



Calvinism, Evangelism & Founders Ministries

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The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [*The Abstract of Principles*](#).

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Calvinism, Evangelism & Founders Ministries

[Tom Ascol](#)

The extent to which the revival of the doctrines of grace is sweeping across churches in our land can be measured in part by the growing antagonism toward them. Books have begun to appear which attempt to refute the reformational understanding of salvation, or at least to distance that view from "traditional Baptists." [1] One state convention in the SBC has attempted to warn Directors of Mission of the influence of Calvinism in local churches and associations. In addition to this various pastors and recognized denominational leaders continue to speak publicly about what they perceive to be the deadening impact which these doctrines have on missions and evangelism.

Founders Ministries has borne the brunt of such attacks throughout our history. Rather than address every accusation, our response has been, almost without exception, to keep pressing forward in an unwavering commitment to our purpose which is to see the gospel of God's grace recovered and local churches renewed. Only rarely have we engaged directly in polemics, choosing rather to follow a positive agenda of preaching, teaching and writing. [2] That approach has served us well and it is one which we are determined to maintain. It would unprofitable, even if it were possible, to respond to every false accusation and misrepresentation of who we are and what we believe.

In this article, however, I do attempt to set the record straight on some common misconceptions and accusations which are completely without warrant. Founders Ministries has not done its work in some dark corner. We have not been clandestine in our approach. For nearly twenty years we have attempted to steer a straight course that is bent on reformation and revival. We have never hidden our beliefs. On the contrary, we have published and explicated them many times and in many ways. Where we disagree with brothers and sisters who see things differently, we have tried always to understand their arguments and represent their views accurately. That same goal governs this present attempt to clarify our concerns, correct misrepresentations and refute false accusations.

Reasonable men obviously can disagree in their understanding of the nature and workings of God's grace in salvation and yet can stand together in the common cause of making that grace known through the preaching of the gospel to all peoples. History gives us some wonderful examples of this. And this has been and remains my great desire for those of us who live together in the SBC with different perspectives on the issues that have been framed by the historic debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Timothy George's recent book, *Amazing Grace*, points the way forward in doing this.

But charges that Calvinism is nothing more than fatalism and that the doctrines of grace detract from evangelism and missions undermine that effort. Such charges so misrepresent historical data and doctrinal positions that to remain silent in the face of them is to become complicit in the spread of caricature and misunderstanding.

Paige Patterson has written a wonderful "parable for our time" entitled, "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists." The article quotes Satan revealing his strategy for destroying the SBC: "We will induce the thoroughgoing Calvinists to accuse the less Calvinistic of Arminianism, and the less Calvinistic to accuse the thoroughgoing Calvinists of unconcern for evangelism." [3] His words are a timely warning for those

of us who are committed to living together in the Southern Baptist Convention of churches.

I want to heed this warning as I respond to charges which have been leveled by some of the "less Calvinistic" who, I believe, have fallen prey to the latter part of this very scheme. Thus, I refrain from "naming names," because I want to focus not on personalities but issues. As I write I do so with the prayer that God will grant those of us who disagree on these issues a love for truth that overcomes any party spirit and the temptations that come from engaging in controversial debate.

Mischaracterization of Founders

In the initial years of Founders Ministries, it was common to hear the assertion that "Southern Baptists have never been Calvinists." With every reprint of early Southern Baptist views on salvation and grace, however, this charge appeared more and more ridiculous. In the early 1990s it began to die out and now only the most detached and uninformed dare to make it. In its wake, however, a new accusation has gained a footing. Instead of claiming that Southern Baptists never were Calvinistic in our view of salvation, it has now become popular to envision the origin of the SBC in such a way that Calvinism is reduced to one of two or more contributing tributaries which flowed into the river which became the convention.

One SBC leader has recently stated,

I do not believe the Founders group is as forthcoming as it should be when it calls itself the Founders group, because the suggestion here is that all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention. Nothing could be further from the truth. There have always been two strong tributaries flowing into the Southern Baptist river, one of them Charleston, one of them Sandy Creek. Now, Charleston is heavily Calvinistic, Sandy Creek is highly revivalist. Most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists. I admit that. But most of the people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out winning people to Christ. So both things are there and to suppose that the Convention was founded only by Calvinists is a total misrepresentation.[\[4\]](#)

The suggestion that Founders Ministries has been less than forthcoming in the selection of our name reveals a lack of understanding of the purpose, scope and claims of our efforts. Never have we suggested that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention." Rather, we have argued that there was a theological consensus on the doctrines of grace among Southern Baptists when the convention began. John Dagg, the first writing theologian among Southern Baptists whose theological influence was greatly appreciated by early Southern Baptists, celebrated this consensus when he wrote in 1858, "The general agreement of Baptist churches, in doctrine as well as church order, is a fact which gives occasion for devout gratitude to God."[\[5\]](#) It also insured that the founding faculty of our first seminary was comprised of none but Calvinists and that the document which they were required to sign was and remains decidedly Calvinistic.[\[6\]](#)

This theological consensus is clearly reflected in the leaders who were chosen to give direction and shape to Southern Baptist life in the first 50-75 years of the denomination's existence. Because we stand with those early leaders in their understanding of the grace of God in salvation (in other words, because we believe they were correct in their understanding of God's Word at this point), we chose the name "Founders" as a fitting description for our concern.

In the very first issue of the *Founders Journal* I wrote that the resurgence of the doctrines of grace in our denomination was "nothing less than [a reaffirmation of] the soteriological convictions which prevailed among the founders and early leaders of the SBC." After listing a dozen such leaders as representative of that contention, I concluded that "it is without question that these men, who were the denominational loyalists of their day, firmly embraced the Doctrines of Grace. Further, the thesis that this theological persuasion prevailed among Southern Baptists during the first 75 years of our existence has yet to be refuted (see *By His Grace and For His Glory*, by Tom Nettles [recently reprinted by Founders Press])." [7] Eleven years later there is still no refutation in sight, though countless gratuitous assertions have been made.

This early Southern Baptist theological consensus can be identified by tracing the influence of confessional Calvinism on the formation of the Convention. In 1742 the first Baptist association in America adopted the 1689 London Baptist Confession as its own. Known now as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, this summary of Christian teaching was greatly respected by Baptist churches across America. As Timothy George notes,

The *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* was transplanted to the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina. It soon became the most widely accepted, definitive confession among Baptists in America both North and South. *Each of the 293 "delegates,"* [emphasis added] as they were then called, who gathered in Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, belonged to congregations and associations which had adopted the *Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith* as their own. [8]

The significance of this claim can be easily missed by those who have been weaned on the pervasive doctrinal indifference of the twentieth century. Our forebears in the mid-nineteenth century were not accustomed to our modern habit of adopting confessions of faith which are not sincerely believed. Today it is not uncommon for pastors, to say nothing of members, to be ignorant of their church's confession of faith. It has also been tragically demonstrated over the last twenty years that many Baptist educators have no scruples about signing doctrinal statements to which they take exception in order to secure a teaching contract. [9] But when a delegate showed up at the founding convention in 1845 from a church or association which had adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, we can be reasonably certain that he both knew and approved of that confession. The practice of signing a confession of faith while really not believing certain articles in it seems to be a function of the modern Southern Baptist conscience.

When the accusation is made that "nothing could be further from the truth" than the suggestion that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention" what is being refuted is a straw man. No one to my knowledge has ever made such a claim. If, however, anyone is indeed convinced that there was no theological consensus among early Southern Baptist leaders, then he ought to further the dialog on this point by bringing forth evidence. Where is the list of early Southern Baptist statesmen who were Arminians or opposed to Calvinism? Who among those original delegates disavowed the doctrines of grace? Can even one name be given?

Suspect Theory of Southern Baptist Origins

The theory of SBC origins which distinguishes the "Charleston Calvinists" from the "Sandy Creek evangelists" is disingenuous at best. The suggestion that "most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists" while "most of the people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out

winning people to Christ" follows the historical analysis of Walter Shurden and Fisher Humphreys, the latter of whom claims that the Sandy Creek tradition "minimized Calvinism and emphasized evangelism."[\[10\]](#) This is true neither in principle nor in the practice of early Baptist churches in the South. The dichotomy between Calvinism and evangelism which the Shurden-Humphreys analysis imposes on Baptists in the early American South is simplistic to the point of being false. Even a cursory reading of the historical evidence demonstrates that the Charleston Baptists were evangelistic and the Sandy Creek Baptists were hardly opposed to Calvinism.

Charleston Baptist Evangelism

During Oliver Hart's ministry as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, the congregation sent a request to the meeting of the Charleston Association in November, 1755. They asked the association to secure a missionary to labor among the destitute people "in the interior settlements of this and neighboring States."[\[11\]](#) This took place *before* Daniel Marshall and Shubal Stearns migrated from Opekon, Virginia to begin the Separate Baptist movement at Sandy Creek. In response to the church's request, the association commissioned John Gano to preach the gospel at the Jersey Settlement on the banks of the Yadkin River--not far from Sandy Creek--in what is now North Carolina. Far from being a dividing point, Sandy Creek actually became something of a meeting point for the evangelistic fervor of both the Charleston and Separate Baptists.

Furthermore, a later pastor of FBC Charleston, Richard Furman, helped organize the General Missionary Convention (Triennial Convention) in 1814. At the organizational meeting on May 21 of that year, the delegates asked Furman to preach. His closing appeal clearly refutes the charge that "Charleston Calvinists" were something less than concerned for evangelism and missions.

Let the wise and good employ their counsels; the minister of Christ, who is qualified for the sacred service, offer himself for the work; the man of wealth and generosity, who values the glory of Immanuel and the salvation of souls more than gold, bring of his treasure in proportion as God has bestowed on him; yea, let all, even the pious widow, bring the mite that can be spared; and let all who fear and love God, unite in the prayer of faith before the throne of Grace; and unceasingly say, "Thy Kingdom come." And O! let it never be forgotten, that the Son of God hath said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Amen and Amen.[\[12\]](#)

By 1845, the year of the founding of the SBC, the Triennial convention had compiled an impressive missions record: they had missionaries among 8 Indian groups in North America; in numerous European countries as well as in Africa, Burma, Siam, China, Assam, India and Asia. "The total program by 1845 involved 17 missions; 130 mission stations and outstations; 109 missionaries and assistant missionaries, of whom 42 were preachers; 123 native preachers and assistants; 79 churches, 2,593 baptisms in the previous year, and more than 5,000 church members; and 1,350 students in 56 schools."[\[13\]](#)

Furman also led his church to participate in a "Quarterly Concert of Prayer for world missions" and recommended this practice to all the churches of the association by 1795. After 1810, the church held this prayer meeting on the first Monday of every month.[\[14\]](#)

In 1800 the General Committee of the Charleston Association called on that body to engage even more diligently in the concerted work of missions.

Is there not at this time, a call in providence for our churches to make the most serious exertions, in union with other Christians of various denominations, to send the gospel among the heathen; or to such people who, though living in countries where the gospel revelation is known, do not enjoy a standing ministry, and the regular administration of divine ordinances among them?[15]

It is obvious that writing books was not all that occupied the time and energies of Charleston Baptists!

Sandy Creek Calvinism

The evangelistic fervor of the Charleston tradition is only one side of the evidence which refutes the skewed historical interpretation that Charleston and Sandy Creek were separated by Calvinism and missionary zeal. The implication that the Separate Baptists of Sandy Creek were somehow anti-Calvinistic is, at best, a thesis which is difficult to defend. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that Separate Baptists were just as convinced of the Reformed understanding of salvation as were their Regular Baptist brethren.

William McLoughlin reads the historical record this way. He refers to the Calvinistic Baptists of New England as "the Separate Baptists" and describes the separation of Regular, or Particular, Baptists from Separate Baptists in the South as "two wings" of Calvinistic Baptists in that region.[16] McLoughlin specifically identifies the preaching of Shubal Stearns, who was the principal founder of the Sandy Creek Association, as "evangelical Calvinism." [17]

Separate Baptists emerged out of Congregationalism with its thoroughly Reformed confession of faith, the Savoy Declaration. Those who separated from Congregationalism after the Great Awakening were rejecting "a dead formalism that substituted agreement with a creed for vital, experiential Christianity." [18] Evidence suggests that they did not give up their strongly Calvinistic understanding of salvation.

The first covenant of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church affirms predestination, effectual calling, and perseverance of the saints. The preamble states their belief in "believers' baptism; laying on of hands; particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ; effectual calling by the Holy Ghost; free justification through the righteousness of Christ; progressive sanctification through God's grace and truth; the final perseverance, or continuance of the saints in grace;...." [19]

The 1816 Articles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association affirms total depravity in Article 3: "That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his own posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed." Article 4 affirms election, effectual calling, and perseverance: "We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost." [20]

Lest anyone should try the standard liberal ploy of reinterpreting these statements in some kind of Arminian framework ("what this means to me is..."), it should be remembered that the decidedly Calvinistic Basil Manly Sr. chaired the committee which drew up the association's articles. Dismissing authorial intent is a standard policy of liberals and moderates who are embarrassed by statements of faith

which they have signed but with which they do not agree.

Isaac Backus, one of the most influential Separate Baptist pastors, never wavered in his commitment to Calvinistic theology. Near the end of his life he wrote:

The enmity which men have discovered against the sovereignty of the grace of God as revealed in Holy Scriptures hath now prevailed so far that every art is made use of to put other senses upon the words of revelation than God intended therein. He said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," Rom. 9:15-16. This was the doctrine that God made use of in all the reformation that wrought in Germany, England and Scotland after the year 1517; and by the same doctrine he wrought all the reformation that has been in our day, both in Europe and America.[\[21\]](#)

Revisionist histories, like urban legends, die hard. The simplistic assertion that Separate Baptists (Sandy Creek) were evangelistic while Regular or Calvinistic Baptists (Charleston) were scholarly or academic is unfounded and should be renounced in the face of evidence drawn from the historical record.

Gratuitous Historical Assertions

So strident is the opposition which some have to the doctrines of grace that on occasion outlandish claims are made which cannot in any way be justified. One conservative Baptist leader recently went further than most in his comments:

Now, I don't care what any Calvinist has to say about it. Calvinism, as a doctrinal commitment, has always had the effect of being a drag, to put it the best way, kindest way, a drag on missions and evangelism.

All you have to do is prove me wrong, but you have to do it in some other way than citing Spurgeon because he's been cited often enough and it is not really impressive to cite Spurgeon and one or two others and say we've proved you wrong. No, look at the whole. Look at what has happened across the centuries. Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer. And it is understandable why. Here is a man who believes that God has created this number of people over here to be saved and, because he believes in irresistible grace, they're going to get saved no matter what. So what is the necessity of my going to them? Well, in my mind of course I treat it this way: I say, Well, I've got to go to them because God's told me to go to them. So the fact that I'm a Calvinist doesn't make any difference really. God has told me to do it, so I've got to go to them. But let me tell you what. In your heart, if you don't think it's going to make any difference to begin with because what's done is done in eternity past, you [aren't] going to go. That's just the truth of the matter. Very seldom do people go. The fact that there are some exceptions only underscores the rule.

It is hard to know how to answer the charge that Calvinism has "always" been a drag on missions and evangelism when the accuser 1) "doesn't care what any Calvinist has to say about it" and 2) disallows citing "Spurgeon and one or two others" because he finds such citations "unimpressive." How many examples does it take to overthrow an unqualified universal charge that Calvinism "always" causes

evangelism to suffer? Is Spurgeon disallowed because he is regarded as unevangelistic or because he is thought to have been uncalvinistic? Hardly anyone believes the former and no one who has read Spurgeon's own "Defence of Calvinism" (to name only one of a myriad of such examples) can seriously entertain the latter.[\[22\]](#)

The challenge to be proven wrong is easily done. The recent book, *Amazing Grace*, by Timothy George contains a whole chapter on this subject, citing William Carey and Spurgeon as Calvinists whose theology fueled evangelism.[\[23\]](#) Yet, even if one does inexplicably leave Spurgeon out of the equation the case can still be easily made simply by selecting from the numerous examples which are readily available in the historical record. In fact, the difficulty is not in finding such examples, but in knowing which ones to omit. How many will suffice to cause a retraction of the assertion?

John Calvin himself led out in bold evangelistic enterprises to such a degree that Philip Hughes calls him a "Director of Missions" and refers to Geneva under his leadership as a "school of missions." Under Calvin, hundreds of men were sent out to preach the gospel in hostile lands, extending their work as far as Brazil.[\[24\]](#)

The Puritan movement in the seventeenth century saw a continuation and expansion of this evangelistic and missionary zeal. Who can honestly consider the pastoral work of Richard Baxter in Kidderminster and say that "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer"? In 1879 Alexander Grosart called him "the most successful preacher and winner of souls and nurturer of won souls, that England has ever had."[\[25\]](#) Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* and *Reformed Pastor* underscore this assessment. His passion for mission work among Indians in New England made him eager to assist missionary John Eliot in securing a new charter for the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England in 1660-62. His vision for called-out missionary workers, whom he called "unfixed Ambulatory Ministers," helped persuade Eliot to give himself to that work in a full time capacity. Similar passion for evangelism and missions can be found among Baxter's Puritan contemporaries if one is willing to avoid the anachronistic mistake of searching their writings for modern vocabulary on the subject.[\[26\]](#)

The eighteenth century is also filled with witnesses against the assertion that Calvinism kills evangelism. Among the Great Awakening's most notable leaders are George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The former crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times preaching wherever he could gather a crowd because, as he put it, "the doctrines of our election, and free justification in Christ Jesus are daily more and more pressed upon my heart. They fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Saviour."[\[27\]](#) The latter's pastoral ministry in Northampton, Massachusetts was marked by revival flames and resulted in the best writings on the theology of revival in history. Both men were unabashed Calvinists as was Edwards' young colleague and fervent missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd, who felt it wise to catechize his converts in all aspects of biblical doctrine, including sovereign predestination.[\[28\]](#)

Many more names could be added to this list, including Thomas Boston, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine of Scotland, Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams of Wales, William Grimshaw, John Newton and Henry Venn of England, William Tennent and his son, Gilbert, Samuel Davies and Theodore Frelinghuysen of North America--to name but a few. The lives and ministries of these men confound the claim that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

A survey of the nineteenth century tells the same story. Charles Simeon, vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, was instrumental in founding the Church Missionary Society. He influenced a generation of students to go overseas with the gospel, including Henry Martyn, one of the earliest missionaries to India. Martyn was a convinced Calvinist, as was John G. Paton, who, despite being warned that he would be eaten by cannibals, joyfully ventured to bring the gospel to such natives in the New Hebrides. William Chalmers Burns was a great Scottish evangelist and missionary to China who, in theology, "was of old Knox's principles" and of whom it was said, "All China knows him! He is the holiest man alive!"^[29] Scotsmen Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, as well as American revival preachers, James McGready and Asahel Nettleton could, among many others, be added to this nineteenth-century list of men whose evangelistic fires were fed by their Calvinistic theology.

Though the twentieth century looms too near to afford much historical perspective, it already reveals similar testimonies. Who will question the missionary heart of John Stott, or the pastoral evangelism of John MacArthur? D. James Kennedy is an avowed "five-point Calvinist" as is the English evangelist, John Blanchard. John Piper, who calls himself a "seven-point Calvinist," has written the best book on missions that the latter half of the twentieth century saw, and has been so valued for his missionary heart that he was invited to be the key-note speaker during "International Missions Week" at Ridgecrest.^[30] Francis Schaeffer was greatly used to lead numbers of students and intellectuals to faith in Christ. The great Welsh pastor of Westminster Chapel, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, saw himself primarily as an evangelist and it is arguable that no one was more influential than he in the revival of the doctrines of grace in the last fifty years.

With two exceptions (John Blanchard and John Piper) the more than thirty names mentioned above are drawn from denominations other than Baptist. But our own heritage has no shortage of men whose Calvinism also ignited in them a passion for evangelism and missions. As with the broader evangelical world, a survey of our Baptist leading lights gives the lie to the assertion that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

What would Adoniram Judson, who gave his life to preach Christ to the Burmese, think of such a charge? His missionary commitment can hardly be questioned and is demonstrated in the honest way he appealed to John Hasseltine for his daughter's hand in marriage. In a letter to his prospective father-in-law he writes,

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure for a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness, brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?^[31]

This missionary zeal was not merely compatible with Calvinism, in Judson's mind God's sovereign grace in salvation was the driving force of evangelism. The only English sermon he ever preached in Burma

was on John 10:1-18. In it he argues that because the elect must be called to faith in Christ, Christian pastors must be faithful in going to those who are lost and making Christ known.

We come now to consider the main duty of a Christian pastor. First he must call his people. Though enclosed in the Saviour's electing love, they may still be wandering on the dark mountains of sin, and he must go after them; perhaps he must seek them in very remote regions, in the very outskirts of the wilderness of heathenism. And as he cannot at first distinguish them from the rest, who will never listen and be saved, he must lift up his voice to all, without discrimination, and utter, in the hearing of all, that invitation of mercy and love which will penetrate the ears and the hearts of the elect only.[\[32\]](#)

Judson wrote a liturgy to be used in the Burmese churches. One part of it is called "A Creed, in Twelve Articles; or, A Summary of the Doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ." In it we find a clear affirmation of the doctrines of grace.

ART. III. According to the Scriptures, man, at the beginning, was made upright and holy; but listening to the devil, he transgressed the divine commands, and fell from his good estate; in consequence of which, the original pair, with all their posterity, contracted a depraved, sinful nature, and became deserving of hell.

