



# Why Work for Reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention?

Issue 48

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# The Founders Journal



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# Why Work for Reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention?

[Tom Ascol](#)

Pastors and church members who are committed to historic Southern Baptist principles regularly find themselves confronted with the question, "Why stay in the SBC?" After all, when many denominational leaders have made it very clear that you and your theological convictions are suspect at best and unwanted at worst, why put up with the headaches and animosity that often accompany SBC affiliation? Wouldn't it be easier and even better to disassociate oneself from a convention of churches that has deviated so far from its doctrinal roots? Isn't staying in the SBC compromise--making truth secondary to denominational loyalty?

These questions cannot be answered simplistically. Good men will no doubt disagree on the value/wisdom/legitimacy of working for reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention. Ultimately, every person and every congregation must seek to address this issue individually before God. No one can dictate to another what course to chart and we should be willing to grant those who disagree with us the same right that we request for ourselves, namely, to be true to one's conscience. With that consideration clearly before us, I am convinced that there are several good reasons for those who believe the doctrines of grace to stay in the Southern Baptist Convention.

One consideration is that our theology is that of the founders of the denomination. We are historic Southern Baptists. This point is often ignored, occasionally begrudged, but can never be disproved.

Further, every Southern Baptist is a member of a local church, not a denomination strictly speaking. Each local church is autonomous and can cooperate with other churches as it believes best. Every Southern Baptist church is an independent church. No one dictates to it (officially, at least), and no one can coerce the collective conscience of its membership.

The SBC has its problems. We have lots of blemishes and shortcomings, lots of needs. But that is true of my life individually and every congregation I know. Real problems are not an immediate excuse to disassociate from a church or fellowship of churches--especially when there is real opportunity to address the problems and see them corrected.

Would you want to pastor or even to remain a member of a church that nauseates Jesus, or is self-deceived, or is spiritually lukewarm, or has a prominent member who is a known adulterer and promotes fornication and adultery, or is blatantly hypocritical, or is spiritually dead? Yet, all of these maladies and more are found in the churches of Revelation 2-3. Jesus speaks very plainly about the sinfulness of five of them. The charges are incredible. Yet, He comes to them to warn them and call them to repent. He has not yet given up on them, though He does indeed threaten to remove the lamp stand from among them (2:5) unless they repent.

I think we are far too quick to give up on local churches in our day--especially when we think deeply about Jesus' response to those congregations. I heartily encourage a study of those seven letters in the light of the important question of staying affiliated with the SBC. Our Lord's example provides the basis of the sixteenth-century battle cry to be "reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God." Staying in a Southern Baptist church may

provide an opportunity to pursue such a course while "strengthening the things which remain" (Revelation 3:2).

Reformation has never been neat or easy and that certainly remains true in our day. Luther was part of a "church" that was corrupt and by its very polity, unreformable--in my opinion. That is, I cannot conceive of a reformed Roman Catholic Church. Were it to be reformed by the Word of God, it would necessarily be dismantled and rebuilt without its false dogmas and practices.

It is at just this point where the genius of Baptist polity shines brightly. Our polity makes reformation always a prospect because we do not have a "top-down" structure of government. Every church is independent. This is why from our beginning in 1982 Founders Ministries has focused on local churches and pastors. A local church can be reformed according to the Word. In fact, every church worth the name should be always striving for that--never thinking that they have arrived at some level that puts them beyond the need of further conformity to Scripture. Our efforts have been focused on helping churches see this and strive for it. For the same reason we have particularly aimed our efforts at pastors, convinced that if we help a pastor then we have helped a church.

In this sense we are not trying to "reform the SBC." We are trying to help churches become more biblical in faith and practice. The denominational structure can be either helpful or hurtful to a church's pursuit of this goal. But never should it be allowed to dictate a church's life. When this happens (and I know that it often does both in subtle and overt ways), the church has abdicated its authority and responsibility before God, and should repent.

What this means, in part, is that a pastor must be willing to die to denominational favor if he is determined to work for reformation in a church. After all, the work of a pastor in building Christ's church is more important than any denominational approval or position. And a church must be willing to pursue its calling with a similar indifference about whether or not it ever receives denominational approval or recognition. It is accountable to Christ Himself as its Head and must live to please Him.

