



The Pastor as Theologian

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Contributors:

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

William G. Moore is Pastor of Dover Baptist Church in Shelbyville, KY, working on Ph.D. in Historical Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

Editor:

Thomas K. Ascol, PhD

Associate Editor:

Ernest C. Reisinger

Contributing Editors:

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The Pastor as Theologian

[Tom Ascol](#)

The story is told of two seminary professors who were walking in a cemetery when one said to the other, "Look, two men are buried in this grave." His colleague asked, "How do you know?"

"Because the tombstone says, 'Here lies a pastor and a theologian.'"

Unfortunately, that is an all-too-common conception. In both the academy and the church the opinion largely prevails that one can either be a theologian or a pastor, but surely, one cannot be both.

I confronted this mentality twenty years ago during an interview with the head of the PhD program at a well-known, conservative theological seminary. When asked what my ministerial goals were, I responded, "To be a pastor." The interviewer replied, "Then I don't know why you would want to pursue PhD studies in theology, since this degree is really designed for scholarly, theological research. You would never use it in the pastorate. In fact, I only know of one man who is a pastor that uses his PhD very much in his church, and that's Jim Boice [the late pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA]. And if you asked him, I think he would tell you that you really don't need a PhD if all you want to do is pastor."

The man meant no slight to the office of pastor, I am sure, but his comments betray an attitude which has wreaked havoc on biblical Christianity in recent generations. The idea that depth of learning and theological concern should be relegated to the classroom while the "practical" aspects of Christianity should be reserved for the church is deadly. It was perverse when liberals espoused it in the first half of the twentieth century and it is no less diabolical when advocated--even if subtly--by conservatives.

The separation of the role of the pastor from that of the theologian is a modern development. A cursory glance over history confirms this. Think of some of the greatest theologians before the twentieth century.

Augustine, the great Patristic theologian was the bishop--the pastor--of Hippo. Martin Luther, whose theological writings started reformational fires across Europe saw himself not merely as a professor but as a pastor.^[1] The same can be said of John Calvin, who pastored in Strasbourg as well as Geneva, and Huldreich Zwingli, who fulfilled his calling as pastor of the *Grossmünster* in Zurich).

This is also true of most of the Puritan writers whose works are gaining new appreciation in our day as well as the greatest American theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Our most significant Baptist theologians have also been pastors: John Gill served as pastor Horslydown for more than fifty years and Andrew Fuller pastored in Kettering for more than thirty years. P. H. Mell served Baptist churches in Georgia for more than thirty years as pastor and John Dagg pastored churches in Virginia and Philadelphia before his academic career. The great proponent for Southern Baptist theological education, Basil Manly, Sr. served as pastor for sixteen years, twelve of which were spent at the First Baptist Church of Charleston.

Such examples could be multiplied, but the point is sufficiently made that there was a time when to be a pastor meant to be a theologian. Those days were spiritually healthier than the times we live in today. If we hope to see a renewal of spirituality and church life, we must work to recover the role of the pastor-theologian.

Modern Separation of Pastor from Theologian

How did the separation of this unified calling occur? One significant factor has been the church's abdication of its theological task. The Apostle Paul declares the church to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). This means that the church is the steward of truth. We must recognize, therefore, that God has given to the church the responsibility to confess, reflect upon, and apply the truth, which is simply another way of describing the work of theology.

The Christian faith is inherently (though not exclusively) doctrinal. The truth which God has revealed throughout all of redemptive history and which culminates in Christ is to be explored, understood, explained, proclaimed and defended. Thus, truth is to set the agenda for the church.

Where this understanding of the church prevails, the pastor will be seen primarily as a "truth-broker." He will see himself responsible for doing the work of theology—studying, proclaiming and applying God's Word in such a way that "moral character is formed and Christian wisdom results."[\[2\]](#)

During the last 200 years in America this understanding of the church has been almost completely undermined. It happened quite obviously to mainline denominations in the first fifty years of the twentieth century and it is happening now (for the last forty years) in evangelical churches.

Evangelicals have largely been taken over by the consumer culture where the customer is king. Thus, just like any good capitalistic business, churches have become market driven. Find out what people want and give it to them. Some even advocate this philosophy for church growth in crass marketing language (see, for example, George Barna's 1988 book, *Marketing the Church*).

What do religious consumers want? Happiness, good child care, social relationships, aerobic exercise classes and twelve-step programs covering everything from weight loss to enhancing one's self-esteem would make the list. It seems that the last thing they want is doctrine. As the church begins to recast its vision in terms of market analyses (diminishing or even dismissing its role as steward of God's truth), it necessarily changes its conception of what a pastor ought to be. Consequently, today the role of the pastor is being modeled primarily after the therapist and manager rather than the theologian.

At the same time that the church has abdicated its responsibility as steward of the truth, the academy has jockeyed to usurp the theological task from the church. Theology has gone professional. The church is no longer regarded as "the prime recipient of theological endeavors" nor the primary context in which theological visions are constructed.[\[3\]](#)

Those who are gifted in certain technical fields which contribute to the work of theology (ie. grammatical and literary analysis; historical, theological and philosophical analysis, etc.) have often been conscripted by academic institutions which have increasingly distanced themselves from the church. Many of the largest and most respected seminaries have no formal affiliation with any church.[\[4\]](#)

Coupled with this is a shift in thinking about the nature of training for pastoral ministry. Instead of pastors training pastors the current model advocates professional academicians as the proper teachers of pastoral candidates. One proponent of this new model explained the rationale for entrusting inexperienced graduates with the responsibility of training men for the ministry: "Most people in middle age and beyond have not remained in touch with the academic subjects to the required level. And people coming out of college aren't sullied by the disillusionment of unfruitful parochial experience, nor by just

having gone rusty and not being able to read." [5] A review of theological faculty resumes easily demonstrates how widespread this thinking has become.

Granted, some subjects which are important to a minister's preparation can be taught by those who have mastered the material outside of practical church ministry. But the idea that the professional "teacher track" is the best source from which to draw men to train prospective pastors is biblically tenuous at best and counterproductive at worst. Who would ever think it wise to assign a newly minted pathologist the responsibility of training medical students in heart surgery? The relegation of ministerial training to academicians further contributes to the unhealthy division between pastoral work and theological work.

The result of this professionalization of theology has made it easy, if not preferred and at times even required, for those engaged in the work of theology to forget about the church as their primary audience and to address only other academics. One symptom of this malady is the relative dearth of recent work in the area of ecclesiology. It has become an almost forgotten subject of theology.

These tendencies have had a spiraling degenerative effect. Theology has become increasingly esoteric and church life has become increasingly a-theological. What is greatly needed, then, is a renewal of theology that takes place in the church. The effort for such renewal must be led by pastors. And such pastors must be committed to the work of theology.

Revival of the Pastor-Theologian

Every pastor is called to be a theologian. And both pastors and churches need to begin thinking again in these terms. This will happen when the Bible is regarded as sufficient for defining and directing pastoral ministry. All pastoral practice should extend from theological understanding which is rooted in the Bible. The primary question for a pastor's self-understanding is this: What does God say a pastor should be and do?

This question can only be answered in the context of biblical ecclesiology. When the order and officers of the church are considered, pastors will be recognized as the servant leaders of the church. Apostolic example and instruction provide content for this service and leadership. In Jerusalem the apostles were shepherding the church after Pentecost. In the context of responding to a divisive problem in the fellowship we are taught that those who pastor the church should give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Similarly, Peter gives a comprehensive charge to pastors when He writes,

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

These verses address the character, motivation, manner, methodology and goal of pastoral ministry.

While the whole Bible should be perused to determine the nature and role of a pastor, Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus comprise the primary source for such study. They are called the "Pastoral Letters" for a reason. Both Timothy and Titus had pastoral responsibilities and Paul gives them apostolic instruction on how to fulfill their ministries. So it is somewhat amazing to see how many books and articles on pastoral ministry either ignore or give only slight attention to these three letters.

A careful reading of these three letters will show that what Paul repeatedly emphasizes to his pastoral colleagues is the importance of sound doctrine to their work.

In the 242 verses which comprise these three letters, which are in effect divinely inspired pastoral manuals, Paul uses the word, "doctrine" at least sixteen times. Theology was to be at the heart of Timothy's and Titus' understanding of what a pastor is to be and do. Consider a few of the points Paul makes about a pastor's doctrinal responsibility.

- He is to charge people that they teach only apostolic doctrine. (1 Timothy 1:3)
- He is to beware that some professing believers will depart from the faith and will be taken in by deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).
- He will be a good minister of Jesus Christ if he teaches his brethren to see through ascetic gnosticism and he himself continues to carefully feed on good doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6).
- He is to give careful attention to doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13).
- He is continuously to take heed to himself and to the doctrine, with the assurance that by doing so he will save both himself and his hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).
- He is to aspire to become worthy of double honor by ruling well and laboring in word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).
- He is to regard the Scriptures as being profitable for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16).
- He is to preach the word because he knows that the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:1-4).
- He is to be so doctrinally grounded that he can refute false teaching by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).
- Everything which he teaches is to be consistent with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).
- In doctrinal convictions he is to have integrity, be reverent and incorruptible (Titus 2:7).

