Christ, is 'sight' (John 3:4). By this rebirth an individual comes to belong to the number of whom it is written: 'They shall all be taught by God' (John 6:45). He possesses an enlightenment which sets apart the teaching of God from all the teaching of men; for this person the promise 'You shall know the truth' is a reality (John 8:32).

This is not to say that becoming a Christian is primarily a change of opinion: it is far more profound. The Christian has received a new nature. Included in that nature is a capacity for truth, an affinity with truth, and a love for truth. He has been given 'the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive' (John 14:17), with the result that his understanding of salvation no longer depends upon himself or upon the thinking of other men: 'But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you' (1 John 2:27). 'He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself' (1 John 5:10). What Jesus said to Peter is therefore true of every Christian, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 16:17). Or, as Paul wrote to believers at Ephesus, 'You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord' (Eph. 5:8).

On the basis of these facts, the New Testament shows that one sure test of a Christian profession is how that person reacts to the Scriptures. Unregenerate men not only do not receive God's Word but they have no moral ability to do so. By nature they are at enmity both against God and against his truth. 'The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him' (1 Cor. 2:14). So Christ could say to Jewish unbelievers, 'Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me...He who is of God hears God's words: therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God' (John 8:45, 47). On the other hand, a believing acceptance of his words is proof of belonging to his kingdom. All who hear the voice of Christ are members of his flock (John 10:28). So Paul could write to the Christians at Thessalonica: 'For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God' (1 Thess. 2:13).

In distinction from contemporary claims that dogmatism means unchristian intolerance, Scripture thus gives us an antithesis which is sharp and definite. Saving faith requires the power of the Holy Spirit, and his presence or absence in an individual is to be known by the response or the absence of response to his words: 'They are of the world. Therefore speak they as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error' (1 John 4:5-6).

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What happens when these fundamental truths are recovered and proclaimed with power in an age of ignorance and unbelief is not a matter of theory or speculation? The history of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century is second only to the apostolic age as a demonstration of what may be expected to occur. The lives of the Reformers are examples of men who, no longer content to trust the teaching of the institutional church of their upbringing, went back to Scripture. What was said of Luther might have been said of them all: 'He strengthens himself each day in his

convictions by a constant application to the Word of God.'<sup>[2]</sup> The definition of a Christian which they found there was startlingly new, first to themselves, then to others, and it divided them from Renaissance scholars (such as Erasmus) on the one hand, and from the upholders of the traditional theology of the Church of Rome on the other.

Against the scholars who viewed Christianity largely in terms of a discussion on opinions and morality, and who objected to all claims to certainty, the Reformers asserted the sufficiency and finality of the truth which they had been taught by Christ. They saw the difference between the Renaissance and scriptural Christianity as the difference between natural and supernatural. Thus Luther could respond to Erasmus:

Leave us free to make assertions, and to find in assertions our satisfaction and delight; and you may applaud your Skeptics and Academics--till Christ calls you too!... The truth is that nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they can discuss and quote all that is in Scripture, they do not understand or really know any of it.<sup>[3]</sup>

Philip Melanchthon elaborates on the same point when he states what it means to be a Christian in the Preface to his *Loci* of 1521:

If a man know nothing of the power of sin, of law, or of grace, I do not see how I can call him a Christian. It is there that Christ is truly known. The knowledge of Christ is to know his benefits, taste his salvation, and experience his grace; it is not, as the academic people say, to reflect on his natures and the modes of his incarnation. If you do not know the practical purpose for which he took flesh and went to the cross what is the good of knowing his story? He is given us as our remedy, or, in the Bible's phrase, our salvation. And we must know him in another way than the scholars. To know him to purpose is to know the demand of the conscience for holiness, the source of power to meet it, where to seek grace for our sin's failure, how to set up the sinking soul in the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil, how to console the conscience broken. Is that what any of the schools teach?... How often Paul declared to his believers that he prays for them a rich knowledge of Christ. He foresaw that we should one day leave the saving themes and turn our minds to discussions cold and foreign to Christ.<sup>[4]</sup>

The same principle of the sole authority of Scripture bore equally against Roman Catholicism. For the traditional religion, salvation was an external, objective thing, which the disciple could never know with any personal certainty this side of purgatory. All that could be done was to trust the teaching of the Church and submit to her ceremonies. Against this the Reformers preached that by repentance and faith in Christ there was full and immediate acceptance with God, and that the Holy Spirit himself testifies to the reality of this acceptance in the heart of the believer. United with a risen Saviour, the Christian has the joy of pardon and assurance in present possession.

To the universal objection of Roman Catholicism that the Protestants had fallen into such beliefs through lack of the guidance of the Church (the only true interpreter of Scripture) the evangelicals replied that an understanding of Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit. William Tyndale prized Scripture so highly that he lost his life in giving it to his fellow-countrymen. But he knew that far more than the possession of New Testaments was needed to make men Christians. Nor could any church supply what was necessary. As he told Sir Thomas More, his Roman Catholic opponent:

Though the Scripture be an outward instrument, and the preacher also, to move men to believe, yet the principal cause why a man believeth, or believeth not, is within: that is, the Spirit of God

teacheth his children to believe; and the devil blindeth his children, and keepeth them in unbelief, and maketh them consent unto lies, and think good evil, and evil good...

It is impossible to understand either Peter or Paul or aught at all in the scripture, for him that denieth the justifying of faith in Christ's blood.[\[5\]](#)

For the Reformers the Reformation was no mere controversy or doctrinal dispute. The Church of Rome, in her opposition to the way of salvation clearly taught in Scripture, was demonstrating her lack of the Spirit of God. This is not, of course, to say that the Reformers believed that the teaching of the Holy Spirit makes the thinking of Christians identical in every respect. But the Spirit teaches every Christian what is essential to salvation. The Roman system, by putting faith in the Church, and its sacramental system, in the place of the finished work of Christ, gave sure proof that she was not being taught of God. Her adherents, commonly, did not know the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

On this same theme John Calvin wrote:

They who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards... Since for unbelieving men religion seems to stand by opinion alone, they, in order not to believe anything foolishly or lightly, both wish and demand rational proof that Moses and the prophets spoke divinely. But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For God alone is a fit witness to himself in His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaim what has been divinely commanded... By this power we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing... I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself.[\[6\]](#)

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This attitude, it should be said, did not originate in the nineteenth century. At the time of the ejection of the Puritans from the Church of England in 1662 Thomas Case spoke of 'indifference as to matters of faith and doctrine... We have accounted it no matter of what opinion or judgement men be in these latter times. 'Tis an universal saying, "No matter what judgement men be so they be saints"; as if *truth in the judgement* did not go to the making up of a saint, as well as *holiness* in the will and affections... as if it were no matter, if God have the heart, so the devil be in the head.' Sermon of 17 August 1662 in *Farewell Sermons* (London, 1663).

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich to Melanchthon, in speaking of Luther at Coburg, during the Diet of Augsburg.

<sup>3</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, eds. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, (London: Independent Press, 1948), p. 220-1.

<sup>5</sup> *An Answer to Sir Thomas More* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1850), p. 139, 169.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 79-80. See also pp. 580-3. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit supplies directly to each individual the evidence necessary to salvation. That evidence is already in Scripture but the Spirit's word is necessary that we should see it.



## Book Review

Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided, A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000. X, 342 pp. \$21.99

Reviewed by [Roger Nicole](#)

Surely Rev. Iain Murray does not need an introduction to the readers of the *Founders Journal*, for they presumably know him as the author of *The Forgotten Spurgeon, Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, as well as biographies of Jonathan Edwards, Arthur W. Pink, John Murray and Martin Lloyd-Jones (2 volumes). In the present work Rev. Murray has undertaken to describe and document some serious weakening in the evangelical front in the British Isles and in the United States of America during the period of 1950 to 2000.