One of the great needs for local churches and pastors today is the restructuring of church polity and authority to the degree that their ministries are consciously governed by Scripture, not some outside program (whether denominationally inspired or not). We must realize that all denominational servants are just that--servants of the churches. All denominational institutions and agencies exist to serve local churches. That is necessarily true in theory or else our polity is abdicated. I recognize that this is sometimes not true in fact where denominational politics or bureaucratic inertia exert themselves. But, where our practice (church life) does not live up to our theory (polity) the fault lies primarily with the local church, not the denomination. A church must not abdicate its calling regardless of internal or external pressures.

With this perspective, I have been able to live within the SBC and encourage the church I serve to follow God's Word to the best of our ability. We have a very amiable, beneficial relationship with many denominational entities, including a local association and state and national conventions. These relationships work because we have entered into them and continue to cultivate them with a firm commitment to our Baptist conviction that every local church is autonomous.

Here is a good question to ask when considering a break with the SBC: "What could I do tomorrow that I cannot do today if I were to leave tonight?" At this point my own answer is, "Nothing." On the other hand there are many things that we are doing today which we could not do tomorrow if we severed ties with the SBC tonight. Opportunities of genuine fellowship around common gospel causes would be lost or at least greatly hindered. Participation in some amazing developments in world missions as well as cooperation in a variety of ministries of mercy (children's homes, medical care, hunger and disaster relief, etc.) would be lost as would opportunities to be

useful in the lives of other Southern Baptist ministers and churches.

Unless a church pursues a cultic isolationism it will inevitably be identified or associated with some other group that is itself less than perfect. Such identification may be more perception than reality but it is inevitable. An important point for Baptists to remember is this: a church's autonomy and independence are not compromised by its association with other churches. There is no coercion to participate in any activity or cause and each church is not only free but is indeed obligated under God to exercise discernment and care in determining how and on what to expend its energies and resources.

God is doing an amazing work among the churches known as Southern Baptist. In the mid-1970s many were saying that liberalism was too strongly entrenched in the SBC ever to be rooted out. Through the influence and determination of conservative churches and leaders who chose not to abandon the denomination, today the SBC is known for its strong commitment to biblical authority. Had the mentality of these churches and individuals been simply to separate because of all that was wrong, think of all of the present gospel opportunities that would have been lost.

With the return to and reaffirmation of the full authority of Scripture has come a growing awakening to the supremacy of God in salvation and the glory of God that should be displayed in local churches. By God's grace the reformation for which those affiliated with Founders Ministries have long worked and prayed is happening. If the next twenty years are marked by the same kinds of advances which have been seen since 1982, who can estimate the eternal good which could be done for the cause of Christ across the earth?

In Josiah's day the rediscovery of God's Law was followed by sweeping reformation. The same thing happened in the sixteenth century. And it is happening again today. As the inerrant Scriptures are honestly searched God is opening the eyes of a growing number of men and women to the riches of sovereign grace. They are rediscovering the "faith once for all delivered to the saints," including those saints who founded the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. This revival of historic Southern Baptist conviction about the grace of God in the gospel has continued to grow so that today, unlike twenty years ago, we have leaders at every level of denominational life and untold scores of pastors, missionaries and church leaders who are returning to "the old paths."

During his third missionary journey the Apostle Paul wanted to leave Ephesus and travel to Corinth. But he judged it better not to do so. When explaining his decision to the Corinthian believers he gives two reasons: "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). Opportunities to be useful in God's kingdom (the "great and effective door" that has opened) coupled with significant and numerous trials ("many adversaries") made Paul determined to stay the course. Many historic Southern Baptists can identify with the Apostle.

Now is not the time to quit. Difficulties, struggles, blemishes, hardships, weaknesses and desperate needs are not in and of themselves reasons to leave. Rather, such realities are a continual call to arms, a plea to maintain our battle stations and press on for the cause of God and His truth. The goal is too great, the prize is too valuable, our Lord is too faithful and His promises too true to allow frustration and disillusionment to rule our thinking. Much already has been accomplished and by God's grace reformation will continue. But God uses means and the means that He has been pleased to use in advancing the work of His kingdom on earth is people--people who are willing to walk through the doors He opens even while facing the adversaries He refuses to remove.

The challenge is great. The need is great. And for those who have eyes to see it, the opportunity is great. In Spurgeon's famous words, "Here is the day for the man, where is the man for the day?"



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# Learning the Priority of the Local Church

Brian Strider

Beginning in January of 2001 Campus Crusade for Christ loaned me to Capitol Hill Baptist Church for six months as a pastoral intern with the goal of exploring the pastorate and ministry partnerships. Seven years of experience with campus ministry could not offer me insight and distinctives that only a church could provide. Moreover, so much of what is tied up in ministry is caught, rather than just taught, so the time to observe and participate propelled my understanding beyond what a reading list could accomplish. There were several experiences and lessons that I gained as an intern. I will elaborate on three and also mention how the internship has shaped my current ministry as a Campus Crusade staff member.