ART. IV. God, originally knowing that mankind would fall and be ruined, did, of his mercy, select some of the race and give them to his Son, to save from sin and hell.

ART. V. The Son of God, according to his engagement to save the elect, was in the fulness of time, conceived by the power of God, in the womb of the virgin Mary, in the country of Judea and land of Israel, and thus uniting the divine and human natures, he was born as man; and being the Saviour Messiah, (Jesus Christ,) he perfectly obeyed the law of God, and then laid down his life for man, in the severest agonies of crucifixion, by which he made an atonement for all who are willing to believe.[\[33\]](#)

Judson's last public address to an American audience came July 5, 1846, before a joint gathering of several Baptist congregations in Boston. He had lost his voice and had his prepared message read by Rev. Dr. Sharp. It is entitled, "Obedience to Christ's Last Command a Test of Piety" and is a moving call to heed the Great Commission. The whole basis of his appeal is that those who love Christ must love what He loves and be committed to His purposes. Judson establishes his point in terms of particular redemption and election.

What is the object on which the heart of the Saviour is set? For what purpose did he leave the bosom of the Father, the throne of eternal glory, to come down to sojourn, and suffer, and die in this fallen, rebellious world? For what purpose does he now sit on the mediatorial throne, and exert the power with which he is invested? To restore the ruins of paradise--to redeem his chosen people from death and hell--to extend and establish his kingdom throughout the habitable globe.[\[34\]](#)

Judson's doctrinal and missionary commitments were shared by his colleague, Luther Rice. Originally part of that missionary team which sailed with Judson to India, Rice returned to America in 1813 after being baptized as a believer. His goal in returning was to help raise support for what had become the first Baptist missionaries from this country. His biographer, James B. Taylor, said that Rice "was a decided

believer in the doctrine of divine sovereignty. God was contemplated as working all things after the counsel of his own will."[\[35\]](#)

Rice was not hesitant to declare his views on the sovereignty of God's grace, or as it is commonly known, Calvinism. In a letter to a friend he wrote concerning this doctrine, "This you are aware is not only an item in my creed, but enters into the very ground-work of the hope of immortality and glory, that has become established in my bosom; and constitutes the basis of the submission and joyfulness found in my religious experience." He went on to elaborate,

How absurd it is, therefore, to contend against the doctrine of election, or decrees, or divine sovereignty. Let us not, however, become bitter against those who view this matter in a different light, nor treat them in a supercilious manner; rather let us be gentle towards all men. For who has made us to differ from what we once were? Who has removed the scales from our eyes? Or who has disposed us to embrace the truth?[\[36\]](#)

James Taylor, who became the first Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC, also affirmed these views and noted how easily they are distorted by both their friends and enemies.

The doctrine of divine decrees has often, in various respects, suffered injury. By its enemies, it has been caricatured. Presented in a distorted shape, and arrayed in tattered garments, its true loveliness has been concealed from the eye. All have turned away from the sight with disgust. By some of its avowed friends, also, it has been much abused; its legitimate tendencies, if not misunderstood, have been unfelt.

While the truth that believers are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world has been maintained, they seem to have forgotten the practical design, that they might be holy, and without blame before him in love. What God has joined together they have put asunder. In an eminent degree did the subject of this biography delight to contemplate the harmony of the Scriptures, and their practical influence in promoting the good of men and the glory of God.[\[37\]](#)

To Judson and Rice, the name of William Carey can be added. This "Father of Modern Missions" was, in the words of Timothy George, "like Bunyan before him and Spurgeon after him...an evangelical Calvinist."[\[38\]](#) Carey rejected both Arminianism on the one hand and hyper-Calvinism on the other. In assessing the lessons which Carey's legacy can teach us today as we seek to make Christ known, George puts at the top of the list, "*The sovereignty of God.*"

Carey knew that Christian missions was rooted in the gracious, eternal purpose of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to call unto Himself a redeemed people out of the fallen race of lost humankind. As a young pastor in England he confronted and overcame the resistance of those Hyper-Calvinistic theologians who used the sovereignty of God as a pretext for their do-nothing attitude toward missions. It was not in spite of, but rather because of, his belief in the greatness of God and His divine purpose in election that Carey was willing "to venture all" to proclaim the gospel in the far corners of the world.[\[39\]](#)

This evaluation is supported by the "Serampore Compact" which Carey and his fellow missionaries drew up on October 7, 1805 as a summary of guiding principles for their work. They agreed that three times each year this compact was to be read aloud at each mission station. The first part of that document

declares their understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation.

We are firmly persuaded that Paul might plant and Apollos water, in vain, in any part of the world, did not God give the increase. We are sure that only those ordained to eternal life will believe, and that God alone can add to the church such as shall be saved. Nevertheless we cannot but observe with admiration that Paul, the great champion for the glorious doctrine of free and sovereign grace, was the most conspicuous for his personal zeal in the word of persuading men to be reconciled to God. In this respect he is a noble example for our imitation.[\[40\]](#)

A Calvinistic understanding of God's grace in salvation certainly did not put a drag on William Carey's commitment to evangelism and missions.

If Carey was "Father of Modern Missions" then Andrew Fuller was its grandfather and theologian. His writings, most notably, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, demonstrate the harmony between what he held as "strict Calvinism" (in contrast to the "false Calvinism" of hyper-Calvinists) and the necessity and urgency to preach Christ to all people. He was joined in his views by John Sutcliffe, John Ryland, Jr. and Samuel Pearce. It was from these men, along with Carey--all of whom were Particular Baptists--that the Baptist Missionary Society emerged in England.[\[41\]](#)

What has already been demonstrated of the Charleston and Sandy Creek Associations need not be repeated (though elaboration of the points made would not be difficult), but at least a passing mention should be made of the Georgia Baptist Association. The record of Georgia Baptists from the formation of their first church in 1772 reveals a fervent passion for evangelism and missions. When those churches first formed themselves into an association they did so on the basis of an "abstract of principles and decorum." The following extracts of that document reveal their commitment to the doctrines of grace.

3d. We believe in the fall of Adam, and the imputation of his sin to his posterity. In the corruption of human nature, and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will--ability.

4th. We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race, to grace and glory: And that there was a covenant of grace or redemption made between the Father and the Son, before the world began, in which their salvation is secure, and that they in particular are redeemed.

5th. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God, only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.

6th. We believe that all those who were chosen in Christ, will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported by the spirit and power of God, so that they shall persevere in grace, and not one of them be finally lost.[\[42\]](#)

Some of the most respected church planters and evangelists among 19th century Georgia Baptists were men who were known as "strict predestinarians," fully committed to a Reformed understanding of salvation. Included among them are Silas and Jesse Mercer, Malachi Reeves, Jephtha Vinning and Jabez Pleiades Marshall. Of the latter it was said, "He was strictly a *predestinarian*" and "a thorough going Missionary, and engaged in all the benevolent plans of the day, zealously advocating every scheme

which seemed to be calculated to carry out the commission, and fulfil the commands of Christ." [\[43\]](#)

Examples like these could be multiplied many times over. James Boyce, P.H. Mell, W.B. Johnson, R.B.C. Howell, John L. Dagg, B.H. Carroll, C.D. Mallery, Richard Fuller, Elias and Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Miller, and John Bunyan along with lesser-known men like Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, John Spilsbery, Henry Jesse, Robert Hall, William Mitchell, Ezra Courtney, Spencer Cone and Malcolm McGregor all stand together as a unified Baptist testimony that true Calvinism is a missionary theology. It is beyond comprehension, then, what could possibly give rise to the charge that, "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer." Regardless of what is meant, surely the challenge ("All you have to do is prove me wrong") has been adequately met by the above references.

Concern to see lost people saved

No doubt some people greatly fear evangelical Calvinism because they are convinced that it harms evangelism. Despite the testimony of history to the contrary, some critics seem to have constructed a definition of Calvinism which includes a lack of evangelistic concern. If their definition were right, then their opposition would be laudable. We should not tolerate any teaching which cuts the nerve of biblical evangelism. The doctrines of grace, rightly understood and applied, have never done that.

What does happen, however, is this: when God's sovereignty in salvation is recovered then man-centered, mechanistic methods of evangelism do fall by the wayside, where they belong. Once an evangelist recognizes that the new birth is a sovereign work of God's grace then he will no longer settle for superficial expressions of "deciding" to become born again. Perhaps it is this misunderstanding which provokes the following expression of concern (again, by a conservative Baptist leader) related to the doctrine of election.

I will not tolerate anything--if I can possibly help it, I will give my every energy to preventing it--that I believe to be harmful to evangelism and world missions. You have to understand that when I wake up at night, which is seldom enough, but if I wake up in the middle of the night it's because 6 billion people on the face this globe are on their way to hell. That disturbs me a great deal. My passion, my whole life, has been given to get lost people to Christ. And, I'm sorry, I do not believe that election, whatever it means, and I do believe in election, whatever it is it means, it does not mean that there are not those people out there, people out there can't come to Christ. I believe they can. I believe it is our obligation to get Christ to them.

Such passion for the lost is something which every Christian should possess. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem and we should be weeping over our cities and communities as well. John Knox--staunch Calvinist that he was--is an example to us all when he prayed in the sixteenth century, "O, Lord! Give me Scotland or I die!"

The passion which fuels this expressed antipathy (if not animosity) towards Reformed theology in general and Founders Ministries in particular is the same which I find burning in my soul and motivating me to work for the recovery of the gospel of God's grace and the biblical reformation of local churches.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I too am haunted by the thoughts of people going to hell. But I find that very often my thoughts move from the faceless, nameless billions to those closer to home in

our own evangelical and Southern Baptist family. Paige Patterson has stated that he believes that 30-40% of the Sunday morning crowd in the typical Southern Baptist church are unconverted.^[44] Despite their membership, baptism, service, gifts and regular attendance, he is convinced that they have never been born again. I think he may be underestimating.

I am burdened for these unregenerate Southern Baptists just as I am for the Central Asian Muslim. Both are lost. Both are on their way to hell. Both need the gospel. Both need to be saved. The difference is this: the Southern Baptist has been told that he is saved! He is on his way to hell with a decision card in his pocket. Who, I ask, is in the worse condition? Who is closer to Jesus' description of being "twice the son of hell" (Matthew 23:15)--the one who has never heard the name of Jesus or the one who has been told that because he raised his hand or prayed a prayer or walked an aisle or performed some similar type of act that he is saved?

Assume that Dr. Patterson is correct in his assessment that 30-40% of Sunday morning Southern Baptists are unconverted (which is not hard to do). Studies indicate that less than 40% of a typical Southern Baptist church's membership will even show up for church on a Sunday morning. Let's be generous and assume that that figure is 50%. This would mean that of the 8 million who are motivated enough to attend on Sunday morning, 2.4-3.2 million of them are strangers to God's salvation. Couple this with the 8 million who rarely, if ever, show up and the picture gets very dark very quickly.

Could it really be true that 10-11 million of our 16 million Southern Baptists are members in good standing in our churches while being unconverted? Sadly, I think the evidence suggests that it is so, which means that millions of those within our Southern Baptist family are on the way to hell with some preacher's soothing words of assurance ringing in their ears! The painful thought of these millions of precious souls being deceived to their eternal damnation causes me to lose sleep.

When I wake up thinking about them in the middle of the night, I ask, "How did this happen? What has gone wrong?" Regardless of how these questions are answered (and I do have some studied opinions), one thing is certain: we did not get into this abysmal condition because of the widespread effects of Calvinism!

It isn't Reformed evangelism that has populated our churches with unconverted people. It isn't the influence of Founders Ministries that has turned most of our churches from sheepfolds into goat barns. This deplorable, lamentable, heart-breaking, soul-destroying situation has emerged under the evangelistic practices of a man-centered perversion of the biblical gospel. It is because of this perversion that Founders Ministries came into existence and, by the grace of God, we are determined to fight against it by working for genuine biblical reformation.

Let any honest evaluator ask this question: "Under whose watch has this disease of unregenerate church members spread?" Everyone must conclude that the blame does not fall on the Calvinists in the convention. Rather, this deplorable condition emerged and spread under the prevailing influence of denominationalism (from the 1930s-1950s), moderatism/liberalism (from the 1960s-1980s), and now conservatism/fundamentalism (from the 1990s-present). One of the sad facts--and it is a fact--of the conservative resurgence is that, with all of the good things that have been accomplished, it has done little if anything to stop the spiritual hemorrhaging caused by shallow evangelism. In fact, it is arguable that this problem is even worse now than ever.^[45]

As I have talked to countless missionaries and traveled overseas I have discovered the widespread

influence which our defective evangelism has had on foreign fields. Only eternity will show the damage which well-intentioned but misguided pastors and short-term volunteers have done to noble missionary efforts around the world. The "eyes-closed, hands-up, say-this-prayer-and-you're-in" style of evangelism results in impressive statistics but leaves international souls no less spiritually damaged than those who have been so treated within our own churches. How much longer must our missionaries be expected to pick up the pieces of shoddy evangelism among the people groups of the world?

Austin Phelps made this astute observation in the nineteenth century: "If I were a missionary in Canton, China, my first prayer every morning would be for the success of American Home Missions, for the sake of Canton, China."[\[46\]](#) What he observed then is no less true now. American churches, with all of our resources and opportunities, have a great stewardship to discharge to the rest of the world. So when Founders Ministries presses for reformation in America and especially among Southern Baptists, it is not out of mere provincial concern. Our vision includes the peoples of the world who will be impacted by the kind of Christianity that we export from this country. Anyone who is content to send overseas an evangelism that results in churches which are, at best, only 30-40% converted, is more hard-hearted than the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

So Founders Ministries has a deep concern for the souls of those who are unconverted. We did not originate simply to win theological debates or make historical arguments. Rather we exist because of the deplorable condition of so many churches today, which we trace in large part to the loss of the gospel itself. It is the recovery of the gospel with a desire to see it work in bringing about sound conversions that motivates us.

Should Heresy Be Tolerated?

Conservative leaders are not the only ones to claim that Calvinism will hurt missions and evangelism. The late William Estep shared this view. Al Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary responded to the late distinguished history professor's accusations in direct language.

Dr. Estep charges that a revival of Calvinism will lead to a lessening of evangelistic commitment and missionary vision. This is a common charge, but it is reckless and without foundation. Indeed, many of the most significant missionary and evangelistic movements in the history of the Church have been led by those who held to the very doctrines Dr. Estep laments....If Calvinism is an enemy to missions and evangelism, it is an enemy to the gospel itself. The Great Commission and the task of evangelism are assigned to every congregation and every believer. The charge that Calvinism is opposed to evangelism will not stick--it is a false argument. The "doctrines of grace" are nothing less than a statement of the gospel itself.[\[47\]](#)

If Calvinism is opposed to missions and evangelism, then it should not be tolerated but should be exposed as heresy and attacked with all of the power and influence which any gospel-loving Christian can muster.

No one who is committed to the authority of God's Word should be willing to equate Calvinism with fatalism while at the same time declaring that it should not become a test of fellowship. Yet, that is precisely what one conservative SBC leader did when speaking on open theism. He said,

Specifically, ... is there a position somewhere between the openness of God thing, that says

that God is shaped more by what we do than by anything else, and He's up there wondering what's going to happen next, and on the other hand the inevitable fatalism which Calvinism can never quite divest itself of--is there anything in between? To which I say, that's why I am a Baptist....

Now, I am going to give you a book to read and every single, solitary one of you ought to read it. This is a book called *Providence and Prayer* that has recently come out and it is written by Terrance Tiessen. And it is the best assessment of this that I have ever seen...He goes all the way from fatalism to Calvinism, I don't know what the difference is, but he tries to make one, and so he goes from fatalism all the way to the other side to the openness doctrine and discusses all of it in there.

If this is genuinely how this brother sees it, then how can he also say Calvinism need not become a matter of fellowship? Is he really advocating fellowship with fatalists? The accusation that Calvinism is fatalism is an old ploy by those who either do not understand the issues or who would rather promote fear than understanding among God's people. The charge has been repeatedly and adequately answered, including by the author of the book which is cited in the above quote. Terrance Tiessen writes, "Calvinism is often charged with fatalism, but the models are distinct." He further notes that the charge is commonly made by "proponents of the models that define human freedom as libertarian [who] often equate Augustinian or compatibilist positions with fatalism." [\[48\]](#)

True Calvinism is not fatalism. Calvinism believes in a personal God who has unmitigated sovereignty. Fatalism believes in impersonal fate. Calvinism celebrates (with the Bible) the purposefulness of life. Fatalism espouses meaninglessness. Calvinism sets hope on the future manifested glory of God. Fatalism looks forward to nothingness.

Perhaps the charge was a slip of the tongue, but if any lover of God's Word genuinely believes that Calvinism is no different from fatalism then he is duty-bound to warn against this historic Baptist position as a damnable heresy. To call it fatalism and then to plead for tolerance and fellowship with those who embrace it is a denial of the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Where Christian brothers agree, let us rejoice in the unity we find in Christ. Where we disagree, let us acknowledge it without equivocation while we try to understand and represent honestly differing points of view. And let us hold our views with humble conviction in hopes of either convincing or being convinced of more accurate understandings of God's Word. Where we see beliefs and practices of our brothers drifting into dangerous tendencies and especially heresies, let us lovingly and firmly sound a warning. The cause of God and truth demand nothing less, and those who are committed to that cause should never be satisfied to offer anything less.

The Calvinist-Arminian debate has a long history. Those of us who are convinced evangelical Calvinists stand where we do not because it is popular or politically expedient or theologically chic. We believe what we believe because we are convinced that this is what the Word of God teaches. We have no reason to doubt that our less Calvinistic brothers and sisters are similarly motivated.

Our desire is not to win a theological debate or historical argument. Rather, we want to see God's law and gospel recovered and reasserted with passion and joy. We want to see Christ's churches renewed in faith

and mission. We want to see the nations made glad through the faithful proclamation of God's saving grace in His Son. We want to see our great, triune God receiving the honor and glory which He deserves through the glad submission of all peoples. In short, we want to see genuine, Holy Spirit-sent revival. And as we pray for this great work which only God can do, we are committed to doing all that we can to prepare the way through rigorously pursuing thorough, biblical reformation in our private lives, homes and churches.

Ours is a day which is brimming with spiritual danger and opportunity. The world is becoming less and less accommodating of the church. Entitlements which we have long taken for granted in America are increasingly being challenged. The remnants of cultural Christianity are fading and opposition to fundamental Christian belief and practice is becoming more common. Increasingly the world's message to the church is this: "We will leave you alone if you will leave us alone and simply keep your religion to yourselves." The temptation to go-along-to-get-along is great and giving in to it is deadly. At the same time, what a great opportunity for churches all across our land to be awakened out of our lethargy and start being radically committed to the Bible's way of living out our faith!

When cultural props are demolished, religious organizations and ministries which are dependent on them fall. As sham Christianity is exposed for what it is, the opportunity for biblical Christianity to move forward will become greater. Light is always more noticeable when the night is darkest. When the Church begins to realize that the world more than the Word has been setting our agenda, then we will begin to see the need for repentance and renewed faith. And when we are convinced that our bloated statistics are a lie, our positive press reports mean nothing to God, our methodologies cannot give life and that we are completely dependent on the sovereign grace of our God for all that we have or ever hope to have, then, maybe then, we will be willing to turn to Him in desperation, crying to Him for power and grace.

If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, and if that gospel has been distorted and even lost in many places, then for the sake of our Lord's honor and of never-dying souls, those whose eyes have been opened by God to see these things must be willing to spend and be spent in the work of recovering His gospel and making it known throughout the earth. May our Lord raise up a generation of Great-hearts who are willing to die for this cause!



"The exchange of one set of Bureaucrats for another doth not a reformation make."

Dr. Timothy George

Notes:

¹ See, for example, Fisher Humphreys and Paul E. Robertson, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 2000).

² The most obvious example of polemical engagement on our part can be found in the articles of the 29th issue of the *Founders Journal* (Summer 1997). In that issue the published charge that the doctrines of God's grace lead to a "dunghill" was pointedly refuted.

³ "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists," *SBC Life* (September 1997), 11.

⁴ This and other quotes are taken from a transcript of recorded comments.

⁵ *A Treatise on Church Order*, reprint ed. (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 301.

⁶ The Abstract of Principles remains the doctrinal covenant of Southern Seminary today. It also functions in that role for the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Professors of both schools sign the Abstract and promise to teach in accordance with and not contrary to its contents.

⁷ "Raison d' être: An Editorial Introduction," *Founders Journal* 1 (Spring 1990), 2. The terms "Calvinism" and "Calvinists" should not cloud the issues at stake. Never has Founders Ministries suggested that everything which John Calvin taught ought to be believed. The terms are theological shorthand. They become problematic when they are loaded with meaning far beyond that which is commonly recognized in the history of doctrinal discussion. Regardless of the terms used (and I much prefer "Reformed Baptist" or "Historic Southern Baptist"), what is being asserted is the belief that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation. For elaboration of this see my "An Attempt at Self-Identification," *Founders Journal* 8 (Spring 1992), 1-4.

⁸ Timothy and Denise George, general editors, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 11. George goes on to note the prominent influence which this confession had on early Southern Baptist theological education: "When James P. Boyce was considering a suitable confessional standard for Southern Baptists' first seminary, he originally planned to use the Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith as the doctrinal basis for this new institution. When he became convinced that a briefer, more succinct summary of doctrine would be more useful for this purpose, he commissioned Basil Manly, Jr., to draft an Abstract of Principles based on the Philadelphia/Charleston standard" (Ibid).