Rev. Murray views Billy Graham and Harold J. Ockenga as having been at the root of this weakening in America, while J. I. Packer and John R. W. Stott as well as Billy Graham have had a comparable influence in England. Billy Graham is named because of his broad policy of permitting a wide range of personalities of very diverse convictions, including some Roman Catholics and some liberal Protestants, to support his evangelical crusades and to appear with him on the platform. This, Rev. Murray avers, has blurred the line of distinction between evangelicals and non-evangelicals. Furthermore the evangelistic approach dubbed "invitation" system, has encouraged a certain superficiality in the call of the gospel, neglecting the importance of repentance and leading many who were not truly regenerate to view themselves as "saved" because they had "come forward" in a crusade.

Harold John Ockenga is blamed for a shift in the character of Fuller Theological Seminary, an institution founded on strictly evangelical premises and supported by funds of evangelical origin. In the desire to prepare ministers that would be acceptable in the "mainline denomination", Rev. Murray contends, undue emphasis was placed on academic accreditation and professional earned doctorates rather than spiritual qualifications and experience in ministry. Thus the desire for "intellectual respectability" led many who had started as clear-cut evangelicals to make concessions to Biblical criticism and thus to permit the erosion of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. Ockenga's failure to operate as resident president is blamed for the beginning of this shift under the presidency of E. J. Carrell, which accelerated under President David A. Hubbard with the departure of several of the staunchest conservative members of the Faculty.

On the English scene, J. I. Packer and John R. W. Stott are singled out because of their unwillingness to accept Martin Lloyd-Jones challenge in 1966 that evangelicals should give up the Anglican Church to its own doldrums and concentrate on an effort by all evangelicals to unite in a common fellowship and action. This was understood as an appeal to leave the Church of England which Packer and Stott refused to do. The result, Rev. Murray holds, was a splintering of the evangelical force and, as a result of the marginalizing of Packer and Stott's leadership, a precipitous decline of the clear-cut evangelical movement within Anglicanism.

The gradual estrangement of many in the Church of England who had been considered as evangelicals is then carefully documented by Rev. Murray. This includes the complete alienation of Dr. James Barr and the damaging shift away from verbal inspiration of Dr. J. D. G. Dunn. Some leaders who had formerly been strongly associated with the evangelical movement came to endorse the view that "baptism is the visible sign of a Christian" and we must practice unity with all the baptized. (p. 99). This evidenced a drift toward Anglo-Catholicism and even toward

Roman Catholicism to the great detriment of the recognition of the Reformation as a return to New Testament Christianity singularly blessed by God Himself.

This last weakness, Rev. Murray avers, has a parallel in the American movement call ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) which aroused fiery opposition on the part of some evangelical leaders, while others, no less evangelical, addressed the matter by correcting some flaws in the original document, which the original evangelicals signers acknowledged, without, however, renouncing the principle of evangelical co-belligerency with the Roman Catholic Church against the grievous deterioration or even abandonment of Judeo-Christian morality in the United States.

As one who has been during the whole period wholeheartedly committed to the evangelical cause, inclusive of the inerrancy of Scripture and the centrality of the substitutionary penal nature of the death of Christ, I must confess that the reading of this book was a very melancholy task, particularly in areas in which the book points to real weakenings that I am constrained to acknowledge.

There are certain demurrals that I am eager to present, lest the book be considered to document a massive defection of evangelicalism.

1. The situation in 1950 was not ideal. Some of the defects mentioned for the period 1950-2000 were already in evidence in 1950, in 1930, in the 1920's, in 1900, in 1880, in 1850, throughout the 18th century, at several points in the 1600's as well as during the life-time of our great Reformers. Knowledge of church history will readily prove that no period was free of defection. The constant need to reorganize monastic orders, where separation from the world should have promoted lasting faith and purity, certainly manifests that constant vigilance is imperative. The sin-stained human heart is naturally Pelagian, and thus there is a natural slippage toward a man-centered direction that must be continually resisted. 1950-2000 is no exception.
2. The people on whom Rev. Murray centers the blame happen to have been, and to be still, if now alive, firm believers in the evangelical faith: Billy Graham, Harold J. Ockenga, J. I. Packer, John R. W. Stott were through this period and are wholly committed to the infallible authority of scripture and to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Certainly not one of them has given an example of deviation from the faith they held in 1950.

Of course, people of sound faith may at times favor policies that turn out to be damaging in the event. Perhaps if Billy Graham had adopted another approach to co-operation with non-evangelical churches some loosening of the faith might have been avoided. Perhaps if Dr. Ockenga had moved to Pasadena in 1947, or at least in 1955, he could have prevented a change in the statement of faith of Fuller Seminary, a loss of some of the staunchly conservative faculty members, and a certain slippage in its evangelical stance. Perhaps J. I. Packer and John Stott might have maintained a strong leadership among Anglican evangelicals that would have warded off the defection documented by Rev. Murray. To say this is to posit that their churchmanship may not have been totally impeccable, but it should not ever degenerate into thinking that their faith was in any way deficient. Rev. Murray would be the first to acknowledge this, but his blame may tend to mislead at this point. Let him whose churchmanship is always beyond criticism cast the first stone.

Perhaps if Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones had been careful in 1966 to prepare some of his collaborators like Packer and Stott so as to make sure that they understood his outlook and were ready to support him, instead of springing his challenge when they were wholly unaware of his plan, the Anglican group might not have foundered as it did.

3. While my acquaintance with the British Isles is not such as to permit me to challenge Rev. Murray's portrayal, I believe that I have a sufficient contact with the situation in the United States to warrant my suggestion that the picture he presents here is not complete. In *Christianity Today* for 9/16/96 I wrote an article entitled "What Evangelicalism Has Accomplished" (pp 31-34) in reaction to the rather pessimistic assessment of David Wells and Marc Noll. Here is some of the data adduced.

Seminaries. Although some conservative seminaries have toned down their original evangelical stance, yet at this turn of the century out of 125 accredited Protestant seminaries, 55 are clearly evangelical. Furthermore in some seminaries that had embraced the Biblical critical position some thoroughly evangelical professors have been added to the faculty. Even Harvard Divinity School has now a chair of evangelical theology!

Students. Almost half of those studying theology at the seminary level are enrolled in these 55 seminaries. Moreover many are studying in evangelical seminaries not yet in the accredited list and many evangelical students are found in denominational seminaries that are not evangelical, but are not losing their faith on this account. Since the pastoral ministry does not greatly attract more liberal students, it would appear that there would be soon a strong preponderance of evangelical pastors serving in the pulpit.

Seminary professors in evangelical schools have received fuller academic training than was the case in 1950, many of them holding doctorates from high-rated schools. More adequate salaries and a lesser load of class work combined with judicious sabbatical programs have enabled them to pursue their studies and to publish.

The Evangelical Theological Society inaugurated in 1949 and requiring a Master's degree or its equivalent for full membership, had 112 charter members by mid-1950. At this point it numbers more than 3,132 members, all of whom have declared and sign each year the following statement of faith: *The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, hence inerrant in the autographs.*

Libraries. In 1950 the theological libraries of evangelical institutions were often very inadequate. By 2000 this defect has been very remarkably overcome.

Publications. In 1950 many were chiding evangelicals for being satisfied with reprints of older works. In the latter half of the century, however, a great production has taken place in the Biblical department (Introduction, Dictionaries, Commentaries, Biblical Theology, Archaeology); Historical department (Denominational Studies, Biographies, Monographs); Theological department (Systematics, Ethics, Apologetics), and Practical department (Homiletics, Evangelism, Counseling, Sermons, Edification). Evangelical publishing houses have prospered and produce every year impressive catalogs. The NIV prepared entirely by evangelicals is now the best-seller of the world!