## Reverence

Early during the internship, we began to discuss a book called *Reformed Worship*. The content of that book and the discussions the pastoral team had about it caused me to meditate on reverence. The seriousness and solemnity that characterized our morning service was not a bi-product of old hymns and the main hall's architecture. The service was clearly planned to help communicate, in both word and song, the holiness of God. His condescension and love never rob him of his majesty and awesome power. Our God is to be feared and one way we show our fear is in the attitude with which we approach him.

By not feeding into an entertainment mindset, the church deliberately chooses to make God the focus of its attention and of its praise. There is nothing wrong with a level of comfort (air conditioning is fine), but that is not the reason why God has called Christians out of the world. God has called us out of the world so that we will worship him and glorify him.

Personally, this made me more aware of the services and their construction. They are not random collections of someone's personal favorite songs, nor do they consist of prayers that will make people feel good, though the nature of God's sovereignty and love should bring consolation. They are centered around the revelation of God's truth in Scripture. The hymns, readings and even prayer magnify and underscore aspects of his character and this should lead one into a deeper sense of reverence and awe.

Reverence had also lead me to reflect on the way that I think of God and approach him in my daily life. Location changes nothing about God's character. The reverence I have for him should be consistent throughout my life throughout the week.

## Time

Time, as we know it will not last forever, nor will the window of repentance. The urgency of the gospel is precisely because one day, for an individual and for the world, it will be too late to repent and the dye will be cast. This internship has caused me to reconsider how I understand time.

First, it has made me value it more. What minutes lack in length they make up for in importance. They should not be viewed as crumbs of the day that have no real significance. In each moment eternal matters hang in the balance. The decisions that are made, the thoughts that are pondered, and the plans that are executed--all of them exist in time.

People really do need to hear the message of repentance and belief. What makes me believe that the 15 minutes I threw away on daydreaming was really *my* 15 minutes to waste? And could not those minutes be used to encourage a struggling brother or warn a non-Christian of the coming judgment?

Stewardship is not the same thing as busyness. Inseparable from using the time is prioritizing the events and activities that consume the time. Something I've been encouraged to see and also convicted by is how much time I spend alone. Granted, solitude and personal time in Scripture and meditation should not be replaced with small groups, but there is so much of my day that can be spent in the company of others and this can provide accountability, spontaneous time to encourage or opportunities to disciple. Independence can often be a cover for selfishness.

Second, this understanding of time's value and its finiteness has made me more aware of the need to be intentional. When I plan on seeing a friend for dinner, I should not just wing it and hope some encouragement will come out of it, though that's certainly possible. But prayer about the dinner-meeting, consideration of my friends spiritual state and ways that I can encourage him to grow in Christ and pursue godliness should be strategized.

As a whole, this internship has forced me to evaluate the ways I administer God-given time and the ways that I squander it. His rightful Lordship of my life extends into the way I use time.

## Corporate nature

During the internship I also learned and meditated on the corporate nature of the church. This may be one of the strangest aspects of the church for new members or new Christians, but it is one that most grow to appreciate. The congregational life is witnessed in many ways.

### *Priorities*

Because this corporate nature is so foreign in many churches, CHBC may appear cult-like to some. I have admired the church's commitment to be faithful to God at the risk of being misunderstood by people. One example is the priority placed on Wednesday evening Bible study. Though many churches are built on small groups, cell groups and house churches, CHBC decided to place the congregation above smaller affinity groups. Members should commit themselves to Wednesday Bible study before they commit themselves to a small group. It is important that we grow as a family and not just as peers.

Initially, this sounded strange to me. Everyone knows that the dynamics of a group change once you go beyond 10 people. How do you get to know 50 people very well? Won't sharing and vulnerability be greatly hindered? And won't it feel more like a meeting of people than a gathering of close friends? There may be some truth to this. However, I've come to see the value of having a cross section of the congregation which has *covenanted* together, rather than in a select group of twenty-something-year old women who had previously known each other.

### *Membership course*

The membership course provides some of the first, formal teaching that one receives about the corporate nature of the church. Especially the talks on "*The Covenant*" and "*Why Join a Church?*" If the church is understood to be part of the family of God, then this could be especially needed in the lives of those who come from broken and dysfunctional homes. Those basic qualities of faithfulness, tenacity, care and sacrifice can be learned, experienced and practiced in a redeemed family of faith. During the membership course, participants gain a clearer vision for what it is they may be embarking on. The corporate nature of the church helps them to consider what it means to be a Christian and how they will live that out.