How in the world can any man hope to pass the apostle's admission test to pastoral ministry if he is not committed to being a careful theologian?

It has often been said that a man has no right to be a theologian until he has become an exegete. That is certainly true because the Word of God is the fundamental source for all theological thinking. However, it is also true that a man has no right to become an exegete without going on to become a theologian. The Bible teaches theology and the exegetical task is not complete until theological confession, reflection and application takes place.

The Pastor's Work Defined Theologically

The pastor's work cannot be satisfactorily defined without employing theological categories. Think of some of the major responsibilities of the pastorate: praying, evangelizing, preaching, teaching, counseling (preventative and remedial),

administration, maintaining an exemplary personal and domestic life, overseeing the church's life and ministry, providing leadership (in worship, vision and mission), and training leaders.

All of these tasks can and should be theologically defined. The Bible compares the work of an elder or overseer to that of a shepherd. That is what "pastor" means-shepherd. When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 he said, *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28).

This shepherding motif encompasses all of the tasks listed above and can be categorized under four heads: leading, feeding, caring, and protecting.

Leading

God calls pastors to give decisive leadership in the church. They are to "rule" (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17), not in a heavy-handed way but with genuine authority which has been vested in their office by Christ Himself. Furthermore, they are to lead in such a way that other believers will be able to follow them with spiritual profit.

In order to lead the church effectively a pastor must have a clear understanding of the intended destination. Where is the church supposed to go? What is it supposed to do? How you answer these questions will determine the character, impact, and effectiveness of your ministry. The Bible must be consulted to determine both what the appropriate functions of a church are (worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, etc.) and how these functions are to be carried out. This requires theological thinking.

Consider, for example, worship. Many of the most heated skirmishes in the so-called "worship wars" have arisen because of a failure to ask one basic question: What is worship? Without a clearly defined, biblically based understanding of what it is we are supposed to be doing when we gather for worship we cannot even begin to lead a congregation to do it. You will never hit the bull's eye if you do not know what the target is.

After worship has been biblically defined then other, more practical questions can be pursued. How should a congregation worship? Should congregational worship include choirs? Should offering plates be passed? Should Scripture be read? Should there be preaching? Liturgical dance? Drama? Musicals? Orchestra? Incense? Are any of these activities always--or never--appropriate? Are any of them incidental? Are any more important than others?

I am not suggesting that every pastor will answer all these questions the same way, but these and similar questions must be asked by anyone who is called to lead a congregation to worship. In other words, a pastor needs to work out a theology of worship and seek to teach it and apply it in the life of the congregation.

This is also true for evangelism. Like worship, evangelism is so much a part of the fabric of evangelical church life that pastors often assume that everyone knows what is meant by the word. But, again, the basic question must be asked, What is it? A biblical definition of witnessing and evangelizing must be distilled from Scripture.

Once this is done then other questions must be considered. Who should do evangelism? How? What is essential in evangelism? What is optional? What is the goal? What constitutes success?

When working out a theology of evangelism a pastor will be forced to think through other theological categories such as anthropology (doctrine of man), pneumatology (doctrine of the Spirit), Christology (doctrine of Christ), soteriology (doctrine of salvation) and ecclesiology (doctrine of the church). This requires theological thinking and when applied to

every area of church leadership will enable a pastor to help cast a theological vision for the congregation he shepherds.

Feeding

Like a shepherd, a pastor is responsible to feed his flock. The primary means by which this is to take place is preaching. The division of the "pastor-theologian" into two separate roles has had a devastating impact on preaching. Pastoral preaching has become all but void of doctrinal content. Consequently, church members are often not as stable as they ought to be and are easily led astray by charismatic false teachers. Where this malady long prevails theology is judged as irrelevant and theologians as being of little use to the church.

In former, spiritually healthier days doctrinal preaching was the norm. Just as the great theologians listed above considered themselves to be pastors so they also understood their chief work to be preaching. Their sermons which have been handed down to us in written form are filled with doctrinal content.

The great Welsh preacher of the last century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, "I would lay down a general proposition that preaching must always be theological, always based on a theological foundation."[\[6\]](#) That is to say, preaching must always teach. And what is to be taught is biblical doctrine.

This conviction is clearly seen in the preaching of the Puritans of the seventeenth century. After introducing the theme and direction of his sermon it was common for the Puritan pastor to set forth his exposition of the text under the heading of "Doctrine." Only after this were applications (called "Uses" or "Rules") made. J. I. Packer explains the Puritan approach to doctrinal preaching,

To be a good expositor ... one must first be a good theologian. Theology--truth about God and man--is what God has put into the texts of Scripture, and theology is what preachers must draw out of them. To the question, "Should one preach doctrine?", the Puritan answer would have been, "Why, what else is there to preach?" Puritan preachers were not afraid to bring the profoundest theology into the pulpit if it bore on their hearers' salvation, nor to demand that men and women apply themselves to mastering it, nor to diagnose unwillingness to do so as a sign of insincerity.[\[7\]](#)

Packer appropriately summarizes the importance of this approach by noting, "Doctrinal preaching certainly bores the hypocrites; but it is only doctrinal preaching that will save Christ's sheep. The preacher's job is to proclaim the faith, not to provide entertainment for unbelievers--in other words, to feed the sheep rather than amuse the goats."[\[8\]](#)

Caring

The role of counseling in a pastor's ministry is the subject of great debate. Martyn Lloyd-Jones had little confidence in the post-World War II counseling movement in the church. He argued that careful expository preaching could accomplish more than much of the personal work which counseling proponents advocated. Yet, he also acknowledged at least a supplementary role for personal counseling in pastoral ministry.[\[9\]](#) However much emphasis is given to this type of ministry, the work should be carried out theologically.

I have never encountered one counseling problem that did not have at its root a doctrinal misunderstanding or misapplication. That may sound over-simplified and impractical, but only if we forget how profound and practical God's truth is.

Counseling has become so psychologized in our day that we have a hard time even thinking of it theologically anymore. Yet, the biblical writers constantly use doctrinal truth to get at practical problems and issues in the lives of people. For example, issues of finance (especially giving) are addressed theologically by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. One of the greatest Christological affirmations in the whole Bible is stated in this context as a basis for sacrificial giving: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (8:9).

Ephesians 4 is a classic example of using theology to address personal problems. The chapter begins with a call to living humbly, patiently and lovingly with each other (1-3) which Paul urges on the basis of the genuine unity which believers have in Christ (4-16). In verses 17-32 he takes up the issues of dishonesty (25), anger (26), thievery (28), foul speech (29, 31), bitterness (31) and forgiveness (32). All of these practical counseling issues (and even more which spill over into the first 7 verses of chapter 5) are addressed on the basis of the believer's new life in Jesus Christ (17-24).

The Bible is filled with this kind of theological reasoning about personal problems. A faithful pastor must equip himself to follow this approach if he is going to be biblical in his ministry, which means he must train himself to think theologically about every area of life.

As I have progressed in age and experience my counseling has become more refined and straightforward. Thinking theologically about personal problems has led me to one basic exhortation which, I believe, has universal application. In all my counseling I try to say one thing: Be a real Christian and act like it.

For the unbeliever, a pastor has nothing to offer but the gospel (which is really everything). A man cannot have the kind of marriage he ought to have unless he first submits to Christ. So why spend hours on communication skills and personal habits when a man's fundamental need is to become a real Christian? For the unbeliever, all counseling issues are issues of evangelism.

For the Christian, all counseling issues are issues of sanctification; learning to live up to what has already been attained; learning to engage the spiritual warfare more effectively; learning to live by grace; to trust Christ; to repent sincerely; to forgive; to accept forgiveness, etc. When approached on this basis every problem which a Christian has can and should be evaluated theologically. For example, self-pity will be unmasked as the shadow side of pride and can be therefore fought more effectively. Sinful anger will be revealed as nothing more than unbelief--a lack of confidence in God whose providence orders our lives. The angry believer is, therefore, forced to deal directly with His Creator and Redeemer and rescued from being sidetracked by focusing on secondary causes.

Without a theological understanding of sin and its impact on the human personality, of grace and its power over sin, of Christ and His ministry to believers, of the Spirit and His ministry, of the Word and its usefulness for sanctification, of the Christian life and its goals and purposes, a pastor's efforts at counseling will be either very superficial or ineffective. Let the sociologists and psychologists chase the rabbit trails of a-theological counseling. Pastors must care for souls theologically.