Periodicals. More than 30 quarterlies are now issued under evangelical auspices.

Evangelism and Mission have continued to flourish among evangelicals, while these activities have tended to wane when an unsound pluralism prevailed in many churches.

Social Consciousness, that was sometimes flagging in 1950, has been revitalized in many evangelical churches and para church movements.

All of these things and still others lead me to think that God has placed us evangelicals in a time of unparalleled opportunity that we should be eager to seize for the blessing of His people and for His glory. Rev. Murray's book should alert us to the dangers that are ever threatening. One of these is surely the temptation to dilute the truth in order to accommodate the greatest number possible. But another danger is to permit "Evangelicalism" to be divided and thus to blunt the force of our united witness. It is my prayer that we may by God's grace avoid both of these.

See also [A Response to Dr. Nicole](#) by [Iain Murray](#)



## A Response to Dr. Nicole

[Iain H. Murray](#)

[The following is taken from a letter written by Rev. Iain Murray to Dr. Roger Nicole in response to [the latter's review](#) of the former's book, *Evangelicalism Divided*, which also appears in this issue of the *Founders Journal*. It is printed here with permission.]

Dear Dr Nicole,

I appreciate your kindness in letting me see your projected review of *Evangelicalism Divided* and the time and thought which you have given to this. I agree with your reason for the summary you gave towards the end on evangelical growth. If people thought my book was intended to be a history of evangelicalism as a whole in the last fifty years it would leave them with a wrong negative impression. Another positive fact that could be mentioned is the enormous sale of sound evangelical books in the US, Jim Packer's *Knowing God*, for instance, selling upwards of quarter of a million copies. I also agree entirely with your point 1 on page 2. All generations are flawed and fallible, 'In many things we offend all'. There is much for which we can be thankful in the change since 1950.

I see the main point of my book differently from yourself. I think that someone simply reading your review could think, "Oh, this is just the old fundamentalist attack on people, and the same old targets." I tried, you may think unsuccessfully, to be assessing policies, not people and I took care, in places, to speak *for* the people whose thinking at other points I criticise (e.g. I disagree with Archbishop Fisher on the results of Haringay, p.56). Over against critics of Ockenga and Carnell, I documented that their evangelical convictions did not change (in passing, I don't recall I offering any opinion on how Ockenga's non-residence affected things at Fuller). My main point is the historic evangelical understanding of what it means to be a Christian and how that was challenged (chapter 1) by the liberal contention that it is not essential to believe any set of doctrines to be a Christian. Granting the excesses of fundamentalism, on that issue they were clear. The new evangelicalism (for want of a better term, I don't use it in the book as a smear label) came to believe that the older lines of division were too narrowly drawn and that, with more 'openness' and a better spirit, Christians in the major denominations could be helped and the whole position strengthened. This thinking happened to coincide with the ecumenical movement and thus to an atmosphere which evangelicals believed to be conducive to a wider unity while they could still maintain the biblical essentials. But ecumenism, as liberalism, for the most part assumed a different definition of a Christian from that of evangelicals, and *the issue of division*, as I have tried to relate it, became whether or not evangelical convictions are necessary to be a Christian. On that issue Graham, Stott and Packer have quite clearly taken a position which none of them took in 1950 and which would have been opposed generally throughout evangelicalism at that date. I think the documentation on that point is unanswerable (see, for instance, pp.73-4,119). My use of Fuller Seminary is to show that in trying to advance evangelical belief they quickly ran into tension with non-evangelicals and that there was no way to gain wider acceptance without a toning down of distinctives (pp.188-9), the very problem Ockenga and Carnell discussed. On a much larger scale Graham encountered the same problem and the solution to which he moved was to accept that his earlier idea of Christian was much too narrow. Now he professes to have no problem with either Robert Schuller or the Church of Rome.

It was this tension that Dr Lloyd-Jones was addressing, *not issues of churchmanship*. He argued that evangelicals could only be a part of ecumenism if they accepted the ecumenical axiom that "we are all Christians" and that by so

doing, sooner or later, the *importance* of what is distinctive and essential to evangelical belief would be seriously weakened and undermined. I believe he was right. It is not the jettisoning of evangelical belief by the leaders which I claim has happened (readers of your review could think I do) but their changed stance on how that belief relates to forms of religious thought which are inimical to it. In the end do the differences really matter? They clearly don't matter much if men can deny the resurrection of Christ and still be Christians (p.119 again). (You would notice I said nothing on Dr Stott's views on eternal punishment; I was trying to keep to the big issue which is at the center of the division).

My point in chapter 6, which I think is very relevant, is that the kind of evangelism so blessed of God in history, depends on the conviction that men must believe *the truth* or perish. Lloyd-Jones' great point was that the primary issue is, What is a Christian? and that the ecumenical involvement would necessarily involve a playing down of that issue (Similarly, the quest for intellectual respectability involved a playing down of the antithesis between the regenerate and unregenerate mind).

Following are a few points of detail, on which I simply give my opinion.

- Stott's leadership was not marginalized, not in the 1970s surely. Packer's position was different.
- Regarding "baptism the visible sign", you quote from p.99 but on p. 101 I show this was the position now formally adopted by the Anglican evangelical leadership.
- Schaeffer and others have long allowed social and moral action with Roman Catholics; what was new in ECT was the commitment with respect to evangelism.
- Concerning your speculation that Lloyd-Jones did not speak with Packer and Stott enough about his thinking which he made public at the 1966 meeting, I think here you are wrong. ML-J had plenty of contact with Packer and Stott before the critical meeting of 1966, including discussion on the subject in question.

May I add a final thought. We have to contend for the faith but we would both agree that something more than right beliefs are needed. The power of godliness is not widely in evidence in many churches today - prayer meetings and powerful evangelistic preaching are not common. Certain correct tenets of belief can appear to exist in people who see no conflict in accepting views seriously at variance with those beliefs (I mentioned Inter-Varsity men on this side of the Atlantic and on your side you have such people as Clark Pinnock in the Evangelical Theological Society). Among "our ranks" pragmatism is probably more widespread than wrong beliefs. Your final warning on "the greatest number" is surely right but that kind of thinking would appear to have eaten into evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic. "Is it successful?" becomes a primary question. If the main case of my book is true, the prevalence of expediency is not unconnected with the policy of going for influence at the expense of a clear-cut biblical stand.

Thank you again for this discussion.



## Interview with Paige Patterson

*The following excerpts are taken from a interview with Dr. Paige Patterson, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, conducted by Dr. Mark Dever and Mr. Matt Schmucker of the Center for Church Reform. An audio CD of the hour-long interview is available from CCR (phone 202.543.1224). The transcript has been slightly edited to fit accepted literary style and, where necessary, for clarification.*

**Schmucker:** Briefly, for those who are not familiar with Southern Baptist life, particularly the last 20-30 years, tell us what people refer to as the Southern Baptist Controversy?

**Patterson:** The Southern Baptist Controversy really grew out of things that happened to our denomination following World War II. In spite of the fact that we were a very large denomination at that time, nobody took much notice of us. We were sort of isolated to the south and nobody took a lot of interest in us. But then, as we began to expand into all 50 states and that kind of thing, plus the controversy, then we became fairly well noticed at that point in time. Now it seems like we can't comment that "It's a cloudy day" without the press picking up on it. But, be that as it may, the controversy began in 1979 when some of us just felt that our denomination was slipping ever to the left just as most mainline denominations had done. Some of us decided that it didn't have to be that way and that we were going to try to raise up a standard and sound the trumpet and see if the brothers and sisters wouldn't return to the faith of their fathers. We didn't know whether they would or they wouldn't, but we knew that's what we had to do and the Lord graciously blessed from heaven and that's exactly what happened. The churches returned to the faith of their fathers. Of course, that was not to the liking of some people and so there has been not a little bit of controversy out of it.