⁹ This fact was one of the rallying points of conservatives during the inerrancy controversy in the SBC. In 1985, Paul Pressler argued that Southern Baptists do not need more creeds or confessions but "more integrity" by those who sign them (taken from James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention* [Dallas: Criterion Publications, 1986], 29). To compare early Southern Baptists' attitudes on doctrinal integrity and the importance of adopting and faithfully adhering to a statement of faith, see James P. Boyce's "Three Changes in Theological Institutions" in *James Petigru Boyce, Selected Writings*, ed. Timothy George (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 30-59.

¹⁰ Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What it Means to Us All* (New York: McCracken Press, 1994), 85. Shurden's views of Southern Baptist origins are found in "The 1980-81 Carver-Barnes Lectures" (Wake Forest: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980).

¹¹ Cited in Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Jr., *Adventure in Faith, the First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 156.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ Ibid., 232.

¹⁴ Ibid., 221-22.

¹⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶ In *The Diary of Isaac Backus* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), 3:1246.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:1248. McLoughlin's assessment agrees with Jesse Mercer's. The latter sees the distinctions between Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists as revolving around "externals" and notes that Daniel Marshall specifically and "the Separates generally, became incorporated with the regular, Calvinistic Baptists, in these States and Great Britain" in *History of the Georgia Baptist Association, Compiled at the Request of that Body* (Washington, 1838), 16, 369.

¹⁸ Thomas Ascol, *From the Protestant Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁹ George Washington Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh: The General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930), 1:401.

²⁰ George W. Purefoy, *A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, from its Organization in A.D. 1758, to A.D. 1858* (New York: Arno Press, 1980 reprint ed.), 104-5.

²¹ Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of Isaac Backus*, (1858; Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1991), 356; quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*; (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 181-82.

²² See *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 162-175.

²³ Chapter 5, entitled, "Grace and the Great Commission" in *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative, Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2000), 83-107.

²⁴ For documentation and elaboration of this, see the excellent article by Ray Van Neste, "John Calvin on Evangelism and Missions," *Founders Journal* 33 (Summer 1998), 15-21.

²⁵ Cited in Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft: W.D. Meinema, 1965), 148.

²⁶ Rooy's work gives ample supporting evidence, as does J.I. Packer, in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 291-308.

²⁷ Cited in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield, The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 407.

²⁸ See Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, a New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987) and John Thornbury, *David Brainerd, Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1996).

²⁹ R. Strang Miller, "William C. Burns," in *Five Pioneer Missionaries* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 168.

³⁰ The book is *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). Ridgecrest is a Southern Baptist campground in North Carolina.

³¹ Quoted in Arabella Stuart, *The Three Mrs. Judsons* (Springfield, IL: Particular Baptist Press, 1999), 7-8.

³² Francis Wayland, ed. *Memoir of the Life and Labor of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co., 1835), 2:490.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2:469.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:519.

³⁵ *Memoir of Rev. Luther Rice, One of the First American Missionaries to the East* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1841), 288.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289, 293-94. See also, James B. Taylor, "Luther Rice on God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility," *Founders Journal* 9 (Summer 1992), 10-16.

³⁷ *Memoir*, 292.

³⁸ *Faithful Witness, the Life and Witness of William Carey* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991), 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁰ This document is available from Christian History Institute, Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490.

⁴¹ For a good, brief treatment of Fuller's Calvinism see Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 108-30.

⁴² Mercer, *Georgia Baptist Association*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 415; cf. 380-81, 385-91.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Paige Patterson," *Founders Journal* (Fall 2000), 17.

⁴⁵ Jack Smith, "a soul winning evangelism associate" with the North American Mission Board, said in 1999 that his observations of Southern Baptist churches reveal an abysmal record of retention among their "converts." "Smith said he has found in his informal straw polls that only about 30 percent of baptized believers typically are active in Sunday school a year later. When actual retention rates of new Christians are considered from the time of their decision, the percentage often drops to the single digits" (James Dotson, "Neonatal intensive care critical to spiritual health of newborn Christians," July 2, 1999 Baptist Press report). See also the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) report entitled *A Large Convention of Small Churches: Analysis of the Distributions of Southern Baptist Churches* by Phillip B. Jones, released in 1996 and my "Troubling Waters of Baptism" in *Founders Journal* 22 (Fall 1995), 1-3, in which another HMB research report is cited. That one discovered that only 40.5% of the adults who were recently baptized in SBC said they were doing so because they had been converted. Furthermore, the 840 churches who participated in the study admitted to losing complete contact with more than one-third of those they baptized within one year's time. Even Paige Patterson seems ready to admit that three out of every four converts of his "less Reformed" friends could be "dismissed ... as being not genuine." See his "Shootout at the Amen Corral: Being Baptist Through Controversy" in Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, eds. *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 70.

⁴⁶ Victor I. Masters, *Call of the South* (Atlanta, 1920), 217.

⁴⁷ Albert Mohler, Jr. "The Reformation of Doctrine and the Renewal of the Church: A Response to Dr. William R. Estep," *Founders Journal* 29 (Summer 1997), 12.

⁴⁸ *Providence and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 271.



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Calvinism, Evangelism & Founders Ministries

[Tom Ascol](#)

The extent to which the revival of the doctrines of grace is sweeping across churches in our land can be measured in part by the growing antagonism toward them. Books have begun to appear which attempt to refute the reformational understanding of salvation, or at least to distance that view from "traditional Baptists." [\[1\]](#) One state convention in the SBC has attempted to warn Directors of Mission of the influence of Calvinism in local churches and associations. In addition to this various pastors and recognized denominational leaders continue to speak publicly about what they perceive to be the deadening impact which these doctrines have on missions and evangelism.

Founders Ministries has borne the brunt of such attacks throughout our history. Rather than address every accusation, our response has been, almost without exception, to keep pressing forward in an unwavering commitment to our purpose which is to see the gospel of God's grace recovered and local churches renewed. Only rarely have we engaged directly in polemics, choosing rather to follow a positive agenda of preaching, teaching and writing. [\[2\]](#) That approach has served us well and it is one which we are determined to maintain. It would unprofitable, even if it were possible, to respond to every false accusation and misrepresentation of who we are and what we believe.

In this article, however, I do attempt to set the record straight on some common misconceptions and accusations which are completely without warrant. Founders Ministries has not done its work in some dark corner. We have not been clandestine in our approach. For nearly twenty years we have attempted to steer a straight course that is bent on reformation and revival. We have never hidden our beliefs. On

the contrary, we have published and explicated them many times and in many ways. Where we disagree with brothers and sisters who see things differently, we have tried always to understand their arguments and represent their views accurately. That same goal governs this present attempt to clarify our concerns, correct misrepresentations and refute false accusations.

Reasonable men obviously can disagree in their understanding of the nature and workings of God's grace in salvation and yet can stand together in the common cause of making that grace known through the preaching of the gospel to all peoples. History gives us some wonderful examples of this. And this has been and remains my great desire for those of us who live together in the SBC with different perspectives on the issues that have been framed by the historic debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Timothy George's recent book, *Amazing Grace*, points the way forward in doing this.

But charges that Calvinism is nothing more than fatalism and that the doctrines of grace detract from evangelism and missions undermine that effort. Such charges so misrepresent historical data and doctrinal positions that to remain silent in the face of them is to become complicit in the spread of caricature and misunderstanding.

Paige Patterson has written a wonderful "parable for our time" entitled, "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists." The article quotes Satan revealing his strategy for destroying the SBC: "We will induce the thoroughgoing Calvinists to accuse the less Calvinistic of Arminianism, and the less Calvinistic to accuse the thoroughgoing Calvinists of unconcern for evangelism."^[3] His words are a timely warning for those of us who are committed to living together in the Southern Baptist Convention of churches.

I want to heed this warning as I respond to charges which have been leveled by some of the "less Calvinistic" who, I believe, have fallen prey to the latter part of this very scheme. Thus, I refrain from "naming names," because I want to focus not on personalities but issues. As I write I do so with the prayer that God will grant those of us who disagree on these issues a love for truth that overcomes any party spirit and the temptations that come from engaging in controversial debate.

Mischaracterization of Founders

In the initial years of Founders Ministries, it was common to hear the assertion that "Southern Baptists have never been Calvinists." With every reprint of early Southern Baptist views on salvation and grace, however, this charge appeared more and more ridiculous. In the early 1990s it began to die out and now only the most detached and uninformed dare to make it. In its wake, however, a new accusation has gained a footing. Instead of claiming that Southern Baptists never were Calvinistic in our view of salvation, it has now become popular to envision the origin of the SBC in such a way that Calvinism is reduced to one of two or more contributing tributaries which flowed into the river which became the convention.

One SBC leader has recently stated,

I do not believe the Founders group is as forthcoming as it should be when it calls itself the Founders group, because the suggestion here is that all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention. Nothing could be further from the truth. There have always been two strong tributaries flowing into the Southern Baptist river, one of them Charleston, one of them Sandy Creek. Now, Charleston is heavily Calvinistic, Sandy Creek is highly revivalist. Most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists. I admit that. But most of the

people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out winning people to Christ. So both things are there and to suppose that the Convention was founded only by Calvinists is a total misrepresentation.[4]

The suggestion that Founders Ministries has been less than forthcoming in the selection of our name reveals a lack of understanding of the purpose, scope and claims of our efforts. Never have we suggested that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention." Rather, we have argued that there was a theological consensus on the doctrines of grace among Southern Baptists when the convention began. John Dagg, the first writing theologian among Southern Baptists whose theological influence was greatly appreciated by early Southern Baptists, celebrated this consensus when he wrote in 1858, "The general agreement of Baptist churches, in doctrine as well as church order, is a fact which gives occasion for devout gratitude to God." [5] It also insured that the founding faculty of our first seminary was comprised of none but Calvinists and that the document which they were required to sign was and remains decidedly Calvinistic.[6]

This theological consensus is clearly reflected in the leaders who were chosen to give direction and shape to Southern Baptist life in the first 50-75 years of the denomination's existence. Because we stand with those early leaders in their understanding of the grace of God in salvation (in other words, because we believe they were correct in their understanding of God's Word at this point), we chose the name "Founders" as a fitting description for our concern.

In the very first issue of the *Founders Journal* I wrote that the resurgence of the doctrines of grace in our denomination was "nothing less than [a reaffirmation of] the soteriological convictions which prevailed among the founders and early leaders of the SBC." After listing a dozen such leaders as representative of that contention, I concluded that "it is without question that these men, who were the denominational loyalists of their day, firmly embraced the Doctrines of Grace. Further, the thesis that this theological persuasion prevailed among Southern Baptists during the first 75 years of our existence has yet to be refuted (see *By His Grace and For His Glory*, by Tom Nettles [recently reprinted by Founders Press])." [7] Eleven years later there is still no refutation in sight, though countless gratuitous assertions have been made.

This early Southern Baptist theological consensus can be identified by tracing the influence of confessional Calvinism on the formation of the Convention. In 1742 the first Baptist association in America adopted the 1689 London Baptist Confession as its own. Known now as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, this summary of Christian teaching was greatly respected by Baptist churches across America. As Timothy George notes,

The *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* was transplanted to the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina. It soon became the most widely accepted, definitive confession among Baptists in America both North and South. *Each of the 293 "delegates,"* [emphasis added] as they were then called, who gathered in Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, belonged to congregations and associations which had adopted the *Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith* as their own.[8]

The significance of this claim can be easily missed by those who have been weaned on the pervasive doctrinal indifference of the twentieth century. Our forebears in the mid-nineteenth century were not accustomed to our modern habit of adopting confessions of faith which are not sincerely believed. Today

it is not uncommon for pastors, to say nothing of members, to be ignorant of their church's confession of faith. It has also been tragically demonstrated over the last twenty years that many Baptist educators have no scruples about signing doctrinal statements to which they take exception in order to secure a teaching contract.^[9] But when a delegate showed up at the founding convention in 1845 from a church or association which had adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, we can be reasonably certain that he both knew and approved of that confession. The practice of signing a confession of faith while really not believing certain articles in it seems to be a function of the modern Southern Baptist conscience.

When the accusation is made that "nothing could be further from the truth" than the suggestion that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention" what is being refuted is a straw man. No one to my knowledge has ever made such a claim. If, however, anyone is indeed convinced that there was no theological consensus among early Southern Baptist leaders, then he ought to further the dialog on this point by bringing forth evidence. Where is the list of early Southern Baptist statesmen who were Arminians or opposed to Calvinism? Who among those original delegates disavowed the doctrines of grace? Can even one name be given?

Suspect Theory of Southern Baptist Origins

The theory of SBC origins which distinguishes the "Charleston Calvinists" from the "Sandy Creek evangelists" is disingenuous at best. The suggestion that "most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists" while "most of the people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out winning people to Christ" follows the historical analysis of Walter Shurden and Fisher Humphreys, the latter of whom claims that the Sandy Creek tradition "minimized Calvinism and emphasized evangelism."^[10] This is true neither in principle nor in the practice of early Baptist churches in the South. The dichotomy between Calvinism and evangelism which the Shurden-Humphreys analysis imposes on Baptists in the early American South is simplistic to the point of being false. Even a cursory reading of the historical evidence demonstrates that the Charleston Baptists were evangelistic and the Sandy Creek Baptists were hardly opposed to Calvinism.

Charleston Baptist Evangelism

During Oliver Hart's ministry as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, the congregation sent a request to the meeting of the Charleston Association in November, 1755. They asked the association to secure a missionary to labor among the destitute people "in the interior settlements of this and neighboring States."^[11] This took place *before* Daniel Marshall and Shubal Stearns migrated from Opekon, Virginia to begin the Separate Baptist movement at Sandy Creek. In response to the church's request, the association commissioned John Gano to preach the gospel at the Jersey Settlement on the banks of the Yadkin River--not far from Sandy Creek--in what is now North Carolina. Far from being a dividing point, Sandy Creek actually became something of a meeting point for the evangelistic fervor of both the Charleston and Separate Baptists.

Furthermore, a later pastor of FBC Charleston, Richard Furman, helped organize the General Missionary Convention (Triennial Convention) in 1814. At the organizational meeting on May 21 of that year, the delegates asked Furman to preach. His closing appeal clearly refutes the charge that "Charleston Calvinists" were something less than concerned for evangelism and missions.

Let the wise and good employ their counsels; the minister of Christ, who is qualified for the sacred service, offer himself for the work; the man of wealth and generosity, who values the glory of Immanuel and the salvation of souls more than gold, bring of his treasure in proportion as God has bestowed on him; yea, let all, even the pious widow, bring the mite that can be spared; and let all who fear and love God, unite in the prayer of faith before the throne of Grace; and unceasingly say, "Thy Kingdom come." And O! let it never be forgotten, that the Son of God hath said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Amen and Amen.[\[12\]](#)

By 1845, the year of the founding of the SBC, the Triennial convention had compiled an impressive missions record: they had missionaries among 8 Indian groups in North America; in numerous European countries as well as in Africa, Burma, Siam, China, Assam, India and Asia. "The total program by 1845 involved 17 missions; 130 mission stations and outstations; 109 missionaries and assistant missionaries, of whom 42 were preachers; 123 native preachers and assistants; 79 churches, 2,593 baptisms in the previous year, and more than 5,000 church members; and 1,350 students in 56 schools."[\[13\]](#)

Furman also led his church to participate in a "Quarterly Concert of Prayer for world missions" and recommended this practice to all the churches of the association by 1795. After 1810, the church held this prayer meeting on the first Monday of every month.[\[14\]](#)

In 1800 the General Committee of the Charleston Association called on that body to engage even more diligently in the concerted work of missions.

Is there not at this time, a call in providence for our churches to make the most serious exertions, in union with other Christians of various denominations, to send the gospel among the heathen; or to such people who, though living in countries where the gospel revelation is known, do not enjoy a standing ministry, and the regular administration of divine ordinances among them?[\[15\]](#)

It is obvious that writing books was not all that occupied the time and energies of Charleston Baptists!

Sandy Creek Calvinism

The evangelistic fervor of the Charleston tradition is only one side of the evidence which refutes the skewed historical interpretation that Charleston and Sandy Creek were separated by Calvinism and missionary zeal. The implication that the Separate Baptists of Sandy Creek were somehow anti-Calvinistic is, at best, a thesis which is difficult to defend. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that Separate Baptists were just as convinced of the Reformed understanding of salvation as were their Regular Baptist brethren.

William McLoughlin reads the historical record this way. He refers to the Calvinistic Baptists of New England as "the Separate Baptists" and describes the separation of Regular, or Particular, Baptists from Separate Baptists in the South as "two wings" of Calvinistic Baptists in that region.[\[16\]](#) McLoughlin specifically identifies the preaching of Shubal Stearns, who was the principal founder of the Sandy Creek Association, as "evangelical Calvinism."[\[17\]](#)

Separate Baptists emerged out of Congregationalism with its thoroughly Reformed confession of faith, the Savoy Declaration. Those who separated from Congregationalism after the Great Awakening were

rejecting "a dead formalism that substituted agreement with a creed for vital, experiential Christianity." [18] Evidence suggests that they did not give up their strongly Calvinistic understanding of salvation.

The first covenant of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church affirms predestination, effectual calling, and perseverance of the saints. The preamble states their belief in "believers' baptism; laying on of hands; particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ; effectual calling by the Holy Ghost; free justification through the righteousness of Christ; progressive sanctification through God's grace and truth; the final perseverance, or continuance of the saints in grace;...." [19]

The 1816 Articles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association affirms total depravity in Article 3: "That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his own posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed." Article 4 affirms election, effectual calling, and perseverance: "We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost." [20]

Lest anyone should try the standard liberal ploy of reinterpreting these statements in some kind of Arminian framework ("what this means to me is..."), it should be remembered that the decidedly Calvinistic Basil Manly Sr. chaired the committee which drew up the association's articles. Dismissing authorial intent is a standard policy of liberals and moderates who are embarrassed by statements of faith which they have signed but with which they do not agree.

Isaac Backus, one of the most influential Separate Baptist pastors, never wavered in his commitment to Calvinistic theology. Near the end of his life he wrote:

The enmity which men have discovered against the sovereignty of the grace of God as revealed in Holy Scriptures hath now prevailed so far that every art is made use of to put other senses upon the words of revelation than God intended therein. He said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," Rom. 9:15-16. This was the doctrine that God made use of in all the reformation that wrought in Germany, England and Scotland after the year 1517; and by the same doctrine he wrought all the reformation that has been in our day, both in Europe and America. [21]

Revisionist histories, like urban legends, die hard. The simplistic assertion that Separate Baptists (Sandy Creek) were evangelistic while Regular or Calvinistic Baptists (Charleston) were scholarly or academic is unfounded and should be renounced in the face of evidence drawn from the historical record.

Gratuitous Historical Assertions

So strident is the opposition which some have to the doctrines of grace that on occasion outlandish claims are made which cannot in any way be justified. One conservative Baptist leader recently went further than most in his comments:

Now, I don't care what any Calvinist has to say about it. Calvinism, as a doctrinal

commitment, has always had the effect of being a drag, to put it the best way, kindest way, a drag on missions and evangelism.

All you have to do is prove me wrong, but you have to do it in some other way than citing Spurgeon because he's been cited often enough and it is not really impressive to cite Spurgeon and one or two others and say we've proved you wrong. No, look at the whole. Look at what has happened across the centuries. Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer. And it is understandable why. Here is a man who believes that God has created this number of people over here to be saved and, because he believes in irresistible grace, they're going to get saved no matter what. So what is the necessity of my going to them? Well, in my mind of course I treat it this way: I say, Well, I've got to go to them because God's told me to go to them. So the fact that I'm a Calvinist doesn't make any difference really. God has told me to do it, so I've got to go to them. But let me tell you what. In your heart, if you don't think it's going to make any difference to begin with because what's done is done in eternity past, you [aren't] going to go. That's just the truth of the matter. Very seldom do people go. The fact that there are some exceptions only underscores the rule.

It is hard to know how to answer the charge that Calvinism has "always" been a drag on missions and evangelism when the accuser 1) "doesn't care what any Calvinist has to say about it" and 2) disallows citing "Spurgeon and one or two others" because he finds such citations "unimpressive." How many examples does it take to overthrow an unqualified universal charge that Calvinism "always" causes evangelism to suffer? Is Spurgeon disallowed because he is regarded as unevangelistic or because he is thought to have been uncalvinistic? Hardly anyone believes the former and no one who has read Spurgeon's own "Defence of Calvinism" (to name only one of a myriad of such examples) can seriously entertain the latter.[\[22\]](#)

The challenge to be proven wrong is easily done. The recent book, *Amazing Grace*, by Timothy George contains a whole chapter on this subject, citing William Carey and Spurgeon as Calvinists whose theology fueled evangelism.[\[23\]](#) Yet, even if one does inexplicably leave Spurgeon out of the equation the case can still be easily made simply by selecting from the numerous examples which are readily available in the historical record. In fact, the difficulty is not in finding such examples, but in knowing which ones to omit. How many will suffice to cause a retraction of the assertion?