Guarding

From their inception New Testament churches have been subject to false teaching and false teachers. Jesus warned of this as did the Apostle Paul (Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Corinthians 11:13-16; Galatians 2:4-5; 4:17; 5:7-12; Ephesians 4:14; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:8, etc.). It is the responsibility of pastors to protect churches from the devastating impact of erroneous teaching. This requires both discernment and refutation, both of which are functions of theological thinking.

Paul specifically instructs Titus to make sure that pastors are equipped for this kind of work. Such a man must hold "fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (1:9). Every pastor must be a theologian because there are "many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers ... whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (1:10-11).

The pastor who refuses to take up this work of biblical, systematic and polemical theology cannot adequately protect God's flock and, according to Titus 1:9-11, is not qualified for the office. This does not mean that every pastor will be equally gifted in theological understanding. But it does mean that every man who "desires the position of a bishop" (1 Timothy 3:1) will recognize that inherent in that office is the call to become a theologian.

How Can a Pastor Equip Himself Theologically

Pastor-theologians cannot be produced by academic institutions. Such institutions may assist a man along the path, but the work is far more demanding than can be performed in a classroom. Luther understood this well when he said, "Not understanding, reading, or speculation, but living, nay, rather, dying and being damned make a theologian."[\[10\]](#) Theology is best learned in the crucible of life and ministry, which means that a pastor must regard himself as a life-long learner and student. To aid in this process, a pastor should regard the study of theology and the discipline of thinking theologically ongoing responsibilities of his calling.

Following are a few suggestions which can contribute to this.

1. Become confessional in life and ministry. Study time-tested confessions of faith, such as the Second London Baptist, the New Hampshire, or the Abstract of Principles. There is a long tradition in Baptist life of pastors adopting or even writing their own personal confessions. Such an exercise will sensitize one to reading the Bible theologically (rather than merely narratively). Make a point to know the key biblical passages that teach justification; regeneration; sanctification; election; etc.
2. Use catechisms. Baptists, along with other protestant evangelical groups, have a rich catechetical tradition. Teach the children in your home and congregation a good catechism. Teach your church a catechism. A good catechism provides a theological framework for one's thinking.[\[11\]](#)
3. Familiarize yourself with good pastor-theologian models. Read Martyn Lloyd-Jones' biography and sermons. Do the same with Charles Spurgeon. On the contemporary scene, among those who are writing significantly, John MacArthur, John Piper, Brian Edwards, Joel Beeke, Sinclair Ferguson and the late James Boice are worth noting.
4. Read theology. The recent reprinting of older works makes the Puritans and their heirs more accessible today than at any time in the previous century. Get on the mailing lists of trusted publishers of such works, like Banner of Truth and *Soli Deo Gloria*. Talk to fellow pastors and discover what books they are finding helpful. Read good theological journals and don't skip the book reviews!
5. Read current events. [WORLD Magazine](#) and Ken Myers' [Mars Hill Tapes](#) are two excellent sources for staying current. [Current Thoughts and Trends](#) summarizes dozens of articles from hundreds of periodicals on a monthly basis. In addition to these Christian voices I have greatly benefited from reading almost anything sociologist Neil Postman writes.

Conclusion

Recovering the pastor-theologian model is not optional for a ministry which is committed to being biblical. God's Word requires pastors to see themselves in this light. Though this approach to ministry will require going against the stream of modern thinking, the benefits are far reaching.

Church members who are theologically instructed become better equipped to handle the Word of God responsibly. They are able to use Scripture in problem solving and counseling others. They also become better at listening to preaching and teaching. A theologically grounded congregation makes for better preaching. A pastor who trains his hearers to reason biblically will not be able to bluff his way through a sermon. Doctrinal preaching raises doctrinal literacy which in turn encourages careful study and prayer by the preacher.

A pastor-theologian can be useful in the lives of other pastors--especially those with less experience. I have avoided many wrong steps and unnecessary controversies in the church by listening to the experienced, theologically informed counsel of fellow pastors.

Finally, a pastor who sees theology as his life-long work will help lay the foundation for reformation and revival. If churches are going to be strengthened and renewed in our day, it will be accomplished on the foundation of God's truth and nothing else. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17). The Spirit uses nothing less in that great work. So if a pastor would see himself and his people become increasingly holy, he must restore truth to the pride of place in his ministry. He must continue to aspire to the work of a pastor-theologian. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to *doctrine*" (1 Timothy 4:13).

Notes:

¹ See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 53-56 and Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: the Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, trans. by James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993), 249-53. Luther's well-known prayer from his lectures on Genesis begins, "Lord God, thou has appointed me in the church as bishop and pastor...." (Brecht, 251).

² David Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 253.

³ Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 318.

⁴ Including Fuller, Asbury and Gordon-Conwell. See *Lints*, 318. This is not true of the six Southern Baptist seminaries which are governed by boards of trustees who are elected by messengers from local churches.

⁵ David Stancliffe, as cited in Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 174-75.

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 64.

⁷ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 284-85.

⁸ Ibid., 285.

⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 17-18, 37-40.

¹⁰ Cited in George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 61.

¹¹ For an excellent introduction to Baptist catechisms see Tom Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts, the Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1998). The *Truth and Grace Memory Books* (1 and 2) which I edited (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2000), utilize catechisms designed for children and young people.



A Mid-Nineteenth Century Baptist View Of The Ministry

[William G. Moore](#)

One of the most divisive debates among Baptists at the beginning of the twenty-first century concerns the office of pastor in the local church. The debate over the pastor's calling, gender, and authority creates opinions and parties, with all sides claiming not only the support of Scripture but, also, the precedence of history. One should not think that the debate, however, is merely between those who might be characterized as conservatives and moderates. While conservatives may not debate among themselves whether women are to be pastors, they do often discuss and debate the role of the pastor in the contemporary Baptist church. Although an examination of Scripture is foundational and essential in order to comprehend who are to be ministers of the gospel and what they are to do, a consideration of the views of another generation can help focus our energies on pertinent ideas and their biblical origins.

Mid-nineteenth century Baptists in America used the terms *pastor*, *minister*, and *elder* to designate the officer commonly called *pastor* in Baptist churches of our day. They regarded New Testament terms such as *elder*, *overseer*, *bishop*, *pastor*, and *shepherd* as signifying the same officer in the local church, and they held that such an office was the only ministerial office in the church.^[1] These Baptists had quite definite and, almost without exception, uniform views concerning the gospel ministry, views which they saw as based upon direct commands and principles of the Scriptures. An examination of these views concerning the ministry in general and the pastorate in particular may indeed help return Baptists not only to their historical roots but to biblical principles as well.

The Call to the Ministry

What qualifications are necessary for the ministry? Baptists viewed a man's piety and doctrinal soundness as the chief areas of concern.^[2] Neither a man's station in life nor his educational attainments were matters of preeminent concern. Francis Wayland, who served as President of Brown University from 1827-1855, examined 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9 and maintained, "It would seem from these passages that any disciple of Christ, of blameless character, meek, forbearing, temperate, sober, just, holy, thoroughly attached to the doctrines of the gospel, having a natural gift for teaching, and having had some experience in the Christian life--not a novice--has the qualifications for the ministry which the New Testament requires."^[3] One's godliness and gifts determined one's qualification.

Other denominations might complain that limiting the qualifications to these, without requiring a requisite amount of education as well, would so reduce the prestige of the ministry that the literate would be driven from it. Only the illiterate would be in the ministry. Wayland, however, would countenance no other qualifications than those set forth in the Scriptures:

The apostolic qualifications for the ministry are confined to the illiterate, or they are not. If they are, then it would be safer, after all, to adhere to the apostle's rule, for grace is before gifts in the view of the Master. But if these qualifications are equally distributed through every range of culture, by adhering to the rule we shall have a large variety of gifts adapted to every situation, and after all, have such men as every Christian must say are best suited to the work of saving souls. Our rule would then seem to be, to require, in all cases, the apostolic qualifications, and consider every man a suitable candidate for the ministry who possesses them, whatever may be his attainments or position in society. If he be *apt to teach*, he will be neither an *imbecile* nor a *pedant*.^[4]

Similarly, theologian John L. Dagg saw the qualifications for the ministry as gifts endowed by the Holy Spirit which, in themselves, constitute a call to the ministry of the gospel. Dagg elaborated, "The special qualifications which the Holy Spirit bestows, bind him on whom they are bestowed to use them in the service of Christ. They are given to fit him for this service, and they constitute a divine call for him to engage in it. They are not given to confer a privilege merely, but they are a solemn call to duty--a call demanding the service of the whole life."^[5] Consequently, the one gifted for the ministry could do nothing other than the work of the ministry and remain contented.