**Dever:** If I could just interrupt you for just a second, for a non-Southern Baptist listener your name is probably one of the best known among Southern Baptists. Most loved among some and most hated among others.

**Patterson:** I would say that's true.

**Dever:** Southern Baptists probably understand that. Can you tell those who are not Southern Baptist but evangelical pastors in other churches why that is the case with you in particular.

**Patterson:** I think probably so. I try to empathize with those who are my enemy, and those who think they are my enemies. I understand that many of them had positions in leadership and prestige and all those things that go along with it and they look upon me as the man who blew the whistle.

**Dever:** They would blame you for them being fired or for a lot of people losing their jobs?

**Patterson:** Or for it just becoming so uncomfortable that they couldn't stay and they of their own volition left. But nevertheless I would be blamed for it and I'm sympathetic to that. I often understand very well why they are unhappy, but I still say that truth is more important than one's level of happiness or unhappiness.

**Dever:** A good book summarizing this at least at the time would have been Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles*.

**Patterson:** Nancy, I thought, did one of the best jobs because she was not sympathetic with the conservative revival in Southern Baptist life. She was on the other side, but she was a very honest sociologist.

**Dever:** She sustained what had been your main contention throughout that it was a theological battle, not a political one, while the other guys had always been saying this is just a bunch of guys from Texas who want power. Nothing theological in it. She said actually it's very theological.

**Patterson:** Yes, that's exactly right and one of the funny things that happened out of that was that I wrote a review for *Christianity Today* and was bombarded by people saying that they should not have allowed me to do the book review on it because I didn't represent it correctly. So I called Nancy Ammerman and asked her whether or not I had been accurate. She said, Absolutely. So I said, Would you alert *Christianity Today* and tell them that and she did. So that sort of brought an end to that.

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**Dever:** Hasn't the need for reform in the history of the church always been true, given human nature.

**Patterson:** Given human nature, that's exactly right. Given human nature, and the thirst for power and influence and prestige, the church will forever be having to take a look at itself and asking how much is being influenced by the world philosophy around it, how much materialism has seeped into the lining of the church, and how much the desire for recognition and prestige has passed by the desire for holiness. So, forever, we'll have to do that and we must each individually examine our own hearts on a regular basis about this, too.

**Dever:** A prominent pastor has recently been divorced by his wife and is maintaining himself by staying in the ministry at this particular church. That's the kind of thing you wouldn't have seen 50 years ago, isn't it.

**Patterson:** Absolutely not. Fifty years ago that was not even questioned.

**Dever:** I don't mean to get into that particular case, but isn't it true that pastors are facing situations today that they just weren't facing even when you entered the ministry 20-30 years ago?

**Patterson:** Certainly, that's true. Not that pastors 30-50 years ago didn't have their problems, but it is true that we live in a problem-plagued world right now that is full of so many difficulties that pastors are called upon to face things that they've never even had to think about.

**Dever:** In my mind that encourages me to tell pastors to get back to the Bible and look and see what it says. I know the Bible doesn't directly address everything we're going to run into as pastors, like Mrs. Jones of the flower committee, but there may be a lot of things it addresses. For example, in that case, is it appropriate for a brother who may be genuinely a brother in Lord but has been divorced, is it appropriate for him to serve as an elder or pastor of a congregation? Rather than just simply asserting we have a congregational right to do this, I think there are biblical issues at stake that we need to raise and, in charity, discuss.

**Patterson:** I think you're exactly right, Mark, because otherwise we end up with purely human solutions. Human solutions are always fraught with all the same inadequacies that all human thought has.

**Schmucker:** The up-side of this looks like it would be increasingly thoughtful Christians and a knockout of

Christian nominalism.

**Patterson:** That's what we can hope for. That's what we want to see take place.

**Dever:** That's what I'm guessing is going to be the case in the younger generation. When it's no longer a fashionable thing to be in church on Sunday morning you're not going to have the huge number of nominalists hanging around the churches. I think that in America one of the biggest barriers to evangelism is the sloppy way that pastors are treating church membership.

**Patterson:** Absolutely.

**Dever:** If you're out there doing evangelism on Tuesday nights, sharing with somebody in their home, and they know the guy two doors down is a member of your church and he's been in an openly adulterous affair for 2-3 years and doesn't come to church, yet your church never disciplines him, what on earth do they think you're saying when you're sharing the gospel?

**Patterson:** Here's the pity of it. It is easier to get into a church than it is to join the Rotary Club. It is more difficult to be disciplined by a church than it is to be disciplined by the Lions Club. If you're a member of the Lions Club (if I understand it correctly) and you miss four weeks in a row, you're out. If you're out of town for four weeks in a row, you better find a Lions Club in that city wherever you are and attend or you're going to be out. So, the sad state of affairs that exists in many of our churches now is church membership is meaningless. Therefore there is nothing appealing to the people on the block as they look at the church members who live there. They look no different than the others.

**Dever:** I think the Lions Club may have gotten their standards from 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist churches actually. I want to come back to that more specifically in just a moment, but basic to the tenor of a church, I think, is the preaching and the commitment to biblical preaching.

**Patterson:** I concur 100%.

**Dever:** Any comments on that? Are you encouraged by the state of preaching as you go around? But you're usually preaching as you go around to churches, aren't you?

**Patterson:** Yes, I'm usually preaching, so I don't get to hear as much, but I would have to say, without trying to sound pessimistic, that on the whole I am not encouraged. I am encouraged about what our seminaries at this present moment are doing, but we've got a hiatus here in which, very frankly, we've got people out there who are not really doing biblical preaching.

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**Dever:** So, Paige, would you encourage pastors to spend more or less time reading systematic theology?

**Patterson:** I would encourage them to spend more time reading systematic theology. The commentaries are important but a man has to understand the whole of what God has said and to get a biblical worldview and perspective. The Bible says that God said our ways are not His ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts. Well, just exactly how are we going to come by His thoughts and His ways? We have to see the broader picture. I think the

pastor ought to be reading not only systematic theology and not only his commentaries, but he ought to be reading a good diet of good biography, not only for the influence of the spiritual lives of people that he reads about, but also for cogent illustrations for a segment of his preaching.

**Schmucker:** Name two you would recommend of the biographies.

**Patterson:** Of course, one of my favorites still remains Bainton's biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*. Very frankly it's one of the books that sustained me more than any other during the days of difficulty and confrontation through which I walked. That book was very, very helpful to me. Another is coming from my own background, of course, a book called *The Anabaptist Story* by William R. Estep which chronicles the story of the south German and Swiss Anabaptists during the Reformation and the many persecutions that they suffered. That book, too, was very helpful to me. So those would be two right off the top of my head.

**Dever:** There's something we have talked about before that I would like to understand a bit more, specifically on conversion.... We both agree that salvation is of the Lord, that God saves people.

**Patterson:** Absolutely.

**Dever:** I understand that conversion has to be something that fundamentally God does in our souls by the vivifying influence of the Holy Spirit, to use the old theological language, that the Holy Spirit by the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10), and by the word of Christ, that the Holy Spirit comes in and uses that word and brings new life to a soul. What that means essentially is that regeneration is not caused first by our faith apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.... As we are thinking through conversion, I see it very much the Bible teaching it as the activity of God's Spirit in us. Not at all unrelated to our action. We have to have the gospel preached, Paul is clear on that, and we have to repent and believe, but what I stop and ask the question How is it that I ever did repent and believe? My only answer is the activity of God's Holy Spirit.