### *The actual membership*

This congregational life is seen in the way that the members relate to one another. Having a focus on others (besides yourself and your immediate family) shows up in a number of ways. One of the most simple ways is attendance. During the membership course, regular church meeting attendance is taught to be part of congregational life. But, beyond the

normal scheduled services, there are also special occasions like weddings, receptions, showers, funerals and good-bye parties. Showing up at these is one way that the church cares for itself and shares in each member's joys and sorrows. The flip side to this idea is the concern members show for those who have been absent from meetings.

The way that members take an interest in each other through encouragement and admonishment also reflects the corporate nature. There is a positive effort to know and spur others on in the faith. Often this comes in the way of older people encouraging younger members. But one would also see this manifested as a younger member might seek to serve an older one through domestic chores or even teaching. It has not been uncommon for the Senior Ladies class to be taught by women/men half the age of the ladies. In the same vein, the congregation frequently prays for individual members. And just as the congregation reasons together in applying God's Word on Wednesday evening, so it decides together on matters of the church at the members' meetings. One of the most important parts of the meetings is the receiving of new members into the church. This corporate aspect of the church is vital and evident.

## Current ministry

And last, with regard to my future work in campus ministry, the internship has re-shaped the way that I conceive the relationship between the church and the para-church. For years I have sought to build partnerships between local Campus Crusade movements and local churches. This tended to be on an organizational level. One of the greatest areas of learning during the internship was to think more seriously about ecclesiology. Better understanding of what a church is has helped me to understand what a para-church ministry does, and this understanding reformed my concept of partnership.

Partnering has pragmatic overtones and, I believe, membership is the biblical alternative. Instead of linking two organizations, the way to bridge the gap between campus and church is through student membership<sup>[1]</sup> for the following reasons:

- **Student membership keeps the primacy of the church clear.** The church isn't just some other organization that can help another organization reach its goals. Membership recognizes that fundamentally, students are Christians and Christians are part of a local body. Their identity is tied to a congregation not a campus group. They are church members who happen to be involved in a college ministry.
- **Student membership provides venues for spiritual growth and transformation.** During four years of college, one is more likely to hear the whole counsel of God preached in church rather than at the campus ministry meetings. Likewise, there are aspects of the Christian discipleship that will be taught in the ministry of the church that may be or will be missing from the teaching found on campus--giving and baptism, for example. In addition, students will benefit and learn from the walks of other Christians, such as people twice their age or with different backgrounds and family situations. A campus ministry is limited and rather homogenous in its make up.
- **Student membership provides a firewall or level of accountability to the campus group.** Though the ministry in and of itself is independent, should a core group of leaders be persuaded that the ministry is straying, the student leaders (church members) can pull out and continue their ministry with the church. From a preventative standpoint, the students can also seek the advice or counsel of the church and its leaders on foggy theological issues. Doctrinally, the student group might have a safeguard or mooring from going adrift.
- **Student membership provides a base of support that is consistent with the church covenant.** Students spending the summer in Kazakhstan are not viewed as outside missionaries, but as members of the local body. This should teach students that the church is evangelistic. It is clearly the church that God intends to use in fulfilling the Great Commission. Membership provides opportunities for students to receive and also to give as they support the ongoing ministry of the church. Even though they may not make much money, membership provides a context to instill habits of giving. This support will be more than financial. It will include prayer and other forms of service. Just as a child is the object of much care and love, so a student may learn what it is like to a

part of a family. With time and maturity, the student would learn not only to look out for himself, but for others.

- **Student membership provides more opportunities for outreach.** Because students are being fed and able to take part in corporate worship services, they will not need to recreate the wheel. Students often spend hours in meetings and preparing for meetings that are basically pseudo-church services. If students took advantage of healthy church life they could be free to focus their endeavors on campus more evangelistically. They could spend more time in outreach events/speakers, building relationships naturally or in clubs/sports, and doing follow-up/Bible studies that incorporate new Christians into churches. Campus ministries would then see themselves even more clearly as missionary enterprises and gather for the specific purpose of evangelism.

Of course, all of this assumes on some base level that the church is healthy. Being a campus minister has given me an added incentive to see churches grow in health. If a church is healthy it will be a faithful witness to the world around it including the universities looming near.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> By *student membership* I mean normal membership. I only mention student for emphasis. There are some churches that actually create an associate membership option for various reasons, but I am primarily