How could one know if one was called to the ministry? Was a call simply a personal feeling which was attributed to God and against which no one could stand? In a letter "addressed to the churches," a writer to the *Western Recorder* in 1858 provided the answer which appears to have been accepted practice in Baptist churches. Noting that only those whom God has called should enter the ministry, he asked the inevitable question, "How is the call of God to be ascertained? That a miraculous intimation of his will is to be expected, no rational man, at the present day, believes." The writer proceeded to answer the question which he raised, "Two things are necessary to prove a call to the ministry to be from God. The first is, that the individual possesses a sincere desire to be thus employed. He must feel a strong concern for the glory of God, and for the salvation of men. His heart must be moved with desires to proclaim the love of Christ to dying sinners, and to persuade them to be reconciled to God." The call to the gospel ministry, though, was not to rest only upon a man's testimony that he felt that God had called him and that he had a great desire to follow that call. The writer continued, "But another necessary thing is, that he possess suitable gifts. ... By suitable gifts we mean a sound understanding, a capacity and a desire to learn, an aptitude to teach, a reasonable degree of ability to be useful to his fellow men as a minister, when his mind shall have been cultivated as much as his circumstances may allow." Did this mean that the believer's personal testimony that he possessed such gifts and that he sincerely desired to enter the ministry constitute proof that he was indeed called by God? The writer answered, "Of these points, the individual is not a competent judge. His brethren must judge for him."^[6]

Wayland provided like-minded counsel. While one evidence of the call to the ministry was the conviction within a man has that he must preach the gospel, Wayland warned that more was needed: "We may frequently mistake our motives. We may overrate our capacity. We may thus run before we are sent. Hence we frequently see men in the ministry who have manifestly mistaken their calling, who are useless as preachers, while they might have been very useful in some other situation."^[7] What else was needed?

In answer, he in the next place lays his convictions before his brethren, who know his walk and conversation. He asks them to tell him, in the fear of God, whether or not their convictions correspond with his own, whether or not they in truth believe that he is called to undertake this work. They are bound to take up this subject with solemn deliberation. They do wrong, if they do not employ all the means in their power to come to a right decision.^[8]

Only when a man's fellow believers could confirm his call could that man with confidence claim to be called into the ministry.

The Preparation for the Ministry

Baptists were quick to respond to the charge that, historically, they had cared little for an educated ministry. For instance, D. C. Haynes gave this retort:

We have said that Baptists have ever been the fast friends of missions: the same remark is true of general and ministerial education. Nothing is more unjust than the charge, still reiterated, that the regular Baptists have ever been indifferent to education for the ministry. In illustration of the injustice of our opponents,

the American translators of the church history of Professor Hase, Messrs. Blumenthal and Wing, among other singular mistakes of Baptists in this country say: "*Of late years some portions* of this denomination have done much to redeem their order from the reproach of indifference to education." Baptists have ever been more or less active in this work, and have had learned men in their ranks, from the time of Luke the evangelist, and Paul the apostle.

They *do not*, indeed, deem education *essential* to the ministry; but *desirable*, as is amply proved by their entire history.[\[9\]](#)

Many earlier American Baptists, however, did appear to put little weight upon a formal education. Wayland noted that Baptists forty or fifty years after Jonathan Edwards discounted the importance of education. Most of them had left a "mechanical" occupation in order to enter the ministry. Piety, not learning, was seen as the prerequisite for ordination:

They saw that education, rather than piety, was in many denominations the test of ministerial qualification; and, instead of assigning to it its proper and subordinate place, they abjured it altogether. This was, doubtless, an error. Are not we now liable to the very error against which they contended? Be this as it may, there was, undoubtedly, in most parts of our country, a prejudice against men who were "college learned."[\[10\]](#)

A formal education was not seen by even its supporters, however, as the qualifying element of the gospel ministry. Jesse Mercer, always ready to support the cause of an educated ministry, wrote that "education is not, *in the least*, designed, so far as we know, among Baptists, by any who are engaged to promote it in the ministry, to usurp the place or take the power of any of those gifts, talents, or mental endowments which God by his holy Spirit imparts, and without which no man has any right to pretend to be a minister of God."[\[11\]](#) Mercer compared education for the minister with clothes for the minister: "They [clothes] have no power in them to make the man, yet they are very necessary both to his comfort, and to render him acceptable to his fellow men. So education is very necessary to the happiness and acceptance of a minister in the course of his ministry."[\[12\]](#) Mercer also compared words for the minister with tools for the mechanic:

A mechanic, to do good work, must have a variety, and a knowledge of the use of tools. So a minister, to do good work in preaching for God, must have a fund, and be acquainted with the right use of words. But how shall he attain to *this right use* of words, unless he studies it? Does God give the knowledge of language now? It would seem that many think the less a man is educated, the more plain, forcible and useful he is as a preacher; but the fact is exactly the reverse. It ought to be apparent to every one, that the less a man knows, the poorer must be his stock of words, and the less his capacity to use them advantageously. ... The learned minister of God, under the influence of a right spirit, will use his knowledge to present truth, not floridly, *but clearly*; not in the eloquence of human wisdom, *but in the simplicity* of demonstration, commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.[\[13\]](#)

The concept of an educated ministry did not necessarily mean, though, that the minister had acquired a *formal* education. A writer in the *Western Recorder* noted that knowledge of language and philosophy did not constitute necessary learning for a minister but rather "a knowledge of divinity of the Bible." Competence in this calling consisted of an "aptness to teach and apply that divinity--the truths of the Bible--to the hearts and consciences of men." He should be able to

bring the law of God home to the consciences of men; the man who can administer the heavenly balm of the gospel to the diseased soul, the man who can snatch from the armory of God the winged arrow, that shall pierce the innerest soul of the obdurate and rebellious; the man, whose burning zeal and love, under God's blessings, leads hundreds from darkness to light--that is the able, the learned divine; for "he," says the Almighty, "that winneth souls is wise."[\[14\]](#)

During the nineteenth century Baptists did often debate the best and most efficient way to train ministers. The one thing on which they usually agreed was the need for more ministers and better ministers.[\[15\]](#) While this meant for some a formal education, for others there would be a different type of training. Wayland counseled that one of the most profitable things which an established minister could do for younger believers called to the ministry "but who are, for various reasons, unable to pursue a protracted course of study" was to mentor them. The minister could provide them with books, teach them how to study the Word of God, take them to hear sermons and then discuss the delivery and content of the sermons with them, and take them to funerals, conferences, on visits to the sick. "No one can tell the advantage of such a course as this to a young man who has a talent for the ministry, and can avail himself of no other resources. If our ministers had always two or three young men in this sort of training, our ministry would be immeasurably increased in number, and improved in quality."[\[16\]](#) A ministerial candidate who had been provided in the providence of God with the ability and opportunity to attain a more formal education must take advantage of that opportunity. If not, "he must have a reason which will justify himself at the bar of God. But let him remember that these can not make him a minister of Jesus Christ. ... They are merely accessories which may give increased efficiency to the essential qualifications."[\[17\]](#)

One of the hindrances which prevented many men from getting a formal theological education was their lack of the requisite classical training. In his "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," James P. Boyce saw this as an unnecessary barrier:

In His Word and in His providence, God seems to have plainly indicated the principle upon which the instruction of the ministry should be based. It is not that every man should be made a scholar, an adept in philology, an able interpreter of the Bible in the original languages, acquainted with all the sciences upon the various facts and theories of which God's Word is attacked and must be defended, and versed in all the systems of true and false philosophy. Indeed, some must understand these in order to encounter the enemies which attack the very foundations of religion.[\[18\]](#)

Those who did not have the ability to obtain a classical education should nevertheless have the opportunity to obtain a theological education. Boyce proposed:

Let such a change be made in the theological department as shall provide an English course of study for those who have only been able to attain a plain English education. Let that course comprise the evidences of Christianity, systematic and polemic theology, the rules of interpretation applied to the English version; some knowledge of the principles of rhetoric, extensive practice in the development from texts of subjects and skeletons of sermons, whatever amount of composition may be expedient, and full instruction in the nature of pastoral duties--let the studies of this course be so pursued as to train the mind to habits of reflection and analysis, to awaken it to conceptions of the truths of Scripture, to fill it with arguments from the Word of God in support of its doctrines, and to give it facility in constructing and presenting such arguments--and the work will be accomplished.[\[19\]](#)

Boyce's proposal would come to fruition with the opening of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina, in the fall of 1859. While theological education of the highest caliber would be provided to those who had acquired a pre-seminary course of study, a challenging education suitable for those who had been unable to receive that course of study would also be provided.