**Patterson:** I think I would agree with you 100%. I think probably where we might not see it quite eye to eye is that I would not insist that regeneration be the word applied to that work of the Spirit at this point. I am uncomfortable with preceding repentance and faith by regeneration, although I am equally uncomfortable with preceding regeneration by repentance and faith. I see it all as something that happens in a nanosecond. The point where I really do agree with you 100%, Mark, would be that that can never come to pass as a coincidence of any set of human actions, however you want to define that. Whether of one person or other person's influencing it, or whatever. If it happens, it happens as you very well stated by the vivifying presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

**Dever:** My concern and I think the concern of the more Calvinistic types in this is simply to say that we don't want to fall back into this Roman Catholic error of assuming that we are saved because we have cooperated with the grace of God. We just really don't want to go anywhere near that. We know that we have to repent and believe but we want to make sure the glory of that goes entirely to God. Whereas the Roman Catholics are quite clear in saying that they want God to be glorified, but they think He has made us such a way, and the fall has not been so bad that we can't of our own nature still cooperate with God's grace.

**Patterson:** No, they have misunderstood the scripture completely because even after you are saved Jesus said "*without Me you can do nothing.*" If that's even true after you're saved, then what is it before you're saved? So I agree with you completely and the only rejoinder I would make is that the reason some of us fear the more Calvinistic expression of it is that we fear that what often happens is that people don't preach hard for repentance and faith. Certainly some Calvinists do, and I don't have a problem with that. But I do have with those who don't preach hard

for repentance and faith because they say, If God's going to do this He's going to do it regardless of what I do.

**Dever:** I have to say as somebody who's a Calvinist who preaches all the time, I do feel that tension. You're not just making that up. I understand that because I do know it is God who saves and I don't want to manipulate a false conversion because I think that hurts evangelism and deceives that person, but at the same time Jesus used a lot of imperatives. If we are going to be biblical Christians and preachers we cannot be scared to use those imperatives.

**Patterson:** I guess my concern is that we keep it in proper tension. We don't know how to explain all those things for each other or for a lost and listening world. We wish we could, so we have to, in effect, preach with an intention. Spurgeon was one of the best at that, actually. He'd write a book against Calvinism but then he himself would pretty well preach Calvinistically. So I think he saw the tension that has to be held.

**Dever:** So on evangelism I am hugely concerned that some of the ways that we've done evangelism have actually been some of the things that have most damaged our attempts to spread the gospel. In other words, if I simply share the gospel with somebody, lead them in praying to receive Christ, and then quote 1 John 1:9 to assure them that if they confess their sins that they're forgiven, and ask them, "Have you confessed your sins?" and they say, "Yes, I just did," and I respond, "Then you're forgiven. If you doubt that you doubt the word of God." I fear that we have filled up our churches with millions and millions of people who genuinely don't know Jesus from a hole in the wall. They give every evidence of it in their lives, and we preachers and pastors are partly to blame for the way we've done the evangelism. I'm not talking about all the preachers who are not obedient in doing evangelism at all. You know, there was the Great Awakening rejoinder that somebody said, I'd rather do my poor evangelism than your no evangelism. Well, me too. But, for those who are doing evangelism, it does seem to me like there are a lot of people sitting in our churches who think they are going to heaven. Well, they're sitting on our rolls but they don't sit in our churches, and some who sit in our churches don't really seem to know the Lord.

**Patterson:** Regrettably I have to believe that anytime you stand up and face a congregation these days in the average church you're looking at 30-40% that have never been born again and are not genuinely saved.

**Dever:** You mean in the evangelical church?

**Patterson:** I'm talking about in Baptist churches where we supposedly emphasize nothing in the world but regeneration. Lord knows what it is in some others, but I think that's true of us and I think it's because we have been very careless. We've been more concerned about numbers to report to the denominational press than we have been about genuine conversion. So, yes, I'm very concerned about it. Matter of fact, I've got to where, going into churches, I preach hardly anything else but the new birth anymore from one of 18-20 passages that I work from, just because I'm so concerned about that. So, yes, I do share your concern about that. It can't be any other way for us to have as much of the world in the pew as we presently have.

**Dever:** So, what can a pastor do to help sort that out? Is that where taking church membership and taking that seriously comes in?

**Patterson:** It is true that church discipline is a major part of assuring that we have a redeemed church membership. However, it is also true that in the handling of people when they initially come forward. I've come to believe, for example, that in an evangelistic invitation most people who come forward have not yet really made a commitment of their lives to Christ. They are coming forward out of an honest interest. Usually that is true, but I think if you put them down on the front pew and give them a card to fill out that you have probably done a tremendous disfavor to them if that's the sum total of what you're going to do. I think those people need to be taken and counseled very

carefully and walked with until there is some evidence that a genuine conversion has taken place. If I were counseling pastors today I would say don't receive anybody into the church or for baptism or anything else at the moment they come forward. Get them into a counseling program. By counseling I am not talking about professional counseling.

**Dever:** Examining them?

**Patterson:** That's right. I am in favor of baptizing the new converts as quickly as possible because I think that's the New Testament way, but I am also in favor of putting in the careful approach both at the front and the back.

**Dever:** I think a lot of this can be helped just even by the front and you don't even have to talk about discipline. You just need to examine the way you take in members. So you're saying you don't think it is wise for some of these pastors who may be listening who tend to take in members of the churches at the end of the service? You encourage them not to do that?

**Patterson:** I really have my growing doubts as to the wisdom of that.

**Dever:** I heard about one church recently, and I don't know if you know about churches like this or not, in order to encourage baptisms among children the baptistry is shaped like a fire truck and they've got confetti cannons that go off whenever a kid is baptized. Do you know about any of this?

**Patterson:** This is my first time to hear this. This is blasphemous!

**Dever:** Anyway, it's a church in America. It's an evangelical church and they mean to preach the gospel so I want to be real quick to say their intentions are good. That's going to get kids of course, because they want to come forward, get in the fire truck and make the confetti cannons go off.

**Patterson:** I do not view [positively] the huge number of child baptisms that Baptists are now guilty of--Baptists are some of the worst paedo-baptizers there are.

**Dever:** I know the average age of baptism has dropped, I think, about 10 years in the last 100 years. When you read biographies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they're always getting baptized at 17, 18, 19, 20. J. R. Graves was baptized when he was 19. John Gill was that way. John A. Broadus was that way.

**Patterson:** It's out of hand in our churches.

**Dever:** I don't think we have to say that children can't be saved, we're not saying that at all. But the difficulties to us are knowing that they're saved

**Patterson:** Because of the difficulties of communication.

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**Dever:** Is the fastest way to get fired in a Southern Baptist church is to begin to practice church discipline?

**Patterson:** Probably that's true. When I tell my students about it I tell them, Do not go do this next Sunday.

**Dever:** Are there Southern Baptist churches that are doing this, that are practicing church discipline?

**Patterson:** Yes, there sure are.

**Dever:** A growing number?

**Patterson:** A growing number, yes. I would say right now probably we're at the 100-200 level. So, at first you think, Wow, that's wonderful, that's great. But we have over 42,000 churches, so we're just beginning to make a dent in it. But I think more and more are realizing that you cannot have a meaningless church membership and expect to make any impact on the world.

**Dever:** How do you encourage a pastor at Southeastern Seminary in their classes? Does the seminary encourage young ministers to help churches move toward church discipline?