John Calvin himself led out in bold evangelistic enterprises to such a degree that Philip Hughes calls him a "Director of Missions" and refers to Geneva under his leadership as a "school of missions." Under Calvin, hundreds of men were sent out to preach the gospel in hostile lands, extending their work as far as Brazil.[\[24\]](#)

The Puritan movement in the seventeenth century saw a continuation and expansion of this evangelistic and missionary zeal. Who can honestly consider the pastoral work of Richard Baxter in Kidderminster and say that "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer"? In 1879 Alexander Grosart called him "the most successful preacher and winner of souls and nurturer of won souls, that England has ever had."[\[25\]](#) Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* and *Reformed Pastor* underscore this assessment. His passion for mission work among Indians in New England made him eager to assist missionary John Eliot in securing a new charter for the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England in 1660-62. His vision for called-out missionary workers,

whom he called "unfixed Ambulatory Ministers," helped persuade Eliot to give himself to that work in a full time capacity. Similar passion for evangelism and missions can be found among Baxter's Puritan contemporaries if one is willing to avoid the anachronistic mistake of searching their writings for modern vocabulary on the subject.[\[26\]](#)

The eighteenth century is also filled with witnesses against the assertion that Calvinism kills evangelism. Among the Great Awakening's most notable leaders are George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The former crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times preaching wherever he could gather a crowd because, as he put it, "the doctrines of our election, and free justification in Christ Jesus are daily more and more pressed upon my heart. They fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Saviour."[\[27\]](#) The latter's pastoral ministry in Northampton, Massachusetts was marked by revival flames and resulted in the best writings on the theology of revival in history. Both men were unabashed Calvinists as was Edwards' young colleague and fervent missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd, who felt it wise to catechize his converts in all aspects of biblical doctrine, including sovereign predestination.[\[28\]](#)

Many more names could be added to this list, including Thomas Boston, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine of Scotland, Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams of Wales, William Grimshaw, John Newton and Henry Venn of England, William Tennent and his son, Gilbert, Samuel Davies and Theodore Frelinghuysen of North America--to name but a few. The lives and ministries of these men confound the claim that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

A survey of the nineteenth century tells the same story. Charles Simeon, vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, was instrumental in founding the Church Missionary Society. He influenced a generation of students to go overseas with the gospel, including Henry Martyn, one of the earliest missionaries to India. Martyn was a convinced Calvinist, as was John G. Paton, who, despite being warned that he would be eaten by cannibals, joyfully ventured to bring the gospel to such natives in the New Hebrides. William Chalmers Burns was a great Scottish evangelist and missionary to China who, in theology, "was of old Knox's principles" and of whom it was said, "All China knows him! He is the holiest man alive!"[\[29\]](#) Scotsmen Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, as well as American revival preachers, James McGready and Asahel Nettleton could, among many others, be added to this nineteenth-century list of men whose evangelistic fires were fed by their Calvinistic theology.

Though the twentieth century looms too near to afford much historical perspective, it already reveals similar testimonies. Who will question the missionary heart of John Stott, or the pastoral evangelism of John MacArthur? D. James Kennedy is an avowed "five-point Calvinist" as is the English evangelist, John Blanchard. John Piper, who calls himself a "seven-point Calvinist," has written the best book on missions that the latter half of the twentieth century saw, and has been so valued for his missionary heart that he was invited to be the key-note speaker during "International Missions Week" at Ridgecrest.[\[30\]](#) Francis Schaeffer was greatly used to lead numbers of students and intellectuals to faith in Christ. The great Welsh pastor of Westminster Chapel, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, saw himself primarily as an evangelist and it is arguable that no one was more influential than he in the revival of the doctrines of grace in the last fifty years.

With two exceptions (John Blanchard and John Piper) the more than thirty names mentioned above are drawn from denominations other than Baptist. But our own heritage has no shortage of men whose Calvinism also ignited in them a passion for evangelism and missions. As with the broader evangelical

world, a survey of our Baptist leading lights gives the lie to the assertion that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

What would Adoniram Judson, who gave his life to preach Christ to the Burmese, think of such a charge? His missionary commitment can hardly be questioned and is demonstrated in the honest way he appealed to John Hasseltine for his daughter's hand in marriage. In a letter to his prospective father-in-law he writes,

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure for a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness, brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?[31]

This missionary zeal was not merely compatible with Calvinism, in Judson's mind God's sovereign grace in salvation was the driving force of evangelism. The only English sermon he ever preached in Burma was on John 10:1-18. In it he argues that because the elect must be called to faith in Christ, Christian pastors must be faithful in going to those who are lost and making Christ known.

We come now to consider the main duty of a Christian pastor. First he must call his people. Though enclosed in the Saviour's electing love, they may still be wandering on the dark mountains of sin, and he must go after them; perhaps he must seek them in very remote regions, in the very outskirts of the wilderness of heathenism. And as he cannot at first distinguish them from the rest, who will never listen and be saved, he must lift up his voice to all, without discrimination, and utter, in the hearing of all, that invitation of mercy and love which will penetrate the ears and the hearts of the elect only.[32]

Judson wrote a liturgy to be used in the Burmese churches. One part of it is called "A Creed, in Twelve Articles; or, A Summary of the Doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ." In it we find a clear affirmation of the doctrines of grace.

ART. III. According to the Scriptures, man, at the beginning, was made upright and holy; but listening to the devil, he transgressed the divine commands, and fell from his good estate; in consequence of which, the original pair, with all their posterity, contracted a depraved, sinful nature, and became deserving of hell.

ART. IV. God, originally knowing that mankind would fall and be ruined, did, of his mercy, select some of the race and give them to his Son, to save from sin and hell.

ART. V. The Son of God, according to his engagement to save the elect, was in the fulness of time, conceived by the power of God, in the womb of the virgin Mary, in the country of Judea and land of Israel, and thus uniting the divine and human natures, he was born as man;

and being the Saviour Messiah, (Jesus Christ,) he perfectly obeyed the law of God, and then laid down his life for man, in the severest agonies of crucifixion, by which he made an atonement for all who are willing to believe.[\[33\]](#)

Judson's last public address to an American audience came July 5, 1846, before a joint gathering of several Baptist congregations in Boston. He had lost his voice and had his prepared message read by Rev. Dr. Sharp. It is entitled, "Obedience to Christ's Last Command a Test of Piety" and is a moving call to heed the Great Commission. The whole basis of his appeal is that those who love Christ must love what He loves and be committed to His purposes. Judson establishes his point in terms of particular redemption and election.

What is the object on which the heart of the Saviour is set? For what purpose did he leave the bosom of the Father, the throne of eternal glory, to come down to sojourn, and suffer, and die in this fallen, rebellious world? For what purpose does he now sit on the mediatorial throne, and exert the power with which he is invested? To restore the ruins of paradise--to redeem his chosen people from death and hell--to extend and establish his kingdom throughout the habitable globe.[\[34\]](#)

Judson's doctrinal and missionary commitments were shared by his colleague, Luther Rice. Originally part of that missionary team which sailed with Judson to India, Rice returned to America in 1813 after being baptized as a believer. His goal in returning was to help raise support for what had become the first Baptist missionaries from this country. His biographer, James B. Taylor, said that Rice "was a decided believer in the doctrine of divine sovereignty. God was contemplated as working all things after the counsel of his own will."[\[35\]](#)

Rice was not hesitant to declare his views on the sovereignty of God's grace, or as it is commonly known, Calvinism. In a letter to a friend he wrote concerning this doctrine, "This you are aware is not only an item in my creed, but enters into the very ground-work of the hope of immortality and glory, that has become established in my bosom; and constitutes the basis of the submission and joyfulness found in my religious experience." He went on to elaborate,

How absurd it is, therefore, to contend against the doctrine of election, or decrees, or divine sovereignty. Let us not, however, become bitter against those who view this matter in a different light, nor treat them in a supercilious manner; rather let us be gentle towards all men. For who has made us to differ from what we once were? Who has removed the scales from our eyes? Or who has disposed us to embrace the truth?[\[36\]](#)

James Taylor, who became the first Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC, also affirmed these views and noted how easily they are distorted by both their friends and enemies.

The doctrine of divine decrees has often, in various respects, suffered injury. By its enemies, it has been caricatured. Presented in a distorted shape, and arrayed in tattered garments, its true loveliness has been concealed from the eye. All have turned away from the sight with disgust. By some of its avowed friends, also, it has been much abused; its legitimate tendencies, if not misunderstood, have been unfelt.

While the truth that believers are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world has been maintained, they seem to have forgotten the practical design, that they might be holy, and

without blame before him in love. What God has joined together they have put asunder. In an eminent degree did the subject of this biography delight to contemplate the harmony of the Scriptures, and their practical influence in promoting the good of men and the glory of God.[\[37\]](#)

To Judson and Rice, the name of William Carey can be added. This "Father of Modern Missions" was, in the words of Timothy George, "like Bunyan before him and Spurgeon after him...an evangelical Calvinist."[\[38\]](#) Carey rejected both Arminianism on the one hand and hyper-Calvinism on the other. In assessing the lessons which Carey's legacy can teach us today as we seek to make Christ known, George puts at the top of the list, "*The sovereignty of God.*"

Carey knew that Christian missions was rooted in the gracious, eternal purpose of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to call unto Himself a redeemed people out of the fallen race of lost humankind. As a young pastor in England he confronted and overcame the resistance of those Hyper-Calvinistic theologians who used the sovereignty of God as a pretext for their do-nothing attitude toward missions. It was not in spite of, but rather because of, his belief in the greatness of God and His divine purpose in election that Carey was willing "to venture all" to proclaim the gospel in the far corners of the world.[\[39\]](#)

This evaluation is supported by the "Serampore Compact" which Carey and his fellow missionaries drew up on October 7, 1805 as a summary of guiding principles for their work. They agreed that three times each year this compact was to be read aloud at each mission station. The first part of that document declares their understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation.

We are firmly persuaded that Paul might plant and Apollos water, in vain, in any part of the world, did not God give the increase. We are sure that only those ordained to eternal life will believe, and that God alone can add to the church such as shall be saved. Nevertheless we cannot but observe with admiration that Paul, the great champion for the glorious doctrine of free and sovereign grace, was the most conspicuous for his personal zeal in the word of persuading men to be reconciled to God. In this respect he is a noble example for our imitation.[\[40\]](#)

A Calvinistic understanding of God's grace in salvation certainly did not put a drag on William Carey's commitment to evangelism and missions.

If Carey was "Father of Modern Missions" then Andrew Fuller was its grandfather and theologian. His writings, most notably, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, demonstrate the harmony between what he held as "strict Calvinism" (in contrast to the "false Calvinism" of hyper-Calvinists) and the necessity and urgency to preach Christ to all people. He was joined in his views by John Sutcliffe, John Ryland, Jr. and Samuel Pearce. It was from these men, along with Carey--all of whom were Particular Baptists--that the Baptist Missionary Society emerged in England.[\[41\]](#)

What has already been demonstrated of the Charleston and Sandy Creek Associations need not be repeated (though elaboration of the points made would not be difficult), but at least a passing mention should be made of the Georgia Baptist Association. The record of Georgia Baptists from the formation of their first church in 1772 reveals a fervent passion for evangelism and missions. When those churches first formed themselves into an association they did so on the basis of an "abstract of principles and decorum." The following extracts of that document reveal their commitment to the doctrines of grace.

3d. We believe in the fall of Adam, and the imputation of his sin to his posterity. In the corruption of human nature, and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will--ability.

4th. We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race, to grace and glory: And that there was a covenant of grace or redemption made between the Father and the Son, before the world began, in which their salvation is secure, and that they in particular are redeemed.

5th. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God, only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.

6th. We believe that all those who were chosen in Christ, will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported by the spirit and power of God, so that they shall persevere in grace, and not one of them be finally lost.[\[42\]](#)

Some of the most respected church planters and evangelists among 19th century Georgia Baptists were men who were known as "strict predestinarians," fully committed to a Reformed understanding of salvation. Included among them are Silas and Jesse Mercer, Malachi Reeves, Jeptha Vinning and Jabez Pleiades Marshall. Of the latter it was said, "He was strictly a *predestinarian*" and "a thorough going Missionary, and engaged in all the benevolent plans of the day, zealously advocating every scheme which seemed to be calculated to carry out the commission, and fulfil the commands of Christ."[\[43\]](#)

Examples like these could be multiplied many times over. James Boyce, P.H. Mell, W.B. Johnson, R.B.C. Howell, John L. Dagg, B.H. Carroll, C.D. Mallery, Richard Fuller, Elias and Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Miller, and John Bunyan along with lesser-known men like Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, John Spilsbery, Henry Jesse, Robert Hall, William Mitchell, Ezra Courtney, Spencer Cone and Malcolm McGregor all stand together as a unified Baptist testimony that true Calvinism is a missionary theology. It is beyond comprehension, then, what could possibly give rise to the charge that, "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer." Regardless of what is meant, surely the challenge ("All you have to do is prove me wrong") has been adequately met by the above references.

Concern to see lost people saved

No doubt some people greatly fear evangelical Calvinism because they are convinced that it harms evangelism. Despite the testimony of history to the contrary, some critics seem to have constructed a definition of Calvinism which includes a lack of evangelistic concern. If their definition were right, then their opposition would be laudable. We should not tolerate any teaching which cuts the nerve of biblical evangelism. The doctrines of grace, rightly understood and applied, have never done that.

What does happen, however, is this: when God's sovereignty in salvation is recovered then man-centered, mechanistic methods of evangelism do fall by the wayside, where they belong. Once an evangelist recognizes that the new birth is a sovereign work of God's grace then he will no longer settle for superficial expressions of "deciding" to become born again. Perhaps it is this misunderstanding which provokes the following expression of concern (again, by a conservative Baptist leader) related to the doctrine of election.

I will not tolerate anything--if I can possibly help it, I will give my every energy to preventing it--that I believe to be harmful to evangelism and world missions. You have to understand that when I wake up at night, which is seldom enough, but if I wake up in the middle of the night it's because 6 billion people on the face this globe are on their way to hell. That disturbs me a great deal. My passion, my whole life, has been given to get lost people to Christ. And, I'm sorry, I do not believe that election, whatever it means, and I do believe in election, whatever it is it means, it does not mean that there are not those people out there, people out there can't come to Christ. I believe they can. I believe it is our obligation to get Christ to them.

Such passion for the lost is something which every Christian should possess. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem and we should be weeping over our cities and communities as well. John Knox--staunch Calvinist that he was--is an example to us all when he prayed in the sixteenth century, "O, Lord! Give me Scotland or I die!"

The passion which fuels this expressed antipathy (if not animosity) towards Reformed theology in general and Founders Ministries in particular is the same which I find burning in my soul and motivating me to work for the recovery of the gospel of God's grace and the biblical reformation of local churches.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I too am haunted by the thoughts of people going to hell. But I find that very often my thoughts move from the faceless, nameless billions to those closer to home in our own evangelical and Southern Baptist family. Paige Patterson has stated that he believes that 30-40% of the Sunday morning crowd in the typical Southern Baptist church are unconverted.^[44] Despite their membership, baptism, service, gifts and regular attendance, he is convinced that they have never been born again. I think he may be underestimating.

I am burdened for these unregenerate Southern Baptists just as I am for the Central Asian Muslim. Both are lost. Both are on their way to hell. Both need the gospel. Both need to be saved. The difference is this: the Southern Baptist has been told that he is saved! He is on his way to hell with a decision card in his pocket. Who, I ask, is in the worse condition? Who is closer to Jesus' description of being "twice the son of hell" (Matthew 23:15)--the one who has never heard the name of Jesus or the one who has been told that because he raised his hand or prayed a prayer or walked an aisle or performed some similar type of act that he is saved?

Assume that Dr. Patterson is correct in his assessment that 30-40% of Sunday morning Southern Baptists are unconverted (which is not hard to do). Studies indicate that less than 40% of a typical Southern Baptist church's membership will even show up for church on a Sunday morning. Let's be generous and assume that that figure is 50%. This would mean that of the 8 million who are motivated enough to attend on Sunday morning, 2.4-3.2 million of them are strangers to God's salvation. Couple this with the 8 million who rarely, if ever, show up and the picture gets very dark very quickly.

Could it really be true that 10-11 million of our 16 million Southern Baptists are members in good standing in our churches while being unconverted? Sadly, I think the evidence suggests that it is so, which means that millions of those within our Southern Baptist family are on the way to hell with some preacher's soothing words of assurance ringing in their ears! The painful thought of these millions of precious souls being deceived to their eternal damnation causes me to lose sleep.

When I wake up thinking about them in the middle of the night, I ask, "How did this happen? What has

gone wrong?" Regardless of how these questions are answered (and I do have some studied opinions), one thing is certain: we did not get into this abysmal condition because of the widespread effects of Calvinism!

It isn't Reformed evangelism that has populated our churches with unconverted people. It isn't the influence of Founders Ministries that has turned most of our churches from sheepfolds into goat barns. This deplorable, lamentable, heart-breaking, soul-destroying situation has emerged under the evangelistic practices of a man-centered perversion of the biblical gospel. It is because of this perversion that Founders Ministries came into existence and, by the grace of God, we are determined to fight against it by working for genuine biblical reformation.

Let any honest evaluator ask this question: "Under whose watch has this disease of unregenerate church members spread?" Everyone must conclude that the blame does not fall on the Calvinists in the convention. Rather, this deplorable condition emerged and spread under the prevailing influence of denominationalism (from the 1930s-1950s), moderatism/liberalism (from the 1960s-1980s), and now conservatism/fundamentalism (from the 1990s-present). One of the sad facts--and it is a fact--of the conservative resurgence is that, with all of the good things that have been accomplished, it has done little if anything to stop the spiritual hemorrhaging caused by shallow evangelism. In fact, it is arguable that this problem is even worse now than ever.[\[45\]](#)

As I have talked to countless missionaries and traveled overseas I have discovered the widespread influence which our defective evangelism has had on foreign fields. Only eternity will show the damage which well-intentioned but misguided pastors and short-term volunteers have done to noble missionary efforts around the world. The "eyes-closed, hands-up, say-this-prayer-and-you're-in" style of evangelism results in impressive statistics but leaves international souls no less spiritually damaged than those who have been so treated within our own churches. How much longer must our missionaries be expected to pick up the pieces of shoddy evangelism among the people groups of the world?

Austin Phelps made this astute observation in the nineteenth century: "If I were a missionary in Canton, China, my first prayer every morning would be for the success of American Home Missions, for the sake of Canton, China."[\[46\]](#) What he observed then is no less true now. American churches, with all of our resources and opportunities, have a great stewardship to discharge to the rest of the world. So when Founders Ministries presses for reformation in America and especially among Southern Baptists, it is not out of mere provincial concern. Our vision includes the peoples of the world who will be impacted by the kind of Christianity that we export from this country. Anyone who is content to send overseas an evangelism that results in churches which are, at best, only 30-40% converted, is more hard-hearted than the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

So Founders Ministries has a deep concern for the souls of those who are unconverted. We did not originate simply to win theological debates or make historical arguments. Rather we exist because of the deplorable condition of so many churches today, which we trace in large part to the loss of the gospel itself. It is the recovery of the gospel with a desire to see it work in bringing about sound conversions that motivates us.

Should Heresy Be Tolerated?

Conservative leaders are not the only ones to claim that Calvinism will hurt missions and evangelism. The late William Estep shared this view. Al Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary responded to the late distinguished history professor's accusations in direct language.

Dr. Estep charges that a revival of Calvinism will lead to a lessening of evangelistic commitment and missionary vision. This is a common charge, but it is reckless and without foundation. Indeed, many of the most significant missionary and evangelistic movements in the history of the Church have been led by those who held to the very doctrines Dr. Estep laments....If Calvinism is an enemy to missions and evangelism, it is an enemy to the gospel itself. The Great Commission and the task of evangelism are assigned to every congregation and every believer. The charge that Calvinism is opposed to evangelism will not stick--it is a false argument. The "doctrines of grace" are nothing less than a statement of the gospel itself.[\[47\]](#)

If Calvinism is opposed to missions and evangelism, then it should not be tolerated but should be exposed as heresy and attacked with all of the power and influence which any gospel-loving Christian can muster.

No one who is committed to the authority of God's Word should be willing to equate Calvinism with fatalism while at the same time declaring that it should not become a test of fellowship. Yet, that is precisely what one conservative SBC leader did when speaking on open theism. He said,

Specifically, ... is there a position somewhere between the openness of God thing, that says that God is shaped more by what we do than by anything else, and He's up there wondering what's going to happen next, and on the other hand the inevitable fatalism which Calvinism can never quite divest itself of--is there anything in between? To which I say, that's why I am a Baptist....

Now, I am going to give you a book to read and every single, solitary one of you ought to read it. This is a book called *Providence and Prayer* that has recently come out and it is written by Terrance Tiessen. And it is the best assessment of this that I have ever seen...He goes all the way from fatalism to Calvinism, I don't know what the difference is, but he tries to make one, and so he goes from fatalism all the way to the other side to the openness doctrine and discusses all of it in there.

If this is genuinely how this brother sees it, then how can he also say Calvinism need not become a matter of fellowship? Is he really advocating fellowship with fatalists? The accusation that Calvinism is fatalism is an old ploy by those who either do not understand the issues or who would rather promote fear than understanding among God's people. The charge has been repeatedly and adequately answered, including by the author of the book which is cited in the above quote. Terrance Tiessen writes, "Calvinism is often charged with fatalism, but the models are distinct." He further notes that the charge is commonly made by "proponents of the models that define human freedom as libertarian [who] often equate Augustinian or compatibilist positions with fatalism."[\[48\]](#)

True Calvinism is not fatalism. Calvinism believes in a personal God who has unmitigated sovereignty. Fatalism believes in impersonal fate. Calvinism celebrates (with the Bible) the purposefulness of life.

Fatalism espouses meaninglessness. Calvinism sets hope on the future manifested glory of God. Fatalism looks forward to nothingness.