The Licensing and Ordination to the Ministry

Ministers were often licensed to the ministry before being ordained. This license provided the ministerial candidate the

opportunity to preach so that fellow believers would have the opportunity to determine if the candidate was indeed equipped by God to be a gospel minister. The license was usually for a stated period of time and often renewable each year.[\[20\]](#)

Baptists would admit that the Scriptures were silent concerning the licensing of potential ministers. Nevertheless, because the ultimate supervision of gifts, according to 1 Corinthians, lay with the church, churches were believed to be within their rights to license candidates for the ministry.[\[21\]](#)

Who was to license candidates? Wayland contended that the local church alone possessed that authority. While other denominations might question the ability of "common, uneducated brethren [to] know about the fitness of a man to preach the gospel,"[\[22\]](#) Wayland contended that an examination of other denominations revealed their methods inferior to the Baptists. The local church would be in the best position to determine if a ministerial candidate is apt to teach or is of a godly character. The method for licensing, however, did not ensure that only qualified men would be admitted to the ministry: "If ... we are false to ourselves, and treat this subject as a matter of form, to be acted upon without thought or consideration, it is not our principles but ourselves that are in fault."[\[23\]](#) Churches must be diligent in examining candidates.

While licensing was for a limited time, ordination was considered a permanent action. As with licensing, the church was seen as the only body approved by Scripture with the authority to ordain. After examining New Testament texts dealing with the matter of ordination in general and with the appointment of Matthias in particular, W. B. Johnson lays down the following principles:

1. That under the present dispensation, a church of Christ has the authority to appoint or ordain to ministerial offices.
2. That in the exercise of this authority, after seeking in prayer for special direction of the Lord, the appointment or ordination, should be by casting of votes by the members.
3. That there is no privileged order of men, whose action is required to give validity to appointments or ordinations to ministerial offices, because the churches are clothed with the appointing or ordaining power.[\[24\]](#)

The ordination of a man to the ministry, while performed by a church, was seen as so important that it was recommended that other churches assist and advise the ordaining church. The Charleston Association, in 1808, answered a query concerning the need for such a council: "It is recommended to the Churches, that on calling out a person to preach, they be careful ordinarily to obtain the assistance of neighboring ministers and churches, in forming their judgment of his qualification, before he be licensed to go out publicly as a minister."[\[25\]](#) In response to a similar query, the Bowdoinham Association in Maine gave this response in 1815:

The ordaining of an Elder, or setting apart of one to the work of the gospel ministry, is the transaction so *solemn* in its *nature*, and so *important* in its consequences, that it would be highly improper for a church belonging to this Association to proceed to the business without the concurrence of a suitable number of sister churches, furnished with Elders, *whom*, among other things, have received the solemn charge, "Lay hands suddenly on no man."[\[26\]](#)

The ministerial candidate would have been carefully observed for a period of time and then, on the appointed day, examined as to his fitness to serve as a minister of the gospel. Jesse Mercer, however, decried the quality of ministers of local churches. He believed that too often unqualified men were ordained into the gospel ministry: "Have not many Presbyteries ordained men to the gospel ministry, *purely* on their own and the responsibility of the churches to which they

belonged, with very little, if any inquiry into their qualifications for the sacred office; or the obligations they felt for the honor of God, or the ministry into which they were being put?" [27] Wayland, too, lamented the laxness with which the ordination of ministers too often was carried out:

I fear, however, that these important considerations are frequently neglected. The council convenes on the day that has been publicly announced for the ordination. They have no time for any such inquiries as I have suggested, and they are, therefore, never made. It frequently happens that not a member of the council has ever heard the candidate preach, or has the means of knowing any thing of importance respecting his qualifications. The statement of the candidate's call to the ministry, and of his views of doctrine, have almost passed into a stereotype form. An ordination, in short, is in danger of being considered merely a pleasant meeting of ministers--the private brethren in attendance being very few--to transact a matter of form, to be kindly entertained, and attend the ordination service in the afternoon. [28]

The negative consequences resulting from the ordaining of unqualified men were seen as creating definite problems for both the ministry and the churches. The ordaining of unqualified men could bring reproach upon the ministry. In addition, the ordaining of unqualified men could create divisions among Baptists. The unqualified minister would probably not be asked to officiate at an important associational event and would consequently gather others who would sympathize with him concerning this perceived slight. An even greater evil would be providing unqualified ministers with an opportunity to bring into the church untried methods and untrue doctrines. Furthermore, the ordaining of unqualified ministers would turn the ministry into a profession in which one was paid while doing little or no labor. Churches were warned by these considerations against ordaining men prematurely: "When a brother shall be recommended for ordination, judge of his case in view of a future state. Ask yourselves: have we the proper testimonials, justifying us to set apart to the sacred ministry this brother: Will this act, or will it not, advance the cause of our blessed Savior?" [29]

The Call to a Church

The officers of Baptist churches consisted of pastors and deacons. Each church required a pastor to take care of its spiritual needs and a body of deacons to take care of material needs. W. B. Johnson, though, offered an alternate view: "It is worthy of particular attention, that each [apostolic] church had a plurality of elders, and that although there was a difference in their respective departments of service, there was a perfect equality of rank among them." [30]

S. W. Lynd, editor of the *Western Recorder*, made this distinction between the ordination of an elder and the conferring of the office of elder: "When men are chosen to the office by the vote of the church, the office is conferred upon them. The part which the presbytery takes does not confer office. It recognizes them as elders, and solemnly sets them before the churches and the world as ministers of Christ, by prayer and imposition of hands. This is their ordination." [31]

Baptists recognized the value of long pastorates in one place of service. Short pastorates of only a couple of years were often deplored. A writer to the *New York Chronicle* maintained that

ministers and churches brought together as a mere matter of temporary convenience are almost as much out of place as temporary marriages. ... The incumbent of the office must stay among his people long enough to marry their children and bury their dead, to share in their joys and sorrows, to endear himself to them as a friend and brother, and to create so many ties of affection between him and them that the hold which his eloquence and brilliancy give upon them shall be lost sight of in the higher regards of a brother, a friend, and a spiritual adviser. [32]

Short pastorates were seen as an evil, being deplored as "the migratory character of the ministry of the present day," often

the result of too many pastors looking for more attractive places of service: "There is a sense, in which all Christians are pilgrims on the earth, but these pilgrimages from church to church, from one field of labor to another, on the part of ministers, 'ought not so to be.'" [\[33\]](#)

The responsibility for maintaining a long pastorate rested not only upon the pastors themselves but also upon the churches. Their failure to provide their pastors with adequate support, both financially and in intangible ways, caused many pastors to feel that they had no choice but seek other places of service. [\[34\]](#)

The Responsibilities of the Minister and of the Church

The primary responsibility of the minister was to preach the gospel. This preaching was to be thoroughly scriptural and doctrinal in its content. Popular preaching which appealed to the unregenerate or the spiritually immature was seen as being inherently harmful. One Baptist wrote: "We have at times heard the opinion expressed that the people would no longer endure doctrinal preaching; that the prevailing taste required sermons of a practical character, fitted to move the feelings and fire the soul with ardent desires." The writer maintained that a lack of doctrinal preaching leads to spiritual starvation, while "a faithful, affectionate, and intelligent exhibition of the cardinal truths of the Bible is essential both to the edification of believers and the conversion of sinners. ... Doctrinal preaching has never been popular. Never yet has the unbelieving heart shown any relish for the doctrines of grace." [\[35\]](#)

The second major duty of pastors was visiting the members and attenders of their churches in their homes. Some pastors, however, refused to perform pastoral visitation and often encouraged candidates for ordination not to do it and for churches not to expect it. Wayland gave their argument:

If he [the minister] does not visit them, they must take it for granted that he is on his knees, studying the word of God, and holding communion with his Saviour on their behalf. He is so much engaged in this holy work that they must not disturb him even by calling upon him. I have heard it triumphantly asked, How can they expect their minister to compose sermons like Massillon's, if he do [*sic*] not consume his whole time in solitary study? [\[36\]](#)

Such reasoning received more than a hint of sarcasm from Wayland's pen: "All this is solemnly said, by grave and reverend divines, as if there were really any danger that the candidate would ever preach like Massillon, and as if the people would not know whether their minister had time enough for general reading and social visiting, though he had none to employ in testifying from house to house repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." [\[37\]](#)

This pastoral visitation, as Wayland intimated, was no mere social call. Indeed, it was seen as a type of preaching, in this case "from house to house" instead of from a pulpit. Inquiries were to be made concerning "the subject of personal religion." If possible, each member of family was to be visited individually, but when this was not possible, the "duty of repentance and faith in Christ" was to be presented before them all. Not only could the impenitent be converted as a result of such visitation, but believers could be encouraged and strengthened. The bereaved could be comforted, the tempted could be warned and strengthened, and the young Christians could be disciplined. Pastoral visitation, however, was not restricted to the homes. Men could be found at their places of business and a few words could be shared with them. [\[38\]](#)

Haynes saw the responsibilities of the pastor as comprising single-minded devotion:

It is his right and duty to devote himself exclusively to his spiritual work; and of necessity he must be supported in it. His first duty is to preach the gospel, in the fear of God, and not of man, in the pulpit, and

from house to house. He is subject to removal by the church, but not to dictation and neglect. He should have particular regard, as he goes from house to house, to the sick and suffering. He is none the less a citizen for being a pastor, except so far as the one office is necessarily modified by the other. In the nature of things, he cannot be extensively engaged in worldly matters of a business or political nature; but is nevertheless a citizen, having his responsibilities to such matters like others.[\[39\]](#)

The pastor was to give himself completely to his work.