**Patterson:** Yes, we absolutely do. I tell them to begin preaching it as you come to it in the text, don't back off from it. Preach it straight. Then I tell them when the day comes when you're actually going to begin practicing it, the place to begin is not with somebody who's been caught in some heinous iniquity, because you're going to have sympathy problems there. The place to do it is on every one of these church rolls where you have huge numbers of people that are not attending church.... That is something that people can understand. If folks have not come in five years and they are obviously not intending to come then we owe them, if we love them, a confrontation. If they choose not to respond to that confrontation then we're doing a disservice to them and the church to continue to consider them members.

**Dever:** What about the argument that in doing this you are cutting off a relationship with them that could be evangelistic?

**Patterson:** I think many people believe that, but these are generally people that just have no understanding of the fact that there is a confrontational element in Christianity that is unavoidable.

**Dever:** I know one Southern Baptist church that has 1100 members with about 40 attending. I think there are a lot like that. So if we really did this over the next year you might not be president of the biggest Protestant denomination in America.

**Patterson:** You know, this came up last year. Last year for the first year in our history we had a little drop in membership. The press kept coming to me and saying, Aren't you concerned about this? I said, Well, no, as a matter of fact I'd like to see a year when we dropped about 3 million more. The press would say, What's that you say? You wouldn't mind 3 million more dropped? I would say, No, we're having a boasting membership of 15 million people, there are at least 3 million of those that we can't even find. Some of them are in heaven, some probably went the other way, some of them are just in L. A., and we don't know where they are. For us to count them as church members is absolutely unfair to these people. It's one of the most unchristian things we could do. So, if we love them, we must stress to them that following Jesus Christ is a matter of trusting Him as Lord and doing what He says. *Why do you call me Lord and do not the things I say?* We can't help people live that way. We've got to help them see the better way and we need to lose about 3 million that are not really associated with us. Maybe more.



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## The Glory of God: Our Supreme Passion

*[This article is written by a missionary for other missionaries working in the "Last Frontier." For security reasons, the author must remain anonymous.]*

This is the first and most important of the basic principles of our work. Real Christianity is God--centered. Real Christianity recognizes, as Jesus Himself said, that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. Those who have glimpsed the greatness, the grandeur, the majesty and the excellence of our God through the eyes of trust in Jesus never get over that vision. An obsession with the glory of God is the hallmark of true knowledge of God.

What is the glory of God? The original meaning of glory has to do with weightiness. The glory of God summarizes the seriousness, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God. It sums up who He is, in the awesome brightness and weightiness of all His perfections. What does it mean then for us to glorify God? We cannot add to His glory, for He is already perfectly and infinitely glorious. Rather, for us to glorify God means for us to ascribe the glory that is due His Name in worship. It means that we acknowledge His glory by living as though His perfections are as serious and significant as they really are, so that we reflect His glory through a pure mirror. It means that nothing horrifies us more than the thought of bringing dishonor to His glorious Name, and nothing delights us more than to feel His pleasure as we live to the praise of His glory. It also means that we declare His glory among the nations, inviting others to join us in our love affair with His glorious perfection. Glorifying God thus consumes and defines every aspect of our life and witness as well as our worship.

We urgently need to recapture the centrality of glorifying God in our lives and work. Too much of what passes for evangelical Christianity in America is man-centered or even self-centered. God is reduced to a means to some other end, whether it be my own self-fulfillment or the welfare of others. The results are disastrous for worship, for discipleship, and for witness. Worship either becomes tepid, or it becomes an experience we offer to people as a sort of consumer product rather than adoration and consecration we offer to God. Discipleship becomes a self-help program that leaves huge areas of life untouched, rather than a life-long love affair with God that lays every area of life on the altar to be consecrated to Him and to be conformed to His image. Witness becomes an invitation to sample a product rather than a royal summons to flee to a sovereign Savior. In effect, we reduce the Good News to mere good advice.

If the glory of God is our supreme passion, this will redefine both the goal of our task and the manner in which we pursue that task. The goal of our task is that the earth be filled with the knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea. Our passion is to see Him receive the glory that is due His Name from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Everything else is simply a means to that end. We are not seeking to add numbers that we can report to the organization; we are seeking to add worshippers to the choir of heaven, who will live every area of their lives to the praise of His glory. This focus invests a new, holy seriousness to discipleship and the life of the church. We are not content unless His glory is proclaimed, reflected, upheld and adored among the people to whom He has called us. The task is not about us, and it's not even ultimately about the nations. The focus is on Him.

A passion for the glory of God will also redefine the manner in which we pursue our task. If our supreme goal is to glorify Him, we will not be able to separate our personal lives from our work lives. The way we treat our families, the way we entertain ourselves, the way we spend our money, the way we relate to others, the way we treat our bodies, the hidden attitudes of our hearts, the time we spend nourishing our own relationship with Him, cannot be

compartmentalized away from our "work." It is our job to glorify Him in every area of life, not just through the tasks written on our job descriptions. Failure in the former will mean failure in the latter as well. We also cannot accept any means to the end that does not equally bring glory to God. This passion thus has a purifying effect, safeguarding us from the temptation to take shortcuts or utilize worldly means in the pursuit of our work.

As I read over the words I have just written, I get overwhelmed with the conviction that I fall very far short of my own counsel. That brings me to my final point. We can only live for His glory by His grace. Apart from His enabling, I can do nothing. And even what I do by His strength is still tainted by my sinfulness, so that it must be covered by the blood of His sacrifice to be acceptable to my holy Father. Bless His Name that both His power and His grace are infinitely sufficient to meet all my need! Brothers and sisters, I plead with you to seek His grace to make the glory of God your supreme passion. It is His supreme passion, and the pursuit of anything else would constitute failure to fulfill our calling.



# A Doctrinal Study: God's Love

*[James P. Boyce](#)*

*The following study is adapted from Chapter 10 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 Holiness of God

Holiness is, however, not a distinctive attribute, but rather the combination of all these attributes. We may suppose a being in whom there may be love without justice, or truth, or any one of these to the exclusion of the other two; but no being can be holy, who does not combine in himself all of these, and all other moral perfections. Nor, when we have such a combination, is there anything to be added to constitute holy character. It is evident, therefore, that holiness is the sum of all excellence and the combination of all the attributes which constitute perfection of character.

In the study of these constituents, we first consider

## The Goodness of God

In one aspect of this word, it is merely equivalent to holiness. If we look at it as marking the excellence of God's nature, as we often use it with reference to man, we mean by it simply holiness. Thus, when we say of any one, he is a good man, we mean to assert the combination of traits of character, such as have just been pointed out as constituting holiness. This is the goodness which terminates in God himself.

On the other hand, the goodness of God may be spoken of as kindness, benevolence, or beneficence towards others, in which it is seen to terminate outside of himself. Thus we speak of him, as being very good to us. Thus the Psalmist says: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Ps. 23: 6.

It is on account of this ambiguity in this word, that it is best to consider it, in its first aspect, as merely holiness, and, therefore, as disposed of in what we have said of that, and to refer it in this second respect to one of the divisions into which the love of God naturally falls.

We therefore take up next

## The Love of God

Of this there are five kinds, which vary according to the object upon which love is exercised. The attribute in God is the same; but it is in its exit, or in its termination, that it assumes these different forms.

1. There is the love of complacency or approbation. This is exercised towards a worthy object in which excellencies are perceived. It is of the nature of the love of the beautiful, or the good, or the useful in us. It complacently or

approvingly regards, because there is in the object something worthy of such regard.

This is exercised by God, in its highest degree, in the love of himself, of his own nature and character, because the infinitely excellent must be to God the highest object of complacent love.