Perhaps the charge was a slip of the tongue, but if any lover of God's Word genuinely believes that Calvinism is no different from fatalism then he is duty-bound to warn against this historic Baptist position as a damnable heresy. To call it fatalism and then to plead for tolerance and fellowship with those who embrace it is a denial of the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Where Christian brothers agree, let us rejoice in the unity we find in Christ. Where we disagree, let us acknowledge it without equivocation while we try to understand and represent honestly differing points of view. And let us hold our views with humble conviction in hopes of either convincing or being convinced of more accurate understandings of God's Word. Where we see beliefs and practices of our brothers drifting into dangerous tendencies and especially heresies, let us lovingly and firmly sound a warning. The cause of God and truth demand nothing less, and those who are committed to that cause should never be satisfied to offer anything less.

The Calvinist-Arminian debate has a long history. Those of us who are convinced evangelical Calvinists stand where we do not because it is popular or politically expedient or theologically chic. We believe what we believe because we are convinced that this is what the Word of God teaches. We have no reason to doubt that our less Calvinistic brothers and sisters are similarly motivated.

Our desire is not to win a theological debate or historical argument. Rather, we want to see God's law and gospel recovered and reasserted with passion and joy. We want to see Christ's churches renewed in faith and mission. We want to see the nations made glad through the faithful proclamation of God's saving grace in His Son. We want to see our great, triune God receiving the honor and glory which He deserves through the glad submission of all peoples. In short, we want to see genuine, Holy Spirit-sent revival. And as we pray for this great work which only God can do, we are committed to doing all that we can to prepare the way through rigorously pursuing thorough, biblical reformation in our private lives, homes and churches.

Ours is a day which is brimming with spiritual danger and opportunity. The world is becoming less and less accommodating of the church. Entitlements which we have long taken for granted in America are increasingly being challenged. The remnants of cultural Christianity are fading and opposition to fundamental Christian belief and practice is becoming more common. Increasingly the world's message to the church is this: "We will leave you alone if you will leave us alone and simply keep your religion to yourselves." The temptation to go-along-to-get-along is great and giving in to it is deadly. At the same time, what a great opportunity for churches all across our land to be awakened out of our lethargy and start being radically committed to the Bible's way of living out our faith!

When cultural props are demolished, religious organizations and ministries which are dependent on them fall. As sham Christianity is exposed for what it is, the opportunity for biblical Christianity to move forward will become greater. Light is always more noticeable when the night is darkest. When the Church begins to realize that the world more than the Word has been setting our agenda, then we will begin to see the need for repentance and renewed faith. And when we are convinced that our bloated statistics are a lie, our positive press reports mean nothing to God, our methodologies cannot give life and that we are completely dependent on the sovereign grace of our God for all that we have or ever hope

to have, then, maybe then, we will be willing to turn to Him in desperation, crying to Him for power and grace.

If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, and if that gospel has been distorted and even lost in many places, then for the sake of our Lord's honor and of never-dying souls, those whose eyes have been opened by God to see these things must be willing to spend and be spent in the work of recovering His gospel and making it known throughout the earth. May our Lord raise up a generation of Great-hearts who are willing to die for this cause!



"The exchange of one set of Bureaucrats for another doth not a reformation make."

Dr. Timothy George

Notes:

¹ See, for example, Fisher Humphreys and Paul E. Robertson, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 2000).

² The most obvious example of polemical engagement on our part can be found in the articles of the 29th issue of the *Founders Journal* (Summer 1997). In that issue the published charge that the doctrines of God's grace lead to a "dunghill" was pointedly refuted.

³ "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists," *SBC Life* (September 1997), 11.

⁴ This and other quotes are taken from a transcript of recorded comments.

⁵ *A Treatise on Church Order*, reprint ed. (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 301.

⁶ The Abstract of Principles remains the doctrinal covenant of Southern Seminary today. It also functions in that role for the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Professors of both schools sign the Abstract and promise to teach in accordance with and not contrary to its contents.

⁷ "Raison d' être: An Editorial Introduction," *Founders Journal* 1 (Spring 1990), 2. The terms "Calvinism" and "Calvinists" should not cloud the issues at stake. Never has Founders Ministries suggested that everything which John Calvin taught ought to be believed. The terms are theological shorthand. They become problematic when they are loaded with meaning far beyond that which is commonly recognized in the history of doctrinal discussion. Regardless of the terms used (and I much prefer "Reformed Baptist" or "Historic Southern Baptist"), what is being asserted is the belief that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation. For elaboration of this see my "An Attempt at Self-Identification," *Founders Journal* 8 (Spring 1992), 1-4.

⁸ Timothy and Denise George, general editors, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 11. George goes on to note the prominent influence which this confession had on early Southern Baptist theological education: "When James P. Boyce was considering a suitable confessional standard for Southern Baptists' first seminary, he originally planned to use the Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith as the doctrinal basis for this new institution. When he became convinced that a briefer, more succinct summary of doctrine would be more useful for

this purpose, he commissioned Basil Manly, Jr., to draft an Abstract of Principles based on the Philadelphia/Charleston standard" (Ibid).

⁹ This fact was one of the rallying points of conservatives during the inerrancy controversy in the SBC. In 1985, Paul Pressler argued that Southern Baptists do not need more creeds or confessions but "more integrity" by those who sign them (taken from James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention* [Dallas: Criterion Publications, 1986], 29). To compare early Southern Baptists' attitudes on doctrinal integrity and the importance of adopting and faithfully adhering to a statement of faith, see James P. Boyce's "Three Changes in Theological Institutions" in *James Petigru Boyce, Selected Writings*, ed. Timothy George (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 30-59.

¹⁰ Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What it Means to Us All* (New York: McCracken Press, 1994), 85. Shurden's views of Southern Baptist origins are found in "The 1980-81 Carver-Barnes Lectures" (Wake Forest: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980).

¹¹ Cited in Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Jr., *Adventure in Faith, the First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 156.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ Ibid., 232.

¹⁴ Ibid., 221-22.

¹⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶ In *The Diary of Isaac Backus* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), 3:1246.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3:1248. McLoughlin's assessment agrees with Jesse Mercer's. The latter sees the distinctions between Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists as revolving around "externals" and notes that Daniel Marshall specifically and "the Separates generally, became incorporated with the regular, Calvinistic Baptists, in these States and Great Britain" in *History of the Georgia Baptist Association, Compiled at the Request of that Body* (Washington, 1838), 16, 369.

¹⁸ Thomas Ascol, *From the Protestant Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁹ George Washington Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh: The General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930), 1:401.

²⁰ George W. Purefoy, *A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, from its Organization in A.D. 1758, to A.D. 1858* (New York: Arno Press, 1980 reprint ed.), 104-5.

²¹ Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of Isaac Backus*, (1858; Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1991), 356; quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*; (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 181-82.

²² See *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 162-175.

²³ Chapter 5, entitled, "Grace and the Great Commission" in *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative, Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2000), 83-107.

²⁴ For documentation and elaboration of this, see the excellent article by Ray Van Neste, "John Calvin on Evangelism and Missions," *Founders Journal* 33 (Summer 1998), 15-21.

²⁵ Cited in Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft: W.D. Meinema, 1965), 148.

²⁶ Rooy's work gives ample supporting evidence, as does J.I. Packer, in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 291-308.

²⁷ Cited in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield, The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 407.

²⁸ See Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, a New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987) and John Thornbury, *David Brainerd, Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1996).

²⁹ R. Strang Miller, "William C. Burns," in *Five Pioneer Missionaries* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 168.

³⁰ The book is *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). Ridgecrest is a Southern Baptist campground in North Carolina.

³¹ Quoted in Arabella Stuart, *The Three Mrs. Judsons* (Springfield, IL: Particular Baptist Press, 1999), 7-8.

³² Francis Wayland, ed. *Memoir of the Life and Labor of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co., 1835), 2:490.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2:469.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:519.

³⁵ *Memoir of Rev. Luther Rice, One of the First American Missionaries to the East* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1841), 288.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289, 293-94. See also, James B. Taylor, "Luther Rice on God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility," *Founders Journal* 9 (Summer 1992), 10-16.

³⁷ *Memoir*, 292.

³⁸ *Faithful Witness, the Life and Witness of William Carey* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991), 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁰ This document is available from Christian History Institute, Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490.

⁴¹ For a good, brief treatment of Fuller's Calvinism see Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*,

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 108-30.

⁴² Mercer, *Georgia Baptist Association*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 415; cf. 380-81, 385-91.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Paige Patterson," *Founders Journal* (Fall 2000), 17.

⁴⁵ Jack Smith, "a soul winning evangelism associate" with the North American Mission Board, said in 1999 that his observations of Southern Baptist churches reveal an abysmal record of retention among their "converts." "Smith said he has found in his informal straw polls that only about 30 percent of baptized believers typically are active in Sunday school a year later. When actual retention rates of new Christians are considered from the time of their decision, the percentage often drops to the single digits" (James Dotson, "Neonatal intensive care critical to spiritual health of newborn Christians," July 2, 1999 Baptist Press report). See also the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) report entitled *A Large Convention of Small Churches: Analysis of the Distributions of Southern Baptist Churches* by Phillip B. Jones, released in 1996 and my "Troubling Waters of Baptism" in *Founders Journal* 22 (Fall 1995), 1-3, in which another HMB research report is cited. That one discovered that only 40.5% of the adults who were recently baptized in SBC said they were doing so because they had been converted. Furthermore, the 840 churches who participated in the study admitted to losing complete contact with more than one-third of those they baptized within one year's time. Even Paige Patterson seems ready to admit that three out of every four converts of his "less Reformed" friends could be "dismissed ... as being not genuine." See his "Shootout at the Amen Corral: Being Baptist Through Controversy" in Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, eds. *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 70.

⁴⁶ Victor I. Masters, *Call of the South* (Atlanta, 1920), 217.

⁴⁷ Albert Mohler, Jr. "The Reformation of Doctrine and the Renewal of the Church: A Response to Dr. William R. Estep," *Founders Journal* 29 (Summer 1997), 12.

⁴⁸ *Providence and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 271.



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Calvinism, Evangelism & Founders Ministries

Tom Ascol

The extent to which the revival of the doctrines of grace is sweeping across churches in our land can be measured in part by the growing antagonism toward them. Books have begun to appear which attempt to refute the reformational understanding of salvation, or at least to distance that view from "traditional Baptists." [1] One state convention in the SBC has attempted to warn Directors of Mission of the influence of Calvinism in local churches and associations. In addition to this various pastors and recognized denominational leaders continue to speak publicly about what they perceive to be the deadening impact which these doctrines have on missions and evangelism.

Founders Ministries has borne the brunt of such attacks throughout our history. Rather than address every accusation, our response has been, almost without exception, to keep pressing forward in an unwavering commitment to our purpose which is to see the gospel of God's grace recovered and local churches renewed. Only rarely have we engaged directly in polemics, choosing rather to follow a positive agenda of preaching, teaching and writing. [2] That approach has served us well and it is one which we are determined to maintain. It would unprofitable, even if it were possible, to respond to every false accusation and misrepresentation of who we are and what we believe.

In this article, however, I do attempt to set the record straight on some common misconceptions and accusations which are completely without warrant. Founders Ministries has not done its work in some dark corner. We have not been clandestine in our approach. For nearly twenty years we have attempted to steer a straight course that is bent on reformation and revival. We have never hidden our beliefs. On the contrary, we have published and explicated them many times and in many ways. Where we disagree with brothers and sisters who see things differently, we have tried always to understand their arguments and represent their views accurately. That same goal governs this present attempt to clarify our concerns, correct misrepresentations and refute false accusations.

Reasonable men obviously can disagree in their understanding of the nature and workings of God's grace in salvation and yet can stand together in the common cause of making that grace known through the preaching of the gospel to all peoples. History gives us some wonderful examples of this. And this has been and remains my great desire for those of us who live together in the SBC with different perspectives on the issues that have been framed by the historic debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Timothy George's recent book, *Amazing Grace*, points the way forward in doing this.

But charges that Calvinism is nothing more than fatalism and that the doctrines of grace detract from evangelism and missions undermine that effort. Such charges so misrepresent historical data and doctrinal positions that to remain silent in the face of them is to become complicit in the spread of caricature and misunderstanding.

Paige Patterson has written a wonderful "parable for our time" entitled, "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists." The article quotes Satan revealing his strategy for destroying the SBC: "We will induce the thoroughgoing Calvinists to accuse the less Calvinistic of Arminianism, and the less Calvinistic to accuse the thoroughgoing Calvinists of unconcern for evangelism." [3] His words are a timely warning for those

of us who are committed to living together in the Southern Baptist Convention of churches.

I want to heed this warning as I respond to charges which have been leveled by some of the "less Calvinistic" who, I believe, have fallen prey to the latter part of this very scheme. Thus, I refrain from "naming names," because I want to focus not on personalities but issues. As I write I do so with the prayer that God will grant those of us who disagree on these issues a love for truth that overcomes any party spirit and the temptations that come from engaging in controversial debate.

Mischaracterization of Founders

In the initial years of Founders Ministries, it was common to hear the assertion that "Southern Baptists have never been Calvinists." With every reprint of early Southern Baptist views on salvation and grace, however, this charge appeared more and more ridiculous. In the early 1990s it began to die out and now only the most detached and uninformed dare to make it. In its wake, however, a new accusation has gained a footing. Instead of claiming that Southern Baptists never were Calvinistic in our view of salvation, it has now become popular to envision the origin of the SBC in such a way that Calvinism is reduced to one of two or more contributing tributaries which flowed into the river which became the convention.

One SBC leader has recently stated,

I do not believe the Founders group is as forthcoming as it should be when it calls itself the Founders group, because the suggestion here is that all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention. Nothing could be further from the truth. There have always been two strong tributaries flowing into the Southern Baptist river, one of them Charleston, one of them Sandy Creek. Now, Charleston is heavily Calvinistic, Sandy Creek is highly revivalist. Most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists. I admit that. But most of the people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out winning people to Christ. So both things are there and to suppose that the Convention was founded only by Calvinists is a total misrepresentation.[\[4\]](#)

The suggestion that Founders Ministries has been less than forthcoming in the selection of our name reveals a lack of understanding of the purpose, scope and claims of our efforts. Never have we suggested that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention." Rather, we have argued that there was a theological consensus on the doctrines of grace among Southern Baptists when the convention began. John Dagg, the first writing theologian among Southern Baptists whose theological influence was greatly appreciated by early Southern Baptists, celebrated this consensus when he wrote in 1858, "The general agreement of Baptist churches, in doctrine as well as church order, is a fact which gives occasion for devout gratitude to God."[\[5\]](#) It also insured that the founding faculty of our first seminary was comprised of none but Calvinists and that the document which they were required to sign was and remains decidedly Calvinistic.[\[6\]](#)

This theological consensus is clearly reflected in the leaders who were chosen to give direction and shape to Southern Baptist life in the first 50-75 years of the denomination's existence. Because we stand with those early leaders in their understanding of the grace of God in salvation (in other words, because we believe they were correct in their understanding of God's Word at this point), we chose the name "Founders" as a fitting description for our concern.

In the very first issue of the *Founders Journal* I wrote that the resurgence of the doctrines of grace in our denomination was "nothing less than [a reaffirmation of] the soteriological convictions which prevailed among the founders and early leaders of the SBC." After listing a dozen such leaders as representative of that contention, I concluded that "it is without question that these men, who were the denominational loyalists of their day, firmly embraced the Doctrines of Grace. Further, the thesis that this theological persuasion prevailed among Southern Baptists during the first 75 years of our existence has yet to be refuted (see *By His Grace and For His Glory*, by Tom Nettles [recently reprinted by Founders Press])."^[7] Eleven years later there is still no refutation in sight, though countless gratuitous assertions have been made.

This early Southern Baptist theological consensus can be identified by tracing the influence of confessional Calvinism on the formation of the Convention. In 1742 the first Baptist association in America adopted the 1689 London Baptist Confession as its own. Known now as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, this summary of Christian teaching was greatly respected by Baptist churches across America. As Timothy George notes,

The *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* was transplanted to the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina. It soon became the most widely accepted, definitive confession among Baptists in America both North and South. *Each of the 293 "delegates,"* [emphasis added] as they were then called, who gathered in Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, belonged to congregations and associations which had adopted the *Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith* as their own.^[8]

The significance of this claim can be easily missed by those who have been weaned on the pervasive doctrinal indifference of the twentieth century. Our forebears in the mid-nineteenth century were not accustomed to our modern habit of adopting confessions of faith which are not sincerely believed. Today it is not uncommon for pastors, to say nothing of members, to be ignorant of their church's confession of faith. It has also been tragically demonstrated over the last twenty years that many Baptist educators have no scruples about signing doctrinal statements to which they take exception in order to secure a teaching contract.^[9] But when a delegate showed up at the founding convention in 1845 from a church or association which had adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, we can be reasonably certain that he both knew and approved of that confession. The practice of signing a confession of faith while really not believing certain articles in it seems to be a function of the modern Southern Baptist conscience.

When the accusation is made that "nothing could be further from the truth" than the suggestion that "all Southern Baptists were Calvinists at the inception of the convention" what is being refuted is a straw man. No one to my knowledge has ever made such a claim. If, however, anyone is indeed convinced that there was no theological consensus among early Southern Baptist leaders, then he ought to further the dialog on this point by bringing forth evidence. Where is the list of early Southern Baptist statesmen who were Arminians or opposed to Calvinism? Who among those original delegates disavowed the doctrines of grace? Can even one name be given?

Suspect Theory of Southern Baptist Origins

The theory of SBC origins which distinguishes the "Charleston Calvinists" from the "Sandy Creek evangelists" is disingenuous at best. The suggestion that "most of the people doing the writing were Calvinists" while "most of the people growing the denomination were Sandy Creekers who were out

winning people to Christ" follows the historical analysis of Walter Shurden and Fisher Humphreys, the latter of whom claims that the Sandy Creek tradition "minimized Calvinism and emphasized evangelism."[\[10\]](#) This is true neither in principle nor in the practice of early Baptist churches in the South. The dichotomy between Calvinism and evangelism which the Shurden-Humphreys analysis imposes on Baptists in the early American South is simplistic to the point of being false. Even a cursory reading of the historical evidence demonstrates that the Charleston Baptists were evangelistic and the Sandy Creek Baptists were hardly opposed to Calvinism.

Charleston Baptist Evangelism

During Oliver Hart's ministry as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, the congregation sent a request to the meeting of the Charleston Association in November, 1755. They asked the association to secure a missionary to labor among the destitute people "in the interior settlements of this and neighboring States."[\[11\]](#) This took place *before* Daniel Marshall and Shubal Stearns migrated from Opekon, Virginia to begin the Separate Baptist movement at Sandy Creek. In response to the church's request, the association commissioned John Gano to preach the gospel at the Jersey Settlement on the banks of the Yadkin River--not far from Sandy Creek--in what is now North Carolina. Far from being a dividing point, Sandy Creek actually became something of a meeting point for the evangelistic fervor of both the Charleston and Separate Baptists.

Furthermore, a later pastor of FBC Charleston, Richard Furman, helped organize the General Missionary Convention (Triennial Convention) in 1814. At the organizational meeting on May 21 of that year, the delegates asked Furman to preach. His closing appeal clearly refutes the charge that "Charleston Calvinists" were something less than concerned for evangelism and missions.

Let the wise and good employ their counsels; the minister of Christ, who is qualified for the sacred service, offer himself for the work; the man of wealth and generosity, who values the glory of Immanuel and the salvation of souls more than gold, bring of his treasure in proportion as God has bestowed on him; yea, let all, even the pious widow, bring the mite that can be spared; and let all who fear and love God, unite in the prayer of faith before the throne of Grace; and unceasingly say, "Thy Kingdom come." And O! let it never be forgotten, that the Son of God hath said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Amen and Amen.[\[12\]](#)

By 1845, the year of the founding of the SBC, the Triennial convention had compiled an impressive missions record: they had missionaries among 8 Indian groups in North America; in numerous European countries as well as in Africa, Burma, Siam, China, Assam, India and Asia. "The total program by 1845 involved 17 missions; 130 mission stations and outstations; 109 missionaries and assistant missionaries, of whom 42 were preachers; 123 native preachers and assistants; 79 churches, 2,593 baptisms in the previous year, and more than 5,000 church members; and 1,350 students in 56 schools."[\[13\]](#)

Furman also led his church to participate in a "Quarterly Concert of Prayer for world missions" and recommended this practice to all the churches of the association by 1795. After 1810, the church held this prayer meeting on the first Monday of every month.[\[14\]](#)

In 1800 the General Committee of the Charleston Association called on that body to engage even more diligently in the concerted work of missions.

Is there not at this time, a call in providence for our churches to make the most serious exertions, in union with other Christians of various denominations, to send the gospel among the heathen; or to such people who, though living in countries where the gospel revelation is known, do not enjoy a standing ministry, and the regular administration of divine ordinances among them?[\[15\]](#)

It is obvious that writing books was not all that occupied the time and energies of Charleston Baptists!

Sandy Creek Calvinism

The evangelistic fervor of the Charleston tradition is only one side of the evidence which refutes the skewed historical interpretation that Charleston and Sandy Creek were separated by Calvinism and missionary zeal. The implication that the Separate Baptists of Sandy Creek were somehow anti-Calvinistic is, at best, a thesis which is difficult to defend. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that Separate Baptists were just as convinced of the Reformed understanding of salvation as were their Regular Baptist brethren.

William McLoughlin reads the historical record this way. He refers to the Calvinistic Baptists of New England as "the Separate Baptists" and describes the separation of Regular, or Particular, Baptists from Separate Baptists in the South as "two wings" of Calvinistic Baptists in that region.[\[16\]](#) McLoughlin specifically identifies the preaching of Shubal Stearns, who was the principal founder of the Sandy Creek Association, as "evangelical Calvinism."[\[17\]](#)

Separate Baptists emerged out of Congregationalism with its thoroughly Reformed confession of faith, the Savoy Declaration. Those who separated from Congregationalism after the Great Awakening were rejecting "a dead formalism that substituted agreement with a creed for vital, experiential Christianity."[\[18\]](#) Evidence suggests that they did not give up their strongly Calvinistic understanding of salvation.