The pastor, like all ministers, needed to realize the necessity of personal holiness for the effectiveness of his ministry. Those who failed in their personal living would do no better in their public ministry:

Can you do it [lead the church to greater heights] without the strength of a piety beyond that of the age which is passing away? If ye are carnal, will your churches be spiritual?--If ye are contentious, will your churches be gentle and peaceful? If ye are sordid, will the people that you fashion learn to trample the world under their feet? If your hearts are the seats of narrow and frozen affections, will those bosoms in which they throb catch the sentiments of burning, boundless benevolence?[\[40\]](#)

Pastors could not lead others to where they themselves had not been.

Responsibility was not seen as being only from the pastor to the church--the church also had responsibilities to its pastor. P. F. Rainwater charged that churches had three basic duties to their pastors. First, the church was "to respect and guard sacredly the character of their pastor, for his character is an invaluable part of his power." Second, the members should exhibit a proper respect for the pastor's ministry, particularly during the delivery of the sermon. Rainwater charged that "professed Christians instead of listening to the sermon, are seen gazing around the house, whispering and laughing, and making remarks on the appearance of others, while some doze themselves to sleep. To such we say, you are disgracing yourselves, while truly you embarrass the pastor, reproach religion, and dishonor God." Third, the church is to provide proper compensatory support for the pastor--not "a bare pittance, which may just keep him from starving, but a remuneration for his labor--such an one as will relieve him from worldly care, and the support of a helpless family, and as will enable him to provide himself with suitable books for his mission." The pastor was to be paid adequately and punctually, with the deacons being charged with the responsibility of making sure that it was properly done.[\[41\]](#)

The failure of church members to carry out their duties to their pastors was seen as one of the chief reasons for pervasive spiritual dullness. Rainwater explained:

Brethren, there is a lack somewhere. Coldness and baseness pervade the churches. But few are on the walls of Zion, and they are mostly men who have to labor for a temporal support, while all their time and talents should be devoted to religious services. Is it not time for us to covenant together as churches and as Christians, that we will pray for our pastor, and that a succession of ministers may be given us? Let us love and respect them for their work's sake. Let us guard and protect their character from all undue reproach. Let us meet them at the sanctuary and attend to their ministrations. Let us help them in building up the Church and preaching the Gospel to lost sinners.[\[42\]](#)

Conclusion

Baptists of the mid-nineteenth century saw the gospel ministry as a noble endeavor which none dared enter without an assurance of the call of God. This assurance came neither from pietistic feelings nor from educational attainment. While a desire to enter the ministry and a determination that God had laid that desire upon one's heart were important, the

confirmation by fellow Christians was essential. Baptists realized that a man could be deceived into thinking he was called when, in reality, he was not. Consequently, licensing and ordination were seen as the necessary involvement of fellow believers required to ensure that the ministry would have, as much as possible, only qualified men.

While there was an increasing realization of the importance of a formal, theological education, Baptists realized that such training was not essential. Education could enhance the qualifications for ministry which God had given, but education could not replace or supercede those qualifications.

Baptists saw the pastorate as involving responsibilities on the part of both the pastor and the church. While the pastor was to give himself primarily to the preaching of the Word, whether in the pulpit or "from house to house," the members of the church were to respect their pastors, obey the Word preached, and provide the necessary compensation for the pastor.

What can Baptists at the beginning of the twenty-first century learn from their predecessors who lived a century and a half ago? Surely, one of the greatest and most necessary lessons concerns the divine call to the ministry. In the present era of radical individualism, too many Baptists believe that the only prerequisite to ordination is that one be personally convinced of his calling. For the church to question a man's assertion that God has called him is seen as the height of arrogance and the rejection of Baptist principles. Consequently, to deny a woman the right to pastor a church, a denial based upon 1 Timothy 2:12, is to reject her as an equal to whom God can speak and call into His work. After all, who are others to reject the call which she is certain that she received?

In addition, the ordination of too many men today is little more than mere formality. Again, if a man claims to have been called into the ministry, who can argue against that? Ordination councils are often satisfied with little more than the candidate's testimony of personal salvation and his declaration that he feels that God has called him into the ministry. The candidate's doctrinal awareness is unexamined, his personal lifestyle is unknown, and his preaching ability is undetermined. His ordination, therefore, is unjustifiable. Nineteenth-century Baptists, however, looked to the objective nature of scriptural qualifications in order to verify the candidate's call.

Modern Baptists could also learn a lesson about the importance of a *theological* education. In too many seminaries the Bible is viewed as little more than a significant book in the historical development of Christianity. The Bible's authority is negligible at best, with its being referenced almost as an afterthought to provide support for pre-conceived, culturally-acceptable ideas. In addition, even in seminaries where the authority of Scripture is affirmed without reservation, courses which stress the *practice* of the faith are seen as having greater importance than courses which stress the *content* of the faith. Too often "doing" is more important than "being"--relevancy is more important than fidelity. Nineteenth-century Baptists, though, teach us that right beliefs were foundational to right practices.

A third lesson concerns the minister's sense of devotion to his call to pastor a local church of believers. Pastors too often look for the more attractive pastorates, convinced that their success in the ministry is tied to the size of their congregation and the amount of their compensation. Few pastors, as well as few churches, are committed to long-term pastorates. Therefore, the spiritual growth of both pastor and church is stunted because the relationship seldom has time to be developed and nurtured. Both pastors and churches are continually in the process of beginning instead of being in the process of building. Once again, our nineteenth-century forebears show us that pastors must be motivated by godly principles and devoted to scriptural duties if they are to lead healthy, God-centered congregations.

Notes:

¹ For instance, see John James, "Officers of the Church," *Western Recorder*, 15 October 1856, 2; "Names and Titles of the Ministry," *Texas Baptist*, 1 April 1856, 2; and D. C. Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination: Its History, Doctrines and*

Ordinances (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, & Co.; Richmond, VA: Charles Wortham, 1856), 234.

²The issue of gender and the ministry was rarely considered. That men alone were to be ministers of the gospel was usually taken for granted. J. M. Stifler, pastor of First Baptist Church in New Haven, Connecticut, wrote, "The relation of female ministry is definitely set forth [in Scripture]. If a *man* desire the office of a bishop. And the emphasis is not in the word, for in the original it is indefinite--any one--but most strikingly in the context, which goes on to give the bishop's qualifications entirely in the *masculine gender*. He must be the *husband* of one wife, having *his* children in subjection. There are no qualifications for a female bishop anywhere. This is the more striking, when we remember that, a female deaconship being allowed The New Testament knows no such office as a female pastorate, and in express terms forbids it. The work of teaching is pointedly limited to men. For [support] see I. Cor. xiv. 34 and I. Tim. ii. 12." J. M. Stifler, "The Gospel Ministry," in *Baptist Doctrines; Being an Exposition, in a Series of Essays by Representative Baptist Ministers, of the Distinctive Points of Baptist Faith and Practice*, ed. Charles A. Jenkins (St. Louis: Chancy R. Barns, 1885), 257-58.

³Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1857), 50. "S," writing in the *Texas Baptist* elaborated upon three qualifications for the ministry: "true, ardent piety," "talent" required for the tasks of the ministry, and "an intelligent, strong and unconquerable conviction of duty." "The Christian Ministry," *Texas Baptist*, 2 May 1855, 2.

⁴Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 52.

⁵John L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order. Manual of Theology*, Second Part (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1982), 242-43.

⁶"Ministerial Gifts to Be Sought Out and Encouraged," *Western Recorder*, 10 March 1858, 2.

⁷Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 107.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination*, 323.

¹⁰Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 22.

¹¹Charles D. Mallery, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer* (New York: John Gray, 1844; reprint Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, n.d.), 185.

¹²*Ibid.*, 186.

¹³*Ibid.*, 186-87.

¹⁴"An Educated Ministry," *Western Recorder*, 15 November 1854, 2.

¹⁵See "Ministerial Education," *Western Recorder*, 8 April 1857, 2.

¹⁶Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 74-75.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁸James Petigru Boyce, "Three Changes in Theological Education," *James Petigru Boyce: Selected Writings*, ed. Timothy George (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 35.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 114.

²¹E. B. Teague, "Licensing Ministers," *Christian Index*, 8 April 1857, 2.

²²Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 100.

²³*Ibid.*, 102-3.

²⁴William Bullein Johnson, *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, VA: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 133.

²⁵Cited in William Henry Allison, *Baptist Councils in America* (Chicago: George K. Hazlitt, 1906), 63. It is understood that "licensed to go out publicly as a minister" is the act of ordination to the ministry, not the licensing for the trial period.

²⁶Cited in Allison, *Baptist Councils*, 63.