Were God but one person, in this way only could such love be exercised. But in the Trinity of the Godhead, there is found, in the love of the separate persons towards each other, another mode in which this love of complacency may in this highest sense be exercised.

Such love is also felt by God for his purposes. As he perceives them to be just, wise and gracious, he approves and regards them with complacent love.

But this love extends itself also to the creations, which result from this purpose.

This is true of inanimate creation. It is perfect, as far as conformed to his will, and fitted to accomplish his end, and as such God can regard it and pronounce it good. Thus we find that he did in the creation, Genesis, Chap. 1:10, 12.

The same record is made, in verse 25, as to the animal creation, before that of man; and after the creation, and investiture of man with the dominion over the earth, with its plants and animals, we are told, verse 31, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

The complacent love of God, therefore, extends not only to himself and his will, but to all his innocent creation and even to inanimate nature.

This love of complacency, however, as it is exercised in its highest degree towards himself, so also is it exhibited, in the nearest approach to that, towards those beings who are most like himself, having been made in his nature and likeness. An innocent angel, or an innocent man is therefore by nature a joy to God, as is the child to the father who sees in it a peculiar likeness to himself.

But the guilty cannot thus be loved. Sinful man cannot receive such love, so long as sinful. Even the penitent believer in Jesus, until the time of his perfect sanctification in the life to come, and doubtless even then, has access to God only through Christ, and, of himself, can in no respect secure the approbation of God.

2. The second kind of love, is the love of benevolence, which corresponds to the idea of God's goodness towards his creatures.

This is the product of his wishes for their happiness. It is not dependent on their character, as is the love of complacency, but is exercised towards both innocent and guilty.

It is general in its nature, not special, and exists towards all, even towards devils, and wicked men, because God's nature is benevolent, and, therefore, he must wish for the happiness of his creatures

That that happiness is not attained, nor attainable, is due, not to him, but to their own sin.

When the benevolence of God is exercised actively in the bestowment of good things upon his creatures, it is called

his beneficence. By the former, he wishes them happiness, by the latter, he confers blessings to make them so.

This is done to the wicked also, as well as to the righteous. It is to this that Christ refers, Matt. 5:45, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

3. The third form of love is the love of compassion.

This corresponds to our idea of pity. It is benevolent disposition to those who are suffering or in distress.

This also may be exercised towards the guilty or the innocent, if it be possible to suppose that guilt and suffering are separable.

It has been very commonly held that they are inseparable. Pain, suffering and distress have been believed to be the result of sin, and consequently inseparable from guilt.

But this is a mistaken notion. Man in a state of innocence was made capable of physical suffering. That capacity was necessary to the protection of his physical organism.

The lower animals also suffer.

Whatever addition to the capacity of suffering has, therefore, been made by the fall, and is the consequence of sin, we are not, on that account, forced to the conclusion that there can be no suffering where there has been no sin.

The capacity to suffer may so belong to a higher organism, that we would naturally choose that organism, with that capacity, rather than a lower one without it. If so God can justly so create us.

If misery, then, may be the lot of the innocent, God's love of compassion can be exercised toward such.

It can be and is also exercised toward the guilty. We see this in the forbearance with which he delays their punishment, in his constant offers of mercy, in his yearnings after their salvation, and most signally, in the gift of his only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16.

4. A fourth form of the love of God corresponds to what we call mercy.

This can be exercised only toward sinners.

Its very nature contemplates guilt in its objects.

It consists, not only in the desire not to inflict the punishment due to sin, and the neglect and refusal to do so, but in the actual pardon of the offender.

It cannot be exercised towards a righteous being, because in him is no sin or guilt to be pardoned.

It is, however, no new attribute in God, which has arisen because of the existence of sin, and which is, therefore, an

addition to his attributes.

It is a virtue inherent in his nature, and is especially only one form in which his love exhibits itself, the same love as that benevolence which innocent creatures call forth, and the same love which in another form of complacency has been eternally exercised in the Godhead.

When we say that this mercy must be exercised in accordance with the truth and justice of God, we say no more than is true of every attribute of God. No one can be exercised in such a way as to destroy another. Every one must be in harmony with the others. Or, remembering what we have before stated, that these attributes are not separate faculties, all that is meant in this case, as in all others, is that God must act in harmony with his nature.

The objects of the exercise of this attribute are all those to whom God pardons offenses of any kind.

They are not to be confined to redeemed sinners, although this is the most signal exhibition.

Under the ancient economy, God ruled as theocratic ruler over Israel. Sins of the nation and sins of individuals in their capacity of citizens of the nation, were pardoned.

Under that dispensation God occupied to that people the position of an earthly ruler, and consequently could pardon sins against his government at will, upon repentance, and upon merely governmental principle--that is, such as would secure obedience to the law, and peace and order, and the welfare of the nation. These were offences against the mere person of the king or the laws of his state, and not against the fundamental principles of holiness and righteousness; hence sovereignty and expediency could decide in each case what might be done, and mercy was exercised and justice dispensed accordingly.

But this is very different from the case of God, the righteous judge, the dispenser, not of arbitrary law, but of a law based upon his own nature and that of man, essential obedience to which is necessary, not for maintaining government, but for preserving and maintaining the right and preventing the violation with impunity of eternal law.

In both cases God must act in harmony with his whole nature.

But in that of Israel no obstacle was presented by that nature to the pardon of individual and national sins against the theocratic king.

Hence mercy was extended, apparently at least, without compensation to justice.

Yet amid it all, there was, in the sacrificial offerings with which the people were required to approach God, seeking pardon for both individual and national political sins, such a typical relation to the atonement made by Christ as shows that in some way in that atonement, may, after all, be found the reason why God, even in those cases, could be just and yet justify the offenders.

5. The fifth form of love is that of affection.

This differs from that of complacency inasmuch as it does not always demand a worthy object. This is exhibited in the parable of the "Prodigal Son."

It differs from that of benevolence, inasmuch as its object is not viewed in general with all others, but is one of special interest.

It differs from that of compassion and that of mercy, because the object may neither be in distress, nor sinful.

It arises from,

(1.) Mutual relationship; as of the Father to the Son, and of all the persons in the Trinity toward each other; of God to Israel, of Christ to his apostles, his disciples and his church, and of the adopted sons to God the Father.

(2.) From dependence; as of creatures on the creator, and of the redeemed upon the redeemer.

(3.) From ownership; as of God over man of God over Israel, and of Christ over the redeemed. This is illustrated in the lost coin in Luke 15:8, 9.

This kind of love originates in each of these ways in man, and, as the Scriptures show, is also found in God.

It is from this aspect of God's love that proceeds grace, which is to be distinguished from love, and pity, and mercy.

Love, as we have seen, is the general characteristic, exhibiting itself in these five different forms.

Mercy is one of these, but is given to the guilty only.

Pity is given to guilty or innocent, who may be in distress, pain or suffering.

Grace is also given to guilty, or innocent, and does not necessarily suppose distress in the object, but involves an affectionate interest in it, arising either from peculiar relation to it, or ownership of it, or compassion for its dependence.

Grace is undeserved favour to innocent or guilty arising from affection.

Mercy is undeserved compassion to the guilty only.



## News

### Ozark conference report

The third annual Ozark Regional Founders Conference was held September 8-9, 2000, at Immanuel Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Over fifty people attended this gathering with the provocative theme "Would Jesus Join Your Church?" The conference messages focused on various aspects of the doctrine of the church.

Pastor Jim Orrick of North Pointe Baptist Church, Kansas City, Missouri, delivered three messages addressing the nature of the church, church discipline, and biblical church growth. Dr. Jim Elliff, President of Christian Communicators Worldwide, presented sermons on the role of the pastor and the biblical view of how to invite men to Christ.