The first covenant of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church affirms predestination, effectual calling, and perseverance of the saints. The preamble states their belief in "believers' baptism; laying on of hands; particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ; effectual calling by the Holy Ghost; free justification through the righteousness of Christ; progressive sanctification through God's grace and truth; the final perseverance, or continuance of the saints in grace;...."[\[19\]](#)

The 1816 Articles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association affirms total depravity in Article 3: "That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his own posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed." Article 4 affirms election, effectual calling, and perseverance: "We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost."[\[20\]](#)

Lest anyone should try the standard liberal ploy of reinterpreting these statements in some kind of Arminian framework ("what this means to me is..."), it should be remembered that the decidedly Calvinistic Basil Manly Sr. chaired the committee which drew up the association's articles. Dismissing authorial intent is a standard policy of liberals and moderates who are embarrassed by statements of faith

which they have signed but with which they do not agree.

Isaac Backus, one of the most influential Separate Baptist pastors, never wavered in his commitment to Calvinistic theology. Near the end of his life he wrote:

The enmity which men have discovered against the sovereignty of the grace of God as revealed in Holy Scriptures hath now prevailed so far that every art is made use of to put other senses upon the words of revelation than God intended therein. He said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," Rom. 9:15-16. This was the doctrine that God made use of in all the reformation that wrought in Germany, England and Scotland after the year 1517; and by the same doctrine he wrought all the reformation that has been in our day, both in Europe and America.[\[21\]](#)

Revisionist histories, like urban legends, die hard. The simplistic assertion that Separate Baptists (Sandy Creek) were evangelistic while Regular or Calvinistic Baptists (Charleston) were scholarly or academic is unfounded and should be renounced in the face of evidence drawn from the historical record.

Gratuitous Historical Assertions

So strident is the opposition which some have to the doctrines of grace that on occasion outlandish claims are made which cannot in any way be justified. One conservative Baptist leader recently went further than most in his comments:

Now, I don't care what any Calvinist has to say about it. Calvinism, as a doctrinal commitment, has always had the effect of being a drag, to put it the best way, kindest way, a drag on missions and evangelism.

All you have to do is prove me wrong, but you have to do it in some other way than citing Spurgeon because he's been cited often enough and it is not really impressive to cite Spurgeon and one or two others and say we've proved you wrong. No, look at the whole. Look at what has happened across the centuries. Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer. And it is understandable why. Here is a man who believes that God has created this number of people over here to be saved and, because he believes in irresistible grace, they're going to get saved no matter what. So what is the necessity of my going to them? Well, in my mind of course I treat it this way: I say, Well, I've got to go to them because God's told me to go to them. So the fact that I'm a Calvinist doesn't make any difference really. God has told me to do it, so I've got to go to them. But let me tell you what. In your heart, if you don't think it's going to make any difference to begin with because what's done is done in eternity past, you [aren't] going to go. That's just the truth of the matter. Very seldom do people go. The fact that there are some exceptions only underscores the rule.

It is hard to know how to answer the charge that Calvinism has "always" been a drag on missions and evangelism when the accuser 1) "doesn't care what any Calvinist has to say about it" and 2) disallows citing "Spurgeon and one or two others" because he finds such citations "unimpressive." How many examples does it take to overthrow an unqualified universal charge that Calvinism "always" causes

evangelism to suffer? Is Spurgeon disallowed because he is regarded as unevangelistic or because he is thought to have been uncalvinistic? Hardly anyone believes the former and no one who has read Spurgeon's own "Defence of Calvinism" (to name only one of a myriad of such examples) can seriously entertain the latter.[\[22\]](#)

The challenge to be proven wrong is easily done. The recent book, *Amazing Grace*, by Timothy George contains a whole chapter on this subject, citing William Carey and Spurgeon as Calvinists whose theology fueled evangelism.[\[23\]](#) Yet, even if one does inexplicably leave Spurgeon out of the equation the case can still be easily made simply by selecting from the numerous examples which are readily available in the historical record. In fact, the difficulty is not in finding such examples, but in knowing which ones to omit. How many will suffice to cause a retraction of the assertion?

John Calvin himself led out in bold evangelistic enterprises to such a degree that Philip Hughes calls him a "Director of Missions" and refers to Geneva under his leadership as a "school of missions." Under Calvin, hundreds of men were sent out to preach the gospel in hostile lands, extending their work as far as Brazil.[\[24\]](#)

The Puritan movement in the seventeenth century saw a continuation and expansion of this evangelistic and missionary zeal. Who can honestly consider the pastoral work of Richard Baxter in Kidderminster and say that "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer"? In 1879 Alexander Grosart called him "the most successful preacher and winner of souls and nurturer of won souls, that England has ever had."[\[25\]](#) Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* and *Reformed Pastor* underscore this assessment. His passion for mission work among Indians in New England made him eager to assist missionary John Eliot in securing a new charter for the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England in 1660-62. His vision for called-out missionary workers, whom he called "unfixed Ambulatory Ministers," helped persuade Eliot to give himself to that work in a full time capacity. Similar passion for evangelism and missions can be found among Baxter's Puritan contemporaries if one is willing to avoid the anachronistic mistake of searching their writings for modern vocabulary on the subject.[\[26\]](#)

The eighteenth century is also filled with witnesses against the assertion that Calvinism kills evangelism. Among the Great Awakening's most notable leaders are George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The former crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times preaching wherever he could gather a crowd because, as he put it, "the doctrines of our election, and free justification in Christ Jesus are daily more and more pressed upon my heart. They fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Saviour."[\[27\]](#) The latter's pastoral ministry in Northampton, Massachusetts was marked by revival flames and resulted in the best writings on the theology of revival in history. Both men were unabashed Calvinists as was Edwards' young colleague and fervent missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd, who felt it wise to catechize his converts in all aspects of biblical doctrine, including sovereign predestination.[\[28\]](#)

Many more names could be added to this list, including Thomas Boston, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine of Scotland, Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams of Wales, William Grimshaw, John Newton and Henry Venn of England, William Tennent and his son, Gilbert, Samuel Davies and Theodore Frelinghuysen of North America--to name but a few. The lives and ministries of these men confound the claim that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

A survey of the nineteenth century tells the same story. Charles Simeon, vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, was instrumental in founding the Church Missionary Society. He influenced a generation of students to go overseas with the gospel, including Henry Martyn, one of the earliest missionaries to India. Martyn was a convinced Calvinist, as was John G. Paton, who, despite being warned that he would be eaten by cannibals, joyfully ventured to bring the gospel to such natives in the New Hebrides. William Chalmers Burns was a great Scottish evangelist and missionary to China who, in theology, "was of old Knox's principles" and of whom it was said, "All China knows him! He is the holiest man alive!"^[29] Scotsmen Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, as well as American revival preachers, James McGready and Asahel Nettleton could, among many others, be added to this nineteenth-century list of men whose evangelistic fires were fed by their Calvinistic theology.

Though the twentieth century looms too near to afford much historical perspective, it already reveals similar testimonies. Who will question the missionary heart of John Stott, or the pastoral evangelism of John MacArthur? D. James Kennedy is an avowed "five-point Calvinist" as is the English evangelist, John Blanchard. John Piper, who calls himself a "seven-point Calvinist," has written the best book on missions that the latter half of the twentieth century saw, and has been so valued for his missionary heart that he was invited to be the key-note speaker during "International Missions Week" at Ridgecrest.^[30] Francis Schaeffer was greatly used to lead numbers of students and intellectuals to faith in Christ. The great Welsh pastor of Westminster Chapel, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, saw himself primarily as an evangelist and it is arguable that no one was more influential than he in the revival of the doctrines of grace in the last fifty years.

With two exceptions (John Blanchard and John Piper) the more than thirty names mentioned above are drawn from denominations other than Baptist. But our own heritage has no shortage of men whose Calvinism also ignited in them a passion for evangelism and missions. As with the broader evangelical world, a survey of our Baptist leading lights gives the lie to the assertion that Calvinism is a "drag on missions and evangelism."

What would Adoniram Judson, who gave his life to preach Christ to the Burmese, think of such a charge? His missionary commitment can hardly be questioned and is demonstrated in the honest way he appealed to John Hasseltine for his daughter's hand in marriage. In a letter to his prospective father-in-law he writes,

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure for a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness, brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?^[31]

This missionary zeal was not merely compatible with Calvinism, in Judson's mind God's sovereign grace in salvation was the driving force of evangelism. The only English sermon he ever preached in Burma

was on John 10:1-18. In it he argues that because the elect must be called to faith in Christ, Christian pastors must be faithful in going to those who are lost and making Christ known.

We come now to consider the main duty of a Christian pastor. First he must call his people. Though enclosed in the Saviour's electing love, they may still be wandering on the dark mountains of sin, and he must go after them; perhaps he must seek them in very remote regions, in the very outskirts of the wilderness of heathenism. And as he cannot at first distinguish them from the rest, who will never listen and be saved, he must lift up his voice to all, without discrimination, and utter, in the hearing of all, that invitation of mercy and love which will penetrate the ears and the hearts of the elect only.[\[32\]](#)

Judson wrote a liturgy to be used in the Burmese churches. One part of it is called "A Creed, in Twelve Articles; or, A Summary of the Doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ." In it we find a clear affirmation of the doctrines of grace.

ART. III. According to the Scriptures, man, at the beginning, was made upright and holy; but listening to the devil, he transgressed the divine commands, and fell from his good estate; in consequence of which, the original pair, with all their posterity, contracted a depraved, sinful nature, and became deserving of hell.

ART. IV. God, originally knowing that mankind would fall and be ruined, did, of his mercy, select some of the race and give them to his Son, to save from sin and hell.

ART. V. The Son of God, according to his engagement to save the elect, was in the fulness of time, conceived by the power of God, in the womb of the virgin Mary, in the country of Judea and land of Israel, and thus uniting the divine and human natures, he was born as man; and being the Saviour Messiah, (Jesus Christ,) he perfectly obeyed the law of God, and then laid down his life for man, in the severest agonies of crucifixion, by which he made an atonement for all who are willing to believe.[\[33\]](#)

Judson's last public address to an American audience came July 5, 1846, before a joint gathering of several Baptist congregations in Boston. He had lost his voice and had his prepared message read by Rev. Dr. Sharp. It is entitled, "Obedience to Christ's Last Command a Test of Piety" and is a moving call to heed the Great Commission. The whole basis of his appeal is that those who love Christ must love what He loves and be committed to His purposes. Judson establishes his point in terms of particular redemption and election.

What is the object on which the heart of the Saviour is set? For what purpose did he leave the bosom of the Father, the throne of eternal glory, to come down to sojourn, and suffer, and die in this fallen, rebellious world? For what purpose does he now sit on the mediatorial throne, and exert the power with which he is invested? To restore the ruins of paradise--to redeem his chosen people from death and hell--to extend and establish his kingdom throughout the habitable globe.[\[34\]](#)

Judson's doctrinal and missionary commitments were shared by his colleague, Luther Rice. Originally part of that missionary team which sailed with Judson to India, Rice returned to America in 1813 after being baptized as a believer. His goal in returning was to help raise support for what had become the first Baptist missionaries from this country. His biographer, James B. Taylor, said that Rice "was a decided

believer in the doctrine of divine sovereignty. God was contemplated as working all things after the counsel of his own will."[\[35\]](#)

Rice was not hesitant to declare his views on the sovereignty of God's grace, or as it is commonly known, Calvinism. In a letter to a friend he wrote concerning this doctrine, "This you are aware is not only an item in my creed, but enters into the very ground-work of the hope of immortality and glory, that has become established in my bosom; and constitutes the basis of the submission and joyfulness found in my religious experience." He went on to elaborate,

How absurd it is, therefore, to contend against the doctrine of election, or decrees, or divine sovereignty. Let us not, however, become bitter against those who view this matter in a different light, nor treat them in a supercilious manner; rather let us be gentle towards all men. For who has made us to differ from what we once were? Who has removed the scales from our eyes? Or who has disposed us to embrace the truth?[\[36\]](#)

James Taylor, who became the first Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC, also affirmed these views and noted how easily they are distorted by both their friends and enemies.

The doctrine of divine decrees has often, in various respects, suffered injury. By its enemies, it has been caricatured. Presented in a distorted shape, and arrayed in tattered garments, its true loveliness has been concealed from the eye. All have turned away from the sight with disgust. By some of its avowed friends, also, it has been much abused; its legitimate tendencies, if not misunderstood, have been unfelt.

While the truth that believers are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world has been maintained, they seem to have forgotten the practical design, that they might be holy, and without blame before him in love. What God has joined together they have put asunder. In an eminent degree did the subject of this biography delight to contemplate the harmony of the Scriptures, and their practical influence in promoting the good of men and the glory of God.[\[37\]](#)

To Judson and Rice, the name of William Carey can be added. This "Father of Modern Missions" was, in the words of Timothy George, "like Bunyan before him and Spurgeon after him...an evangelical Calvinist."[\[38\]](#) Carey rejected both Arminianism on the one hand and hyper-Calvinism on the other. In assessing the lessons which Carey's legacy can teach us today as we seek to make Christ known, George puts at the top of the list, "*The sovereignty of God.*"

Carey knew that Christian missions was rooted in the gracious, eternal purpose of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to call unto Himself a redeemed people out of the fallen race of lost humankind. As a young pastor in England he confronted and overcame the resistance of those Hyper-Calvinistic theologians who used the sovereignty of God as a pretext for their do-nothing attitude toward missions. It was not in spite of, but rather because of, his belief in the greatness of God and His divine purpose in election that Carey was willing "to venture all" to proclaim the gospel in the far corners of the world.[\[39\]](#)

This evaluation is supported by the "Serampore Compact" which Carey and his fellow missionaries drew up on October 7, 1805 as a summary of guiding principles for their work. They agreed that three times each year this compact was to be read aloud at each mission station. The first part of that document

declares their understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation.

We are firmly persuaded that Paul might plant and Apollos water, in vain, in any part of the world, did not God give the increase. We are sure that only those ordained to eternal life will believe, and that God alone can add to the church such as shall be saved. Nevertheless we cannot but observe with admiration that Paul, the great champion for the glorious doctrine of free and sovereign grace, was the most conspicuous for his personal zeal in the word of persuading men to be reconciled to God. In this respect he is a noble example for our imitation.[\[40\]](#)

A Calvinistic understanding of God's grace in salvation certainly did not put a drag on William Carey's commitment to evangelism and missions.

If Carey was "Father of Modern Missions" then Andrew Fuller was its grandfather and theologian. His writings, most notably, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, demonstrate the harmony between what he held as "strict Calvinism" (in contrast to the "false Calvinism" of hyper-Calvinists) and the necessity and urgency to preach Christ to all people. He was joined in his views by John Sutcliffe, John Ryland, Jr. and Samuel Pearce. It was from these men, along with Carey--all of whom were Particular Baptists--that the Baptist Missionary Society emerged in England.[\[41\]](#)

What has already been demonstrated of the Charleston and Sandy Creek Associations need not be repeated (though elaboration of the points made would not be difficult), but at least a passing mention should be made of the Georgia Baptist Association. The record of Georgia Baptists from the formation of their first church in 1772 reveals a fervent passion for evangelism and missions. When those churches first formed themselves into an association they did so on the basis of an "abstract of principles and decorum." The following extracts of that document reveal their commitment to the doctrines of grace.

3d. We believe in the fall of Adam, and the imputation of his sin to his posterity. In the corruption of human nature, and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will--ability.

4th. We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race, to grace and glory: And that there was a covenant of grace or redemption made between the Father and the Son, before the world began, in which their salvation is secure, and that they in particular are redeemed.

5th. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God, only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.

6th. We believe that all those who were chosen in Christ, will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported by the spirit and power of God, so that they shall persevere in grace, and not one of them be finally lost.[\[42\]](#)

Some of the most respected church planters and evangelists among 19th century Georgia Baptists were men who were known as "strict predestinarians," fully committed to a Reformed understanding of salvation. Included among them are Silas and Jesse Mercer, Malachi Reeves, Jephtha Vinning and Jabez Pleiades Marshall. Of the latter it was said, "He was strictly a *predestinarian*" and "a thorough going Missionary, and engaged in all the benevolent plans of the day, zealously advocating every scheme

which seemed to be calculated to carry out the commission, and fulfil the commands of Christ."[\[43\]](#)

Examples like these could be multiplied many times over. James Boyce, P.H. Mell, W.B. Johnson, R.B.C. Howell, John L. Dagg, B.H. Carroll, C.D. Mallery, Richard Fuller, Elias and Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Miller, and John Bunyan along with lesser-known men like Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, John Spilsbery, Henry Jesse, Robert Hall, William Mitchell, Ezra Courtney, Spencer Cone and Malcolm McGregor all stand together as a unified Baptist testimony that true Calvinism is a missionary theology. It is beyond comprehension, then, what could possibly give rise to the charge that, "Wherever Calvinism takes a strong root, evangelism begins to suffer and world missions begin to suffer." Regardless of what is meant, surely the challenge ("All you have to do is prove me wrong") has been adequately met by the above references.

Concern to see lost people saved

No doubt some people greatly fear evangelical Calvinism because they are convinced that it harms evangelism. Despite the testimony of history to the contrary, some critics seem to have constructed a definition of Calvinism which includes a lack of evangelistic concern. If their definition were right, then their opposition would be laudable. We should not tolerate any teaching which cuts the nerve of biblical evangelism. The doctrines of grace, rightly understood and applied, have never done that.

What does happen, however, is this: when God's sovereignty in salvation is recovered then man-centered, mechanistic methods of evangelism do fall by the wayside, where they belong. Once an evangelist recognizes that the new birth is a sovereign work of God's grace then he will no longer settle for superficial expressions of "deciding" to become born again. Perhaps it is this misunderstanding which provokes the following expression of concern (again, by a conservative Baptist leader) related to the doctrine of election.

I will not tolerate anything--if I can possibly help it, I will give my every energy to preventing it--that I believe to be harmful to evangelism and world missions. You have to understand that when I wake up at night, which is seldom enough, but if I wake up in the middle of the night it's because 6 billion people on the face this globe are on their way to hell. That disturbs me a great deal. My passion, my whole life, has been given to get lost people to Christ. And, I'm sorry, I do not believe that election, whatever it means, and I do believe in election, whatever it is it means, it does not mean that there are not those people out there, people out there can't come to Christ. I believe they can. I believe it is our obligation to get Christ to them.

Such passion for the lost is something which every Christian should possess. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem and we should be weeping over our cities and communities as well. John Knox--staunch Calvinist that he was--is an example to us all when he prayed in the sixteenth century, "O, Lord! Give me Scotland or I die!"

The passion which fuels this expressed antipathy (if not animosity) towards Reformed theology in general and Founders Ministries in particular is the same which I find burning in my soul and motivating me to work for the recovery of the gospel of God's grace and the biblical reformation of local churches.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I too am haunted by the thoughts of people going to hell. But I find that very often my thoughts move from the faceless, nameless billions to those closer to home in

our own evangelical and Southern Baptist family. Paige Patterson has stated that he believes that 30-40% of the Sunday morning crowd in the typical Southern Baptist church are unconverted.^[44] Despite their membership, baptism, service, gifts and regular attendance, he is convinced that they have never been born again. I think he may be underestimating.

I am burdened for these unregenerate Southern Baptists just as I am for the Central Asian Muslim. Both are lost. Both are on their way to hell. Both need the gospel. Both need to be saved. The difference is this: the Southern Baptist has been told that he is saved! He is on his way to hell with a decision card in his pocket. Who, I ask, is in the worse condition? Who is closer to Jesus' description of being "twice the son of hell" (Matthew 23:15)--the one who has never heard the name of Jesus or the one who has been told that because he raised his hand or prayed a prayer or walked an aisle or performed some similar type of act that he is saved?

Assume that Dr. Patterson is correct in his assessment that 30-40% of Sunday morning Southern Baptists are unconverted (which is not hard to do). Studies indicate that less than 40% of a typical Southern Baptist church's membership will even show up for church on a Sunday morning. Let's be generous and assume that that figure is 50%. This would mean that of the 8 million who are motivated enough to attend on Sunday morning, 2.4-3.2 million of them are strangers to God's salvation. Couple this with the 8 million who rarely, if ever, show up and the picture gets very dark very quickly.

Could it really be true that 10-11 million of our 16 million Southern Baptists are members in good standing in our churches while being unconverted? Sadly, I think the evidence suggests that it is so, which means that millions of those within our Southern Baptist family are on the way to hell with some preacher's soothing words of assurance ringing in their ears! The painful thought of these millions of precious souls being deceived to their eternal damnation causes me to lose sleep.

When I wake up thinking about them in the middle of the night, I ask, "How did this happen? What has gone wrong?" Regardless of how these questions are answered (and I do have some studied opinions), one thing is certain: we did not get into this abysmal condition because of the widespread effects of Calvinism!

It isn't Reformed evangelism that has populated our churches with unconverted people. It isn't the influence of Founders Ministries that has turned most of our churches from sheepfolds into goat barns. This deplorable, lamentable, heart-breaking, soul-destroying situation has emerged under the evangelistic practices of a man-centered perversion of the biblical gospel. It is because of this perversion that Founders Ministries came into existence and, by the grace of God, we are determined to fight against it by working for genuine biblical reformation.