²⁷Mallery, *Jesse Mercer*, 267.

²⁸Wayland, *Principles and Practices*, 117.

²⁹"Premature Ordinations and Their Evil Consequences," *Texas Baptist*, 3 November 1859, 1.

³⁰Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 80-81.

³¹S. W. Lynd, "The Church and Her Membership," *Western Recorder*, 10 January 1855, 2.

³²"Accepting a Pastorate," *Texas Baptist*, 19 August 1856, 1.

³³"The Permanency of the Ministerial Office," *Texas Baptist*, 28 January 1857, 1.

³⁴"Accepting a Pastorate," 1.

³⁵"Doctrinal Preaching," *Western Recorder*, 15 November 1854, 2.

³⁶Francis Wayland, *Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), 140.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 145-48.

³⁹Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination*, 238.

⁴⁰"Soul Prosperity.-Number lv.," *Christian Index*, 2 March 1854, 2.

⁴¹P. F. Rainwater, "Duties of Churches to Their Pastors," *Christian Index*, 8 July 1857, 1.

⁴²*Ibid.*



Have Times *Really* Changed?

I am aware it is sometimes said that times have altered since the apostles' days, that the state of the world is different from what it then was. But is not human nature in all its essential elements the same? Is it not the same in its moral aspect, impotency, and necessities? Does it not as much need, and as much depend upon, the gospel scheme now, as it did then? Is not the gospel as exquisitely and fully adapted to its miserable condition now as it was then? Can sin be pardoned in any other way than through the atonement of Christ; or the sinner be justified by any other means than faith in the Lord our Righteousness; or the depraved heart be renewed and sanctified by any other agency than that of the Holy Spirit?... The moral epidemic of our nature is always and everywhere the same, in whatever various degrees of virulence it may exist, and the remedial system of salvation by grace, through faith, is God's own and unalterable specific for the disease, in every age of time, in every country of the world, and in every state of society. Men may call in other physicians than Christ, and try other methods of cure, as they have done; but they will all fail, and leave the miserable patient hopeless and helpless, as regards any other means of health than that which the cross of Christ presents....

It should never be forgotten that the time when the apostles discharged their ministry was only just after the Augustan era of the ancient world. Poetry had recently bestowed on the lettered world the works of Virgil and Horace. The light of philosophy, though waning, still shed its luster over Greece. The arts still exhibited their most splendid creations, though they had ceased to advance. It was at such a time, and amidst such scenes, the gospel began its course. The voices of the apostles were listened to by sages who had basked in the sunshine of Athenian wisdom, and were reverberated in startling echo from temples and statues that had been shaken by the thunders of Cicero and Demosthenes; yet they conceded nothing to the demands of philosophy, but held forth the cross as the only object they felt they had a right to exhibit. They never once entertained the degrading notion that they must accommodate themselves to the philosophy or the taste of the age in which they lived, and the places where they ministered.... Whether the apostle addressed himself to the philosophers on Mars Hill, or to the barbarians on the island of Melita; whether he reasoned with the Jews in their synagogues, or with the Greeks in the school of Tyrannus, he had but one theme, and that was Christ, and him crucified. And what right, or what reason have we for deviating from this high and imperative example? Be it so, that we live in a literary, philosophic, and scientific age, what then? Is it an age that has outlived the need of the gospel for its salvation; or for the salvation of which any thing else can suffice but the gospel? The supposition that something else than pure Christianity, as the theme of our pulpit ministrations, is requisite for such a period as this, or that it must be presented in philosophic guise, appears to me a most perilous sentiment, as being a disparagement to the gospel itself, a daring assumption of wisdom superior to God's, and containing the germ of infidelity.

--John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry: The Want of the Times* (1847; reprinted in Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 69-73.



Book Reviews

Amazing Grace: God's Initiative, Our Response, by Timothy George (Lifeway, 2000), 126 pp.

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

Timothy George has given us a wonderful treatment of the doctrine of grace. A combination of biblical, systematic, historical and pastoral theology make this a helpful tool in teaching church members more about the grace of God in salvation. It is published by Lifeway Press, which is the former Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and contains on the back cover glowing commendations from David Dockery, Ken Keathley and Paige Patterson.

In his characteristically irenic style, Dr. George directly addresses the "hot issues" surrounding the sovereignty of God's grace. He accurately defines the TULIP acrostic and offers his own alternative: ROSES--Radical depravity, Overcoming grace, Sovereign election, Eternal life, Singular Redemption (72). The Calvinistic-Arminian debate is outlined in its historical context as well as biblically and theologically.

The author makes quite clear his own theological convictions while calling on those from both sides of the debate to recognize that we have much on which to agree despite our differences. Throughout the book Dr. George shows that the enemies of biblical Calvinism are Arminianism on the one hand and the "quagmire" of hyper-Calvinism on the other. Though one would expect no less from this author it is nevertheless refreshing to see the distinction between evangelical Calvinism and fatalism clearly and forcefully stated in various places.

In response to the question, "Are Baptists Calvinists?", George acknowledges that, historically, Baptists have been "all over the map" on this issue. "What can be said without dispute, however, is that there is a strong Calvinistic or Reformed stream within the Baptist tradition and that this perspective has been held by some of the most notable shapers of Baptist life and thought" (70).

One final observation before making some recommendations: Dr. George puts the lie to the unfounded yet resilient accusation that "where Calvinism has taken hold, missions and evangelism has died out." His historical examples of Spurgeon, Fuller, Carey and others show the foolishness of such a claim. Also, his own careful arguments for evangelism and missions, showing how a grace-filled theology gives a passion for such work, is a fine example of biblical reasoning from a Reformed perspective on the subject.

This is a "Christian Growth Study Plan" (formerly Church Study Course) book, which means that it is the text for a course on Baptist Doctrine in that series of courses. Consequently, it has sprinkled throughout "Personal Learning Activity" questions. While that may be a distraction to some readers, it hardly discounts the value of the book. In fact, the format and purpose of this book make it an excellent resource to use in Southern Baptist churches. It could be taught in Sunday School or any other small group setting, and can be recommended to church members as a profitable individual study.

The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910, Volume 1, edited by Michael A. G. Haykin (Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 249 pp.

Reviewed by [Thomas Ascol](#)

Those interested in Baptist history and not familiar with Particular Baptist Press would do well to get on their mailing list (phone them at 417/883-0342). PBP is committed to reacquainting modern Baptists with those on whose shoulders we stand. This is being done by reprinting works of long-forgotten Calvinistic Baptist leaders, as they have done with Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832), and by publishing contemporary writings about our Baptist heritage, as contained in the volume under review.

Michael Haykin is an excellent historian who teaches in Cambridge, Ontario. His love for Baptist history has led to be involved in several efforts which bring to light earlier generations of Baptist churchmen. This first volume of a proposed two volume treatment of British Particular Baptists is a helpful introduction to the lives and ministries of such men. Individual chapters are devoted to John Spilsbury, Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, four generations of Stennetts (Edward, Joseph, Joseph, Jr. and Samuel), John Gill, Benjamin Beddome, J.C. Ryland, Robert Hall, Sr., Caleb Evans and Samuel Medley. Along with the editor, contributors include James Renihan, Barry Howson, Paul Wilson, Allen E. Smith, Tom Nettles, B. A. Ramsbottom, Robert Oliver, Peter Naylor and Kirk Wellum.

As with any collection of essays, some chapters make a greater impression on the reader than others. Ramsbottom's treatment of four generations of Stennetts is a succinct testimony to God's grace mediated to and through an unusual family. I am also indebted to Ramsbottom's other chapter on Samuel Medley for introducing me to this hard-hearted sailor turned pastor and hymn-writer. The story of Medley's conversion through the reading of an Isaac Watts' sermon by his godly grandfather is fascinating.

My favorite chapter is the longest and most creative. After outlining Benjamin Keach's life, writings and major theological emphases (salvation, covenant, Trinity, Christ, justification, assurance and evangelism), Tom Nettles brings Keach into our contemporary Baptist setting and allows him to evaluate the life and practices of our churches. The critique is searching, convicting and beneficial. We need to hear and apply the insights of those whom God raised up as teachers in the church in earlier generations. Not only Nettles' chapter but also the others in this book help us do that.

This hardbound volume printed on acid-free paper is highly recommended.



News

CBF rules (or Post-modern chickens come home to roost)

The Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a denomination-like organization established by moderate and liberal Baptists ten years ago, has approved changes to the CBF constitution and bylaws and will recommend their adoption at their General Assembly in June. In what leaders say is an effort to clarify what it means to "partner" with the CBF, the Assembly will be encouraged to adopt specific membership requirements. Under current CBF bylaws, any church or individual that contributes to the Fellowship is considered a member. That includes churches that simply allow individual members to channel contributions to the Fellowship without any formal action by the church. Under such rules, the CBF claims to have 1800 churches.