Pastor Scotty Karber of Faith Baptist Church, Batesville, Arkansas, spoke on the meaning and importance of the ordinances. And Dr. Steve Cowan of the Apologetics Resource Center in Birmingham, Alabama, preached in defense of plural eldership in local church government. Tapes of the conference may be ordered by contacting Pastor Jason Anderson of Immanuel Baptist Church at 604-442-7053.

### New Founders Press title

*A Southern Baptist Looks at the Biblical Doctrine of Election*, by Ernest Reisinger, is the newest title to be offered by Founders Press. This small booklet is an excellent introduction to one of the most wonderful yet misunderstood doctrines in the Bible. The pamphlet has a retail price of \$3.50.

### Pope becomes Globetrotter

Pope John Paul II was recently made an honorary member of the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. In a ceremony conducted at St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, the Pope was presented with an autographed basketball and his own jersey by the team. Pope John Paul joins other honorary team members, including Nelson Mandela, Henry Kissinger and Whoopi Goldberg.

### Reformed Baptist meeting

Heritage Baptist Church, Mansfield, Texas, will host the 5th General Assembly of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, March 6-8, 2001. For a brochure listing all pertinent information for registering call (817) 453-5580 or email [vincent@flash.net](mailto:vincent@flash.net). Dr. Poh Boon Sing, pastor of Damansara Church, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, will be the keynote speaker on the subject of Church Planting. The theme this year, "Turning the World Upside Down for Christ," emphasizes the necessity of church planting. Further encouragement and challenges will come from several pastors and missionaries.

### Pop goes the Gospel

*Christianity Today* (June 8, 2000) and other news sources have reported on what appears to be a new trend in some large evangelical churches. First Baptist Church in Springdale, Arkansas hired a well-known former Disney World designer of children's amusement rides to design two "high tech sets" for elementary age worship areas: Toon Town for first-through third-graders, and Planet 45 for fourth- and fifth-graders. The fully animated cartoon town has 26-foot-tall buildings. The rationale behind the \$270,000 project is summed up by the church's children's minister: "Putting a talking head in front of kids for an hour doesn't work ....This is a visual generation. We need to use technology to the max." That includes a special baptistry which is built around a fire engine. When a child is baptized, the sirens sound and confetti is fired out of cannons.

When kids enter the rooms, a music video is playing on a giant screen in front, and they can amuse themselves at a row of nonviolent video game screens along walls. Once the service starts, "it's 90 minutes of mostly frenetic activity, akin to a live television variety show from the 1950s. In Toon Town, buzzers and bells sound, lights flash from the ceiling and from car headlights on the set, bubbles come out the top of a giant bucket and fill the room, confetti streamers squirt out onto the first few rows, and mist is sprayed onto the crowd." According to the designer, Bruce Barry, "It's just like going on a ride at Disney World."

## Founders YOUTH Conferences

A third Founders YOUTH Conference has been planned for the summer of 2001. In addition to the meetings in Bolivar, MO ("Reconciliation: Can't We All Just Get Along?" July 9-13) and Toccoa Falls, GA ("Spirit-Filled Relationships," June 18-22), a conference is also scheduled for Panama City Beach ("Who Am I? The Doctrine of Man," July 30-August 3). For more information contact Bill Ascol, phone: 318/798-7088; email: [tuliplover@earthlink.net](mailto:tuliplover@earthlink.net).



## Letters

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I received my Founders 2000 CD yesterday, and I was very impressed. Thanks for the quality product at a reasonable cost. I know that it will be of benefit to me for years to come.

G. A. via e-mail

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Just read your article from issue 41. I was a messenger at this year's SBC who was trying to get to a microphone to amend the 2000 BF&M on the subjects of the Lord's Day and Man, but the liberals were all hogging the microphones and debate was cut off. My amendment would have been to keep the 1963 wording on the Lord's Day and to revert to the 1925 wording concerning the nature of man. But the liberals are still among us and the opportunity for substantive debate was cut off when the time allotted ran out.

D. B. R. via e-mail

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Good Morning, ...

While I have been a Christian since 1977, I have only recently come to understand reformed doctrine and accept most of its teachings. While preparing a Sunday school lesson in 1 Peter I got into a lengthy study of what the word "foreknowledge" really meant. Once I understood that it wasn't really possible for it to mean chosen based on who He foresaw would choose Christ, but chosen because of His will, well, everything else seemed to fall into place. I attend Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Virginia Beach, VA. My current Systematic Theology class has given me the opportunity to write a paper on Election, Foreknowledge, and Man's Free Will. As stated, I have been somewhat of a "secure Arminian," of the SWORD OF THE LORD variety until a couple years ago when I started understanding that, as Jonah said, "salvation is (completely) unto the Lord." Fortunately I have been a long time John MacArthur fan so I wasn't too far gone (he recommended you, by the way). I have Calvin's *Institutes* and all his commentaries now, I wish I had time to read them, but I don't have to tell you what seminary does to your ability to read what you WANT to read. Anyway, thanks for your publication, I really appreciate it.

C. L. S. via e-mail

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Dear Brother Ascol:

Thank you for your recent article on reformation and controversy [FJ #40]. I found the section on Wesley and

Whitefield very helpful as I have felt that sting also.

G. B. via e-mail

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I just wanted to send you all a little note of encouragement for your ministry and the articles that you produce. They are very thought provoking and enlightening. Being a soon to be pastor it is such a blessing to find good stuff out there to read and grow from.

I also admire your Calvinistic stance and defense. Being a Calvinist and a great lover of the works of Spurgeon, the blessing I receive is two-fold.

Thanks,

B. S. via e-mail

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I praise God for your site and for what you are doing. I am a young man that believes in the doctrines of grace. I am looking at going to seminary and entering into the preaching of the gospels of God's Holy Word. I would be very grateful if you could point me in the direction of a website message board or someone able and willing to answer questions that I have about going about being a reformed Baptist within the SBC. Could you tell me if Southwestern supports Calvinism also? I thank you for any help that you can offer. God bless you and continue to strive to bring back correct doctrine within our churches.

In God's service,

Mark via e-mail

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very interested in reading FJ regularly ever since I've had a free sample issue. I am on my way of discovering the "doctrines of grace." The problem is, though, I cannot afford the subscription. I am enrolled at a small German seminary and budget is usually quite tight here.

So I was wondering if there might be any funds that you have in order waive the subscription price for me. Just wondering ... I would not want you to have to bend your backs in order to make it possible for me to have FJ. Please be honest, if it's not possible at all.

Thank you so kindly!

Soli Deo Gloria,

S. H. via e-mail



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## Year's End

O LOVE BEYOND COMPARE,  
Thou art good when thou givest,  
    when thou takest away,  
    when the sun shines upon me,  
    when night gathers over me.  
Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world,  
    and in love didst redeem my soul;  
Thou dost love me still,  
    in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude, distrust.  
Thy goodness has been with me another year,  
    leading me through a twisting wilderness,  
    in retreat helping me to advance,  
    when beaten back making sure headway.  
Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead;  
I hoist sail and draw up anchor,  
With thee as the blessed pilot of my future as of my past.  
I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead.  
If thou hast appointed storms of tribulation,  
    thou wilt be with me in them;  
If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and temptation,  
    I shall not drown;  
If I am to die,  
    I shall see thy face the sooner;  
If a painful end is to be my lot,  
    grant me grace that my faith fail not;  
If I am to be cast aside from the service I love,  
    I can make no stipulation;  
Only glorify thyself in me whether in comfort or trial,  
    as a chosen vessel meet always for thy use.

--From *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 111.