Let any honest evaluator ask this question: "Under whose watch has this disease of unregenerate church members spread?" Everyone must conclude that the blame does not fall on the Calvinists in the convention. Rather, this deplorable condition emerged and spread under the prevailing influence of denominationalism (from the 1930s-1950s), moderatism/liberalism (from the 1960s-1980s), and now conservatism/fundamentalism (from the 1990s-present). One of the sad facts--and it is a fact--of the conservative resurgence is that, with all of the good things that have been accomplished, it has done little if anything to stop the spiritual hemorrhaging caused by shallow evangelism. In fact, it is arguable that this problem is even worse now than ever.^[45]

As I have talked to countless missionaries and traveled overseas I have discovered the widespread

influence which our defective evangelism has had on foreign fields. Only eternity will show the damage which well-intentioned but misguided pastors and short-term volunteers have done to noble missionary efforts around the world. The "eyes-closed, hands-up, say-this-prayer-and-you're-in" style of evangelism results in impressive statistics but leaves international souls no less spiritually damaged than those who have been so treated within our own churches. How much longer must our missionaries be expected to pick up the pieces of shoddy evangelism among the people groups of the world?

Austin Phelps made this astute observation in the nineteenth century: "If I were a missionary in Canton, China, my first prayer every morning would be for the success of American Home Missions, for the sake of Canton, China."[\[46\]](#) What he observed then is no less true now. American churches, with all of our resources and opportunities, have a great stewardship to discharge to the rest of the world. So when Founders Ministries presses for reformation in America and especially among Southern Baptists, it is not out of mere provincial concern. Our vision includes the peoples of the world who will be impacted by the kind of Christianity that we export from this country. Anyone who is content to send overseas an evangelism that results in churches which are, at best, only 30-40% converted, is more hard-hearted than the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

So Founders Ministries has a deep concern for the souls of those who are unconverted. We did not originate simply to win theological debates or make historical arguments. Rather we exist because of the deplorable condition of so many churches today, which we trace in large part to the loss of the gospel itself. It is the recovery of the gospel with a desire to see it work in bringing about sound conversions that motivates us.

Should Heresy Be Tolerated?

Conservative leaders are not the only ones to claim that Calvinism will hurt missions and evangelism. The late William Estep shared this view. Al Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary responded to the late distinguished history professor's accusations in direct language.

Dr. Estep charges that a revival of Calvinism will lead to a lessening of evangelistic commitment and missionary vision. This is a common charge, but it is reckless and without foundation. Indeed, many of the most significant missionary and evangelistic movements in the history of the Church have been led by those who held to the very doctrines Dr. Estep laments....If Calvinism is an enemy to missions and evangelism, it is an enemy to the gospel itself. The Great Commission and the task of evangelism are assigned to every congregation and every believer. The charge that Calvinism is opposed to evangelism will not stick--it is a false argument. The "doctrines of grace" are nothing less than a statement of the gospel itself.[\[47\]](#)

If Calvinism is opposed to missions and evangelism, then it should not be tolerated but should be exposed as heresy and attacked with all of the power and influence which any gospel-loving Christian can muster.

No one who is committed to the authority of God's Word should be willing to equate Calvinism with fatalism while at the same time declaring that it should not become a test of fellowship. Yet, that is precisely what one conservative SBC leader did when speaking on open theism. He said,

Specifically, ... is there a position somewhere between the openness of God thing, that says

that God is shaped more by what we do than by anything else, and He's up there wondering what's going to happen next, and on the other hand the inevitable fatalism which Calvinism can never quite divest itself of--is there anything in between? To which I say, that's why I am a Baptist....

Now, I am going to give you a book to read and every single, solitary one of you ought to read it. This is a book called *Providence and Prayer* that has recently come out and it is written by Terrance Tiessen. And it is the best assessment of this that I have ever seen...He goes all the way from fatalism to Calvinism, I don't know what the difference is, but he tries to make one, and so he goes from fatalism all the way to the other side to the openness doctrine and discusses all of it in there.

If this is genuinely how this brother sees it, then how can he also say Calvinism need not become a matter of fellowship? Is he really advocating fellowship with fatalists? The accusation that Calvinism is fatalism is an old ploy by those who either do not understand the issues or who would rather promote fear than understanding among God's people. The charge has been repeatedly and adequately answered, including by the author of the book which is cited in the above quote. Terrance Tiessen writes, "Calvinism is often charged with fatalism, but the models are distinct." He further notes that the charge is commonly made by "proponents of the models that define human freedom as libertarian [who] often equate Augustinian or compatibilist positions with fatalism." [\[48\]](#)

True Calvinism is not fatalism. Calvinism believes in a personal God who has unmitigated sovereignty. Fatalism believes in impersonal fate. Calvinism celebrates (with the Bible) the purposefulness of life. Fatalism espouses meaninglessness. Calvinism sets hope on the future manifested glory of God. Fatalism looks forward to nothingness.

Perhaps the charge was a slip of the tongue, but if any lover of God's Word genuinely believes that Calvinism is no different from fatalism then he is duty-bound to warn against this historic Baptist position as a damnable heresy. To call it fatalism and then to plead for tolerance and fellowship with those who embrace it is a denial of the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Where Christian brothers agree, let us rejoice in the unity we find in Christ. Where we disagree, let us acknowledge it without equivocation while we try to understand and represent honestly differing points of view. And let us hold our views with humble conviction in hopes of either convincing or being convinced of more accurate understandings of God's Word. Where we see beliefs and practices of our brothers drifting into dangerous tendencies and especially heresies, let us lovingly and firmly sound a warning. The cause of God and truth demand nothing less, and those who are committed to that cause should never be satisfied to offer anything less.

The Calvinist-Arminian debate has a long history. Those of us who are convinced evangelical Calvinists stand where we do not because it is popular or politically expedient or theologically chic. We believe what we believe because we are convinced that this is what the Word of God teaches. We have no reason to doubt that our less Calvinistic brothers and sisters are similarly motivated.

Our desire is not to win a theological debate or historical argument. Rather, we want to see God's law and gospel recovered and reasserted with passion and joy. We want to see Christ's churches renewed in faith

and mission. We want to see the nations made glad through the faithful proclamation of God's saving grace in His Son. We want to see our great, triune God receiving the honor and glory which He deserves through the glad submission of all peoples. In short, we want to see genuine, Holy Spirit-sent revival. And as we pray for this great work which only God can do, we are committed to doing all that we can to prepare the way through rigorously pursuing thorough, biblical reformation in our private lives, homes and churches.

Ours is a day which is brimming with spiritual danger and opportunity. The world is becoming less and less accommodating of the church. Entitlements which we have long taken for granted in America are increasingly being challenged. The remnants of cultural Christianity are fading and opposition to fundamental Christian belief and practice is becoming more common. Increasingly the world's message to the church is this: "We will leave you alone if you will leave us alone and simply keep your religion to yourselves." The temptation to go-along-to-get-along is great and giving in to it is deadly. At the same time, what a great opportunity for churches all across our land to be awakened out of our lethargy and start being radically committed to the Bible's way of living out our faith!

When cultural props are demolished, religious organizations and ministries which are dependent on them fall. As sham Christianity is exposed for what it is, the opportunity for biblical Christianity to move forward will become greater. Light is always more noticeable when the night is darkest. When the Church begins to realize that the world more than the Word has been setting our agenda, then we will begin to see the need for repentance and renewed faith. And when we are convinced that our bloated statistics are a lie, our positive press reports mean nothing to God, our methodologies cannot give life and that we are completely dependent on the sovereign grace of our God for all that we have or ever hope to have, then, maybe then, we will be willing to turn to Him in desperation, crying to Him for power and grace.

If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, and if that gospel has been distorted and even lost in many places, then for the sake of our Lord's honor and of never-dying souls, those whose eyes have been opened by God to see these things must be willing to spend and be spent in the work of recovering His gospel and making it known throughout the earth. May our Lord raise up a generation of Great-hearts who are willing to die for this cause!



"The exchange of one set of Bureaucrats for another doth not a reformation make."

Dr. Timothy George

Notes:

¹ See, for example, Fisher Humphreys and Paul E. Robertson, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 2000).

² The most obvious example of polemical engagement on our part can be found in the articles of the 29th issue of the *Founders Journal* (Summer 1997). In that issue the published charge that the doctrines of God's grace lead to a "dunghill" was pointedly refuted.

³ "When the Devil Aimed at Baptists," *SBC Life* (September 1997), 11.

⁴ This and other quotes are taken from a transcript of recorded comments.

⁵ *A Treatise on Church Order*, reprint ed. (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 301.

⁶ The Abstract of Principles remains the doctrinal covenant of Southern Seminary today. It also functions in that role for the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Professors of both schools sign the Abstract and promise to teach in accordance with and not contrary to its contents.

⁷ "Raison d' être: An Editorial Introduction," *Founders Journal* 1 (Spring 1990), 2. The terms "Calvinism" and "Calvinists" should not cloud the issues at stake. Never has Founders Ministries suggested that everything which John Calvin taught ought to be believed. The terms are theological shorthand. They become problematic when they are loaded with meaning far beyond that which is commonly recognized in the history of doctrinal discussion. Regardless of the terms used (and I much prefer "Reformed Baptist" or "Historic Southern Baptist"), what is being asserted is the belief that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation. For elaboration of this see my "An Attempt at Self-Identification," *Founders Journal* 8 (Spring 1992), 1-4.

⁸ Timothy and Denise George, general editors, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 11. George goes on to note the prominent influence which this confession had on early Southern Baptist theological education: "When James P. Boyce was considering a suitable confessional standard for Southern Baptists' first seminary, he originally planned to use the Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith as the doctrinal basis for this new institution. When he became convinced that a briefer, more succinct summary of doctrine would be more useful for this purpose, he commissioned Basil Manly, Jr., to draft an Abstract of Principles based on the Philadelphia/Charleston standard" (Ibid).

⁹ This fact was one of the rallying points of conservatives during the inerrancy controversy in the SBC. In 1985, Paul Pressler argued that Southern Baptists do not need more creeds or confessions but "more integrity" by those who sign them (taken from James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention* [Dallas: Criterion Publications, 1986], 29). To compare early Southern Baptists' attitudes on doctrinal integrity and the importance of adopting and faithfully adhering to a statement of faith, see James P. Boyce's "Three Changes in Theological Institutions" in *James Petigru Boyce, Selected Writings*, ed. Timothy George (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 30-59.

¹⁰ Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What it Means to Us All* (New York: McCracken Press, 1994), 85. Shurden's views of Southern Baptist origins are found in "The 1980-81 Carver-Barnes Lectures" (Wake Forest: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980).

¹¹ Cited in Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Jr., *Adventure in Faith, the First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 156.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ Ibid., 232.

¹⁴ Ibid., 221-22.

¹⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶ In *The Diary of Isaac Backus* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), 3:1246.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3:1248. McLoughlin's assessment agrees with Jesse Mercer's. The latter sees the distinctions between Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists as revolving around "externals" and notes that Daniel Marshall specifically and "the Separates generally, became incorporated with the regular, Calvinistic Baptists, in these States and Great Britain" in *History of the Georgia Baptist Association, Compiled at the Request of that Body* (Washington, 1838), 16, 369.

¹⁸ Thomas Ascol, *From the Protestant Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁹ George Washington Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh: The General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930), 1:401.

²⁰ George W. Purefoy, *A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, from its Organization in A.D. 1758, to A.D. 1858* (New York: Arno Press, 1980 reprint ed.), 104-5.

²¹ Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of Isaac Backus*, (1858; Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1991), 356; quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*; (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 181-82.

²² See *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 162-175.

²³ Chapter 5, entitled, "Grace and the Great Commission" in *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative, Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2000), 83-107.

²⁴ For documentation and elaboration of this, see the excellent article by Ray Van Neste, "John Calvin on Evangelism and Missions," *Founders Journal* 33 (Summer 1998), 15-21.

²⁵ Cited in Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft: W.D. Meinema, 1965), 148.

²⁶ Rooy's work gives ample supporting evidence, as does J.I. Packer, in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 291-308.

²⁷ Cited in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield, The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 407.

²⁸ See Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, a New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987) and John Thornbury, *David Brainerd, Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1996).

²⁹ R. Strang Miller, "William C. Burns," in *Five Pioneer Missionaries* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 168.

³⁰ The book is *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). Ridgecrest is a Southern Baptist campground in North Carolina.

³¹ Quoted in Arabella Stuart, *The Three Mrs. Judsons* (Springfield, IL: Particular Baptist Press, 1999), 7-8.

³² Francis Wayland, ed. *Memoir of the Life and Labor of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co., 1835), 2:490.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2:469.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:519.

³⁵ *Memoir of Rev. Luther Rice, One of the First American Missionaries to the East* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1841), 288.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289, 293-94. See also, James B. Taylor, "Luther Rice on God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility," *Founders Journal* 9 (Summer 1992), 10-16.

³⁷ *Memoir*, 292.

³⁸ *Faithful Witness, the Life and Witness of William Carey* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991), 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁰ This document is available from Christian History Institute, Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490.

⁴¹ For a good, brief treatment of Fuller's Calvinism see Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 108-30.

⁴² Mercer, *Georgia Baptist Association*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 415; cf. 380-81, 385-91.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Paige Patterson," *Founders Journal* (Fall 2000), 17.

⁴⁵ Jack Smith, "a soul winning evangelism associate" with the North American Mission Board, said in 1999 that his observations of Southern Baptist churches reveal an abysmal record of retention among their "converts." "Smith said he has found in his informal straw polls that only about 30 percent of baptized believers typically are active in Sunday school a year later. When actual retention rates of new Christians are considered from the time of their decision, the percentage often drops to the single digits" (James Dotson, "Neonatal intensive care critical to spiritual health of newborn Christians," July 2, 1999 Baptist Press report). See also the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) report entitled *A Large Convention of Small Churches: Analysis of the Distributions of Southern Baptist Churches* by Phillip B. Jones, released in 1996 and my "Troubling Waters of Baptism" in *Founders Journal* 22 (Fall 1995), 1-3, in which another HMB research report is cited. That one discovered that only 40.5% of the adults who were recently baptized in SBC said they were doing so because they had been converted. Furthermore, the 840 churches who participated in the study admitted to losing complete contact with more than one-third of those they baptized within one year's time. Even Paige Patterson seems ready to admit that three out of every four converts of his "less Reformed" friends could be "dismissed ... as being not genuine." See his "Shootout at the Amen Corral: Being Baptist Through Controversy" in Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, eds. *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: Broadman

and Holman Publishers, 2001), 70.

⁴⁶ Victor I. Masters, *Call of the South* (Atlanta, 1920), 217.

⁴⁷ Albert Mohler, Jr. "The Reformation of Doctrine and the Renewal of the Church: A Response to Dr. William R. Estep," *Founders Journal* 29 (Summer 1997), 12.

⁴⁸ *Providence and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 271.



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Justification by Faith Alone & Confessional Confusion

Douglas R. Shivers

By the tender age of eleven my world had begun to look "fuzzy." This "fuzziness" did not seem to have any great affect on my schoolwork, nor had I noticed a diminishing of my quality of life. I was perfectly content with my view of the world--perfectly content until that incredible day when I put on eyeglasses and my vision of the world was corrected. What an astonishing experience, that correction! Suddenly, trees had leaves! Birds had feathers! There were ants on the ground! And there was no turning back. Now that I had the standard of correct vision, "fuzziness" was never again an option.

Today, there is a terrible "fuzziness" afflicting Southern Baptist theology. The central doctrine of salvation has become blurred. It takes no more than a few seconds to gather armloads of first proofs for this assertion: just ask a few believers to define the central doctrine of salvation. Doctrinal vision is so blurred that entire congregations can not clearly read the banner words at the top of salvation's vision chart: JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE. I have had lifelong Southern Baptists tell me they have never heard of justification. At a recent assembly of Southern Baptist leadership, a soloist gave brief testimony about his hope for heaven: "I hope that if I work hard enough and I'm good enough, one day I'll go to heaven and see Momma." As shocked as I was by what he said, I was even more stunned by the number of "amens" that rumbled through the congregation. When Southern Baptists can endorse a man's hope for salvation by works, biblical ignorance has won the day. This is a *critical* ignorance. Without some understanding of justification there is no salvation and there is no true assurance for those who are saved.

One reason for this lack of understanding in the pew (and the pulpit) is the absence of a clearly articulated view of justification in our confession of faith, *The Baptist Faith and Message*. When compared with previous confessions, the current statement is rather anemic:

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.[\[1\]](#)

This appears in the article "Salvation" which divides the subject of salvation into three parts: "Regeneration," "Sanctification" and "Glorification." The statement on justification is found in the section "Regeneration." It doesn't even make the bold print. In earlier confessions, the doctrine of justification was given a full paragraph and a separate heading. Since 1963 it has been diminished to two sentences and is considered a subset of regeneration. This minimizing of justification is dangerous. It is also a betrayal of our previous confessional history. Consider the following excerpts,

The Baptist Faith and Message, 1925:

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of righteousness of all sinners who believe in Christ. The blessing is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but through the redemption that is in and through Jesus Christ. It brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures

every other needed blessing.[\[2\]](#)

The New Hampshire Confession, 1833:

[We believe] That the great Gospel blessing which Christ of his fulness bestows on such as believe in Him, is Justification; that Justification consists in the pardon of sin and the promise of eternal life, on principles of righteousness; that it is bestowed not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through His own redemption and righteousness, [by virtue of which faith his perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us of God;] that it brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures every other blessing needful for time and eternity.[\[3\]](#)

The Second London Confession, 1689:

Those whom God Effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing Righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting, and accepting their Persons as Righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone, not by imputing faith it self, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their Righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death, for their whole and sole Righteousness, they receiving, and resting on him, and his Righteousness, by Faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.[\[4\]](#)

The London Confession, 1644:

That those which have union with Christ, are justified from all their sinnes, past, present, and to come, by the blood of Christ; which justification wee conceive to be a gracious and free acquittance of a guiltie, sinfull creature, from all sin by God, through the satisfaction that Christ hath made by his death; and this applyed in the manifestation of it through faith.[\[5\]](#)

In these confessions, justification isn't backstage. It's front and center. Each confession clearly states: (1) Christ's sinless life and atoning death are the *only* basis for justification, (2) Regeneration is *not* accomplished by the sinner, but is a monergistic act *by God*, and (3) Faith is the *gift* of God, not a work by the sinner. The 1963 confession is not so clear. In fact, when Hobbs explains this part of the confession in his commentary he comes up with a novel interpretation of justification as it relates to the justice of God.

But they [the commandments] must be kept perfectly. Failure in one law made one as guilty as though he had failed in all. No man does as good as he knows. So no man keeps God's law perfectly, whether it be the written law or that in pagan hearts. Someone may object that God is unjust in making such a demand. The perfect life of Jesus speaks to the contrary. He proved God "just" in his demand for perfect righteousness. Having done so, God in Christ became the "justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). This he did by paying the price for each person's sin in his atoning death, that through faith in him we might receive the righteousness of God which is in his Son.[\[6\]](#)

In Romans 3, Paul is not trying to defend God; he is not trying to prove that God was just in demanding perfect righteousness. The debate is not about whether or not God was reasonable. The declaration is about the extraordinary means by which a God of perfect righteousness can justify *unjust* sinners and still

remain "just."

Lack of clarity on justification is further evidenced by a confused chronology in salvation: "Regeneration is the result of conviction of sin, repentance from sin, faith in Jesus Christ, and the confession of that faith."[\[7\]](#) Therefore, we conclude regeneration is within the power of the sinner. When the sinner comes under conviction, repents and believes, he is regenerated. In fact, one must repent to an appropriate degree before regeneration takes place: "Thus one abhors sin not only because of what it does to one's self but to God. This is true repentance *necessary for regeneration*."[\[8\]](#) The sad truth is the entire article smacks of a view of salvation based on "infused" rather than "imputed" righteousness, a view which gives great abilities to the sinner which are prior to any supernatural work by God. The confession is a monument to the success of Charles Finney's views of salvation.[\[9\]](#)

This doctrinal nearsightedness (encouraging focus on self rather than Christ) not only blurs regeneration in salvation, it also puts assurance on unsteady ground. There is the tendency today to look for Christ "inside" as the basis for assurance and acceptance with God. This is the "infused" view of grace. It is reflected in the language addressed to evangelistic prospects, "Let Jesus come into your heart" or "Invite Jesus into your heart." This is actually a confusing thing to say to sinners. Spurgeon noted a similar tendency in his day:

Justification by faith must never be obscured, and yet all are not clear upon it... Many do this when addressing children, and I notice that they generally speak to the little ones about loving Jesus, and not upon believing in him. This must leave a mischievous impression upon youthful minds and take them off from the true way of peace.[\[10\]](#)

A myopic inward look can never result in true assurance. Scripture does not direct us inward but outward. Though regeneration is a reality, the basis for our acceptance with God is not our inner change. The inner change is not complete; it is a mixed work. Yes, the principle of righteousness has been implanted. The believer is a new creature, but not a perfected creature. The perfection which God requires is not found by looking inward at my sanctification but rather outward to the Lord Jesus Christ as my perfect righteousness.