Under the proposed changes, churches and individuals would be required to "embrace" the CBF "mission" and "core values." Lest this seem to be heavy-handed, however, the new rules will not "dictate how a church 'embraces' the mission and values." As Jim Baucom, moderator-elect from Lynchburg, Virginia, explains, "'Embrace' means whatever the church says it means. They will decide for themselves what it means to be a part of the Fellowship....We would love for every church to adopt a statement to say they understand the core values of the Fellowship,...but it's simply too much to ask." Gary Parker, CBF coordinator for Baptist life and leadership sheds further light on his organization's rationale by explaining, "We are trying to find a place for the church that wants fuzziness and the church that wants clarity." If the changes go through, it appears that he will get half of his wish. (taken from an ABP report)

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.

Founders Fellowship Breakfast at the SBC

Scheduled for Tuesday, June 12, 2001, 7:00 AM, during the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, LA, the breakfast meeting will be held in the Louisiana Superdome (SW Quad Room 14 on the Loge Level). The theme of the meeting is "Louisiana Evangelism and the Doctrines of Grace." Pastor Bill Ascol pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport, LA will speak on "The Atonement of Christ and Evangelism." Dr. Joe Nesom, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson, LA will speak on "Louisiana Grace: Louisiana Baptist Origins and the Doctrines of Grace."

The cost per person is \$10.00. Registration deadline is May 22, 2001. Payment and registration information should be sent to Founders Ministries, P.O. Box 150931, Cape Coral, FL 33915.

New Founders Press Book

In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology, by Richard Barcellos, has recently been published by Founders Press. Barcellos graciously and carefully evaluates the so-called "new covenant theology" movement from

biblical, theological and historical perspectives. The book retails for \$10.95. A special introductory offer \$8.95 is available on orders received by August 1, 2001. Payment must include 15% fee for shipping and handling costs (\$1.50 minimum) and should be sent to Founders Press, PO Box 150931, Cape Coral, FL 33915.



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Letters

Dear Sir,

I want to let you know how very much I have appreciated the *Founders Journal*, which I have been receiving for several years now. The content is excellent, reflecting the strong and determined purpose of your organization (fellowship?).

I pray with you for a great spiritual awakening to come over the SBC, to deliver the pastors and churches from their vague and unclear preaching and beliefs. I am not a Southern Baptist, but have met and talked with many pastors and members in my ministry career and have been astonished at their biblical ignorance and even lack of assurance in salvation. I've had the joy of leading a few of these to Christ.

I am a retired missionary (Conservative Baptist) for twelve years and have done much reading, which has deepened my reformed Baptist position and beliefs. I cannot tell you enough how much I appreciate what you are doing to bring many Southern Baptists around to see the truth of God's Word and to stand upon it. Frankly, I am not very hopeful of American Christianity turning back to God, but I do believe this will happen one on one as God's Holy Spirit works in individuals. And you are one of God's means to accomplish this!

God bless you!

Grateful in Christ,

A. M., via e-mail

Dear Sirs:

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

I would like to know who is publishing this. Are your beliefs consistent with the Baptist confession in London in the 19th century? Is there an association of Baptist churches and seminaries that are holding true to this same confession today? I have not heard teaching from pulpits and churches and seminaries that are consistent with this confession. Where are they? There should be an association of those holding strictly to this confession, not in mere word only. Are there any efforts for such?

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

as Nehemiah did. Let's go to work!

Sincerely your brother in the tradition of Baptists,

B. S., via e-mail

I wanted to take a few minutes to express my gratitude for your website. What a relief it was to find that there are others within the SBC who see the need for reformation in our churches.

I attend a church with a 1700+ membership that is embracing a hybrid version of the "Saddleback" growth methods. While the messages haven't been toned down (yet), the music and staff have undergone subtle changes. I realize the affinity towards such a movement is kindled by a man-centered evangelism and eschatology that sees the turmoil in Jerusalem and equates it with the end times. All the while, the sheep go largely devoid of the teaching they need.

I'm a Sunday School teacher currently teaching on the book of Romans. Besides teaching on the fundamental truths concerning man's condition and election, what else can I do to help reform my church besides praying and fasting? I do not wield the influence necessary to reach out to a broader audience than the 15 class members during Sunday School.

My brother and I have attempted to reach-out to the pastors of the church only to be met with resistance and the pulling of rank (i.e. since we're only lay leaders we "lack the hermeneutical training to reach the right conclusions" ... "the Bible teaches both positions--man's choice and election").

Thanks and God bless you and your ministry ... it's an oasis!

via email

Dear Gracious Friends:

I received your "care" package containing many pieces of your good literature. You sent the package of literature in response to my "S.O.S." to help be build a library at my new church in Tennessee. Your literature now makes up the backbone of my library, and I display it proudly. The challenge now is to get my people to read. Please pray for us that the truth of God's grace as presented in your literature will touch and transform the hearts of the people here. May God continue to bless you for your kindness and generosity.

Sincerely,

D.P., TN

Dear Sirs:

Thank you so much for sending me the latest issue [#42] of the *Founders Journal*. I found it a blessing within the first five minutes of reading. The church where I pastor is preparing for its Missions Conference, March 11-14, and for the past two weeks I have preached on the Supremacy of God in Missions taking my ideas from Dr. John Piper, but most importantly from Scripture.

The article which grabbed my attention was "The Glory of God: Our Supreme Passion." It was exactly what I was preaching upon this Sunday. It added fuel to my own personal fire for the Supremacy of God to my own life and prayerfully to the life of the church that God has called me to pastor in.

For your information, I pastor a Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in South Georgia. I have found your ministry to be a blessing and a point of growth for me in my walk with the Lord and in pastoring. May God continue to bless you in the ministry which He has called you to.

In His Adequacy,

R.P., via email

To Whom It May Concern:

I have thoroughly enjoyed the tremendous content and accurate theology contained within your website. Thank you! You are reproducing your (actually, the Bible's) philosophy in so many!

Praise the Lord!

B. R., via email

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Christian church minister in rural Kansas I have been so blessed by the *Founders Journal*. Being a five point Calvinist, I have found myself entertaining infant baptism. Your issue #35 entitled, "Contending for Truth In Love," contained several wonderful articles which blessed me and gave me more to consider.

Thank you for your ministry and stance for the truth.

Sincerely,

D.M. via email



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A Sea of Wisdom Without Shore

Charles H. Spurgeon

I have heard persons rail at Calvinistic doctrine, who never in their lives have read a word that Calvin wrote. If you were to offer them a small treatise in which that noble system of divinity should be vindicated, they would say, "Oh! it is no doubt so dry, I should not be able to read it." Yet these learned gentlemen know what is inside a book without opening it! They are like some critics of whom I have heard, who, when they meet with a new volume, take the knife and cut the first page, smell it, and then condemn or praise. Many there are who do just the same with the Bible. They have heard some verses of it once or twice, they have got some idea of it, and straightway they are wise. They take to themselves their own degree of Doctor of Divinity, and they have much boldness in their unbelief. Now, of any man who should denounce the system of truth which is taught in Scripture as ridiculous and foolish, I can only say he has never taken the trouble to search it out for himself. Have not the mightiest intellects confessed that the truths of this book were infinitely above their highest flights? Even Newton, who could thread the spheres, and map the march of what else had seemed discordant planets, even he said there were depths here which no mortal could fathom. "O the depths of the wisdom of God!" This has been the exclamation of some of the most glorious minds that have ever enlightened the world. And I can say, and I know it to be a truth, that every man who reads the Word of God, and studies the divinity therein revealed--if he at first thinketh that he understandeth it, when he reads again, finds that he has only begun to know; and when he shall have searched year after year, and have become more than usually prescient in the study of the things of God, he will still say, "Now I begin to know my folly, now I began to discover that God is above me and beneath me, but I cannot grasp him, I cannot find out the Almighty to perfection, his words, his works, his ways, herein revealed to the sons of men, are past finding out." You wise fellows who turn upon your heels, and sneer at things which have astonished minds infinitely vaster than yours, prove your own folly when you call the things of God folly. With regard to that particular form of divine truth which we hold so dear, currently called Calvinistic doctrines--there is no philosophy propounded by any sage, so profound as that philosophy. There are no truths that were ever taught so wonderful, so worthy of the profoundest research of the most expanded minds, as those doctrines of the eternal love, the discriminating grace, and the infinite power of God, co-working to produce the results which his wisdom had decreed. When every other science shall have been exhausted, when astronomy shall have no wonders left, when geology shall have no secrets to unravel, when natural history and philosophy shall have given up all their infinite treasures, there will still remain a mine without a bottom, there will still remain a sea of wisdom without a shore, in the doctrines of the gospel of the grace of God.

--Charles H. Spurgeon, "Natural or Spiritual?" *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1861, Vol. 7, Sermon No. 407, pp. 473-480. Available online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0407.htm>.



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