Is it important, then, to have clarity on the doctrine of justification in our confessions? It may be legitimate to ask, "In these times of theological illiteracy, who even reads our confession?" I grant that not many folks read anything worthwhile, much less confessions. I contend, however, that in theological education, we do look at confessions, and that the current expression of Southern Baptists is woefully inadequate and actually confusing. I contend that this confusion is tragic, for it leads sinners astray and it destroys the true basis for assurance in believers. When preachers cannot distinguish and articulate these truths, and then cannot find help to do so in a sound confession, the task is made much more difficult. Recovery of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone ought to be our priority. We need to heed the words of the great pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle,

I am afraid we say a great deal at times which rather lumbers and cumpers the gospel than makes it clear...I mean to let it stand out simply before you, that the incarnation, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ are the one foundation upon which we must depend for eternal salvation, and upon that alone; and if we do so depend we shall most assuredly be saved.[\[11\]](#)

When I was eleven years old, the world was not fuzzy. I was the one with the problem. Likewise,

justification is just as it has always been...the glorious proclamation and provision of God. The modern church is the one with the problem. We should use every means possible, including our confessions, to correct distortions and restore the unmistakable declarations that loose us from the confusion of ignorance. The clear vision of justification springing forth in the minds and hearts of sinners and believers is a glorious revelation. And fuzzy is never again an option.

Notes

¹ Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971, revised, 1996), p. 48.

² H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), p. 509.

³ "The New Hampshire Confession" in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959), p. 363.

⁴ "Justification," Chapter XI, paragraph 1, "Second London Confession, 1689, cited in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959), pp. 265-266.

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Justification by Faith Alone & Confessional Confusion

Douglas R. Shivers

By the tender age of eleven my world had begun to look "fuzzy." This "fuzziness" did not seem to have any great affect on my schoolwork, nor had I noticed a diminishing of my quality of life. I was perfectly content with my view of the world--perfectly content until that incredible day when I put on eyeglasses and my vision of the world was corrected. What an astonishing experience, that correction! Suddenly, trees had leaves! Birds had feathers! There were ants on the ground! And there was no turning back. Now that I had the standard of correct vision, "fuzziness" was never again an option.

Today, there is a terrible "fuzziness" afflicting Southern Baptist theology. The central doctrine of salvation has become blurred. It takes no more than a few seconds to gather armloads of first proofs for this assertion: just ask a few believers to define the central doctrine of salvation. Doctrinal vision is so blurred that entire congregations can not clearly read the banner words at the top of salvation's vision chart: JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE. I have had lifelong Southern Baptists tell me they have never heard of justification. At a recent assembly of Southern Baptist leadership, a soloist gave brief testimony about his hope for heaven: "I hope that if I work hard enough and I'm good enough, one day I'll go to heaven and see Momma." As shocked as I was by what he said, I was even more stunned by the number of "amens" that rumbled through the congregation. When Southern Baptists can endorse a man's hope for salvation by works, biblical ignorance has won the day. This is a *critical* ignorance. Without some understanding of justification there is no salvation and there is no true assurance for those who are saved.

One reason for this lack of understanding in the pew (and the pulpit) is the absence of a clearly articulated view of justification in our confession of faith, *The Baptist Faith and Message*. When compared with previous confessions, the current statement is rather anemic:

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This appears in the article "Salvation" which divides the subject of salvation into three parts: "Regeneration," "Sanctification" and "Glorification." The statement on justification is found in the section "Regeneration." It doesn't even make the bold print. In earlier confessions, the doctrine of justification was given a full paragraph and a separate heading. Since 1963 it has been diminished to two sentences and is considered a subset of regeneration. This minimizing of justification is dangerous. It is also a betrayal of our previous confessional history. Consider the following excerpts,

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every other needed blessing.[\[2\]](#)

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[We believe] That the great Gospel blessing which Christ of his fulness bestows on such as believe in Him, is Justification; that Justification consists in the pardon of sin and the promise of eternal life, on principles of righteousness; that it is bestowed not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through His own redemption and righteousness, [by virtue of which faith his perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us of God;] that it brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures every other blessing needful for time and eternity.[\[3\]](#)

The Second London Confession, 1689:

Those whom God Effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing Righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting, and accepting their Persons as Righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone, not by imputing faith it self, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their Righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death, for their whole and sole Righteousness, they receiving, and resting on him, and his Righteousness, by Faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.[\[4\]](#)

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That those which have union with Christ, are justified from all their sinnes, past, present, and to come, by the blood of Christ; which justification wee conceive to be a gracious and free acquittance of a guiltie, sinfull creature, from all sin by God, through the satisfaction that Christ hath made by his death; and this applyed in the manifestation of it through faith.[\[5\]](#)

In these confessions, justification isn't backstage. It's front and center. Each confession clearly states: (1) Christ's sinless life and atoning death are the *only* basis for justification, (2) Regeneration is *not* accomplished by the sinner, but is a monergistic act *by God*, and (3) Faith is the *gift* of God, not a work by the sinner. The 1963 confession is not so clear. In fact, when Hobbs explains this part of the confession in his commentary he comes up with a novel interpretation of justification as it relates to the justice of God.

But they [the commandments] must be kept perfectly. Failure in one law made one as guilty as though he had failed in all. No man does as good as he knows. So no man keeps God's law perfectly, whether it be the written law or that in pagan hearts. Someone may object that God is unjust in making such a demand. The perfect life of Jesus speaks to the contrary. He proved God "just" in his demand for perfect righteousness. Having done so, God in Christ became the "justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). This he did by paying the price for each person's sin in his atoning death, that through faith in him we might receive the righteousness of God which is in his Son.[\[6\]](#)

In Romans 3, Paul is not trying to defend God; he is not trying to prove that God was just in demanding perfect righteousness. The debate is not about whether or not God was reasonable. The declaration is about the extraordinary means by which a God of perfect righteousness can justify *unjust* sinners and still

remain "just."

Lack of clarity on justification is further evidenced by a confused chronology in salvation: "Regeneration is the result of conviction of sin, repentance from sin, faith in Jesus Christ, and the confession of that faith."^[7] Therefore, we conclude regeneration is within the power of the sinner. When the sinner comes under conviction, repents and believes, he is regenerated. In fact, one must repent to an appropriate degree before regeneration takes place: "Thus one abhors sin not only because of what it does to one's self but to God. This is true repentance *necessary for regeneration*."^[8] The sad truth is the entire article smacks of a view of salvation based on "infused" rather than "imputed" righteousness, a view which gives great abilities to the sinner which are prior to any supernatural work by God. The confession is a monument to the success of Charles Finney's views of salvation.^[9]

This doctrinal nearsightedness (encouraging focus on self rather than Christ) not only blurs regeneration in salvation, it also puts assurance on unsteady ground. There is the tendency today to look for Christ "inside" as the basis for assurance and acceptance with God. This is the "infused" view of grace. It is reflected in the language addressed to evangelistic prospects, "Let Jesus come into your heart" or "Invite Jesus into your heart." This is actually a confusing thing to say to sinners. Spurgeon noted a similar tendency in his day:

Justification by faith must never be obscured, and yet all are not clear upon it... Many do this when addressing children, and I notice that they generally speak to the little ones about loving Jesus, and not upon believing in him. This must leave a mischievous impression upon youthful minds and take them off from the true way of peace.^[10]

A myopic inward look can never result in true assurance. Scripture does not direct us inward but outward. Though regeneration is a reality, the basis for our acceptance with God is not our inner change. The inner change is not complete; it is a mixed work. Yes, the principle of righteousness has been implanted. The believer is a new creature, but not a perfected creature. The perfection which God requires is not found by looking inward at my sanctification but rather outward to the Lord Jesus Christ as my perfect righteousness.

Is it important, then, to have clarity on the doctrine of justification in our confessions? It may be legitimate to ask, "In these times of theological illiteracy, who even reads our confession?" I grant that not many folks read anything worthwhile, much less confessions. I contend, however, that in theological education, we do look at confessions, and that the current expression of Southern Baptists is woefully inadequate and actually confusing. I contend that this confusion is tragic, for it leads sinners astray and it destroys the true basis for assurance in believers. When preachers cannot distinguish and articulate these truths, and then cannot find help to do so in a sound confession, the task is made much more difficult. Recovery of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone ought to be our priority. We need to heed the words of the great pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle,

I am afraid we say a great deal at times which rather lumbers and cumpers the gospel than makes it clear...I mean to let it stand out simply before you, that the incarnation, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ are the one foundation upon which we must depend for eternal salvation, and upon that alone; and if we do so depend we shall most assuredly be saved.^[11]

When I was eleven years old, the world was not fuzzy. I was the one with the problem. Likewise,

justification is just as it has always been...the glorious proclamation and provision of God. The modern church is the one with the problem. We should use every means possible, including our confessions, to correct distortions and restore the unmistakable declarations that loose us from the confusion of ignorance. The clear vision of justification springing forth in the minds and hearts of sinners and believers is a glorious revelation. And fuzzy is never again an option.

Notes

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Sovereign God

This anthem was recorded by the Faithful Men of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on the CD,
TrustinGod.

Take me, a fallen one of Adam's race.
There is no claim I have upon His grace.
I could almost feel the eternal rod,
Were it not for the mercy of our Sovereign God.

Unclouded vision of eternity,
His complete salvation still a mystery.
Pruner of all men, potter of all sod,
We must trust the omniscience of our Sovereign God.

Lord, let the price you paid, price you paid on Calvary
Be my atonement for iniquity.
Now to some the shake, now to some the nod,
It is all in the pleasure of our Sovereign God.

If birds were free to fly, free to fly on broken wing,
Could man then come unbidden to the King?
Could he e'er resist, would he ne'er respond
Once the call comes a ringing from our Sovereign God?

Proud children bearing witness to the Son,
Safe to the finish when the race is run.
Stand before the King where the saints forever trod,
Perseverance eternal in our sovereign God.

Chorus:
Sovereign God. Sovereign God.
There is great salvation in the saving blood.
Through the Son of Man and the Spirit's prod,
Grace abides in the presence of our Sovereign, Sovereign God.

Bridge:
Man's sinful heart could never understand.
Salvation's plan is not at our command.

*But when the Spirit comes to you and me,
We can humbly choose the cross of Calvary.*

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Book Reviews

Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life. Mark E. Dever, Ed. Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001. 586pp hardback, 3 indices [Person, Subject, Scripture]

Reviewed by [Thomas J. Nettles](#)

Recovery of a doctrine of biblical truthfulness gives hope that the Lord may visit us with a revival of loving submission to biblical authority. In such a revival, individuals would pursue mortification of sin by purging "every stain of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). They would find joy in renewed prayerfulness, a disciplined commitment to personal Bible study, intentional gospel witness to friends, family and neighbors, and in the fellowship of the church. Churches would express this in a renewed seriousness about the Bible's construction of church life. The nature of church membership, the selection and character of church officers, the proper execution of church discipline, and the warranted content of church worship each have their own war zones in contemporary church life. A deep-flowing stream of pragmatism has eroded its way into Baptist life from the mid-twentieth century to the present. A true renewal of biblical authority, however, should dam the stream and investigate its tributaries. Spiritually sane observations will cause us to forego our penchant for unexamined success and subdue our exuberance about rising statistics for the sake of a biblically informed, doctrinally sound commitment to the purity of the "household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

Who will help us learn to read the Bible again on these important issues? Our Baptist forefathers worked carefully to define church life in accordance with a "thus saith the Lord." They had suffered under the repression of those who added human tradition to the clear teaching of Scripture. State-churchism, infant baptism, hierarchical ecclesiasticism, undisciplined congregations, and elitism had conspired to render churches around them only faintly reminiscent of the New Testament church. Building an ecclesiology from the ground up using Scripture alone turned into a great scandal, particularly when it involved rejecting infant baptism. They were determined, however, against all contrary powers to establish churches by God's instructions. Some of their most potent, well-reasoned, fire-tempered treatments of biblical ecclesiology they put in print for the sake of sister churches and to explain themselves to their antagonists. These same documents can help us read Scripture on the church with a freshness we have not experienced in a few decades.

The good news about this, is that many of the most important of these "biblical arguments on how to conduct church life" (the subtitle of this book) are now available in one place--our book under review, *Polity*. Mark Dever and the Center for Church Reform have done for us what we need. Documents from 1697 to 1874, ten in all, are in this one book. Among the documents are some shorter treatises and some entire books. The shortest, *A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church* by Benjamin Griffith of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, covers 17 pages of text. The longest, *Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christ* by J. L. Reynolds, includes 107 pages of text.

Three introductory treatises provide an invigorating and informative perspective from which to view the primary documents. The editor, Mark Dever, gives pastoral admonition based on 1 Timothy 3:1 in "The Noble Task: The Pastor as Preacher and Practitioner of the Marks of the Church." Dever gives an

analysis of Baptists in the nineteenth century using the eyes of English Baptists F. A. Cox and J. Hoby. After establishing the Reformation context of pastoral theology, he provides a helpful synopsis of theologically driven changes in preaching, and a challenging analysis of administering the ordinances in the context of a disciplined congregation. Greg Wills discusses 18th and 19th century Baptist views of the authority and spiritual equality of the congregation, church membership, baptism, the Lord's supper, church discipline, confessions of faith (5 pages worth), and church officers. The reader will find these summaries helpful as a virtual abstract of Baptist ecclesiology. Wills then provides brief biographical treatments and synopses pertinent to each document included. Wills also includes a helpful survey of points in which some disagreement between the documents exists on certain points.

For the third introductory essay, entitled *Church Discipline: The Missing Mark*, from R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Polity* republishes an article that appeared in *The Compromised Church*, edited by John Armstrong and published by Crossway books in 1998. Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, contends that "without a recovery of functional church discipline--firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible--the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism" (43). Mohler carefully integrates contemporary cultural analysis as it relates to the church's witness, historical precedent, and biblical and theological commentary. After giving a distressing picture of the growth of permissiveness in our culture and its coincidence with the failure of nerve on the part of churches to practice discipline, he established the biblical principles of holiness for God's people and the biblical warrant for church discipline. Then follow discussions of the biblical pattern of discipline and the power of the keys given to the church. Moving from principle to precise cases of application, Mohler pinpoints three areas Scripture warrants as worthy of church action: fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. His discussion of the pattern, built on Matthew 18, could be expanded and nuanced slightly. Mohler does not make the distinction between public offenses and private offenses (including personal offenses) that are sometimes made in manuals on discipline. Some discipline issues involve such flagrant and notorious offenses that private confrontation is a moot point (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5).

The largest section of the book includes the ten manuals on discipline and church order. Authors of the "Historical Reprints" are Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Griffith, the Charleston Association, Samuel Jones (that makes three straight that come from the Charleston Association), W. B. Johnson, Joseph S. Baker, J. L. Reynolds, P. H. Mell, Eleazer Savage, and William Williams. A fair summary of the subject matter involved is impossible. Large areas predictably overlap in discussions of the basic form of the church, its officers, its ordinances, its composition and the means by which its purity should be maintained. The affirmation one receives on the clarity of Scripture on these points and the astringent conviction of biblical authority in all these matters provides a healthy purgative for ecclesiastical bowels bloated by feverish capitulation to cleverly-devised but fleshly-generated programs. Just as striking and cleansing, however, are the individual words of wisdom that sparkle from the experience and unique gifts of each writer. Joseph S. Baker's exposition on how to get at the bottom of rumors (270-2) could provide a truly wonderful remedy for a plague on many church fellowships. Enlightening discussions of elders, deacons (W. B. Johnson thinks that having deacons serve the Lord's Supper is an offense to the real character of their office), receiving members, dismissing members, associations, preaching, and a surprising array of other elements of life in the local church appear in every document.

I sincerely recommend that each pastor purchase several copies of this book and immediately create a study group in the church to go through the entire volume in a comparative/synthetic manner. The goal should be that the entire membership will study the book in a two year period by creating from the initial

group study leaders for other groups that will meet simultaneously. From this a consensus will emerge that will institute means for church reformation. The preface expressed the hope that "The volume is to be a treasury for researchers and for pastors, for professors and for church leaders" (ix). It is that and more.

Through the courtesy of the Center for Church Reform, [Polity](#) is in the Founders Ministries online library.



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Letters

Beloved Brother, Berean and Editor:

The latest issue of FOUNDERS JOURNAL arrived today and I had to read it all before putting it down. As always, it is like "cold waters to a thirsty soul" and "good news from a far country" (Proverb 25:25). I salute you and all who contribute articles to this little magazine! It is becoming increasingly more important in spreading the truth of our sovereign God and encouraging men and women who believe in the grand doctrines of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." Every issue is deeply appreciated!

Regarding the Fall 2000 issue (number 42) I want to record two personal observations and the problems they present to me and others with whom I have had conversation:

First, I am perplexed that Mark Dever and his associate did not press Paige Patterson to explain why he has been so clamorously caustic in his criticism of Bible believers who are sometimes called "Calvinists." Time after time, over and over again, this former president of our SBC (along with Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines and other denominational leaders) has belligerently and vociferously castigated "Calvinism" and the interview would have been an excellent opportunity to learn if he does this from ignorance or maliciousness, or perhaps a combination of both. Why I wonder was this issue avoided in the interview? Then perhaps it was part of the interesting interview but the editor decided not to print it. If that were the case, why was it not included? Why?

Secondly, I question either the courage of the writer or the wisdom of the editor (or perhaps a combination of both on the part of both) in "for security reasons" allowing the author of the excellent article on "The Glory of God: Our Supreme Passion" to remain "anonymous." WHY was this considered a necessity? "For security reasons, the author must remain anonymous." WHY? WHY must any writer of truth remain unidentified? This is a great mystery to me!

While I do not expect my letter of constructive criticism and sincere inquiry to be printed in the FOUNDERS JOURNAL, I am not afraid of having my name attached if it is used! I prefer to call myself **A BIBLE-BELIEVING BAPTIST CHRISTIAN WHO STRONGLY PROCLAIMS SOME (BUT NOT ALL) OF THE THINGS CALVIN BELIEVED AND TAUGHT.** With that clarification, if people want to call me a Calvinist, so be it! Some have placed that brand on me for 48 years!

Who but a "closet Calvinist" would be fearful of signing such an outstanding article as the one written by the "anonymous" individual and printed on pages 21-22 of the magazine? The article by "anonymous" is a splendid statement and one that any courageous Bible believer would gladly sign unless he or she is afraid of persecution in some form. But I firmly believe that mistreatment or persecution in some form goes with standing for truth! How do you and the unknown author of this superb article interpret such Scriptures as Matthew 5:10-12, John 15:18-20, and II Timothy 3:12?

In Christian love,

Charles Wayne Rosson
Lowell, AR

Response to Charles Rosson:

Thank you for your letter and kind, encouraging words. Your support of the *Founders Journal* is greatly appreciated. The interview with Paige Patterson did address issues of Calvinism, though not in the accusatory way which you suggested. The discussion at this point was brief and not very probing. In the interest of space and relevance, I chose to include segments that demonstrate Patterson shares some common concerns with many *FJ* readers.

Regarding the article on the glory of God, you are certainly free to question both the courage of the author and the editor's wisdom but I can assure you that you have an easier case with the latter than the former. The author has planted churches in some of the most dangerous countries of the world for Christians. He presently oversees missionaries in several such countries. It is easy for those of us living comfortable, middle-class lives in America to challenge the courage of such a man but, quite honestly, it rings hollow.

I can assure you that the author is not afraid of persecution and has faced it up close. I have wept with him in prayer for one of the elders of a church he planted who was given an almost-certain death sentence because of his faith. There is a great difference between wearing the label of "Calvinist" as some kind of badge of "persecution" in the USA and looking down the barrel of an AK-47 in the hands of a fundamentalist Muslim who believes you have blasphemed Allah.

The verses cited, like countless others you could have cited, teach us that persecution is to be expected and even celebrated in the life of faith. They do not teach, however, that a Christian should forget discretion and wisdom when his actions and comments can bring hundreds of lives into harm's way. If the author is linked publicly to his comments in the article and to the hundreds of missionaries and indigenous Christians in countries that are hostile to the Gospel, he could unnecessarily jeopardize their work.

A similar kind of prudence was demonstrated by our Lord when the Jews became angry at Him over His teaching: "Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59). Surely, this is not a lack of courage. Furthermore, Paul, who penned 2 Timothy 3:12, escaped over the city wall of Damascus at night because his persecutors wanted to kill him (Acts 9:23-25). Should we accuse him of being afraid of persecution?

One final verse will suffice. Moses' parents are commended for hiding him when he was born and, against Pharaoh's decree, allowed to live. In fact, their action is specifically said to arise out of faith and not fear: "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command" (Hebrews 11:23). They hid him thereby intentionally avoiding persecution, and their actions were motivated by faith, not fear.

Given these examples and teachings, surely we should give the benefit of the doubt to our brother before questioning his motives for remaining anonymous.

Editor



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News

Southern Baptist Founders Conference Southwest

Heritage Baptist Church of Mansfield, TX (Fort Worth area) will host the conference September 27-29, 2001. The theme this year is "The Law and the Gospel" with our keynote speaker being Dr. Tom Ascol. In addition, several other men will speak on such topics as: "Law, Gospel, and Baptists: Contemporary Concerns," "Unity of the Covenants," "Christ's Teaching of the Law," "Justification," "The Law, the Spirit, and Sanctification," "The Sabbath," and "The Ten Commandments: Its Bounty." We will include a Q&A on the topic plus make available books pertinent to our subject. For further information and a brochure, contact Heritage Baptist Church at 201 E. Broad Street, Mansfield, TX 76063. E-mail: heritagebaptist@birch.net. Phone: 817-453-5580.

Subscription Price to Increase

Significant postage hikes imposed by the United States Postal Service over the last year will necessitate an increase in the Founders Journal yearly subscription rate. This is only the second increase in our more than 10 years of publication. Beginning January 1, 2002, the domestic subscription cost will be increased to \$15.00 per year and \$20.00 per year for foreign subscriptions.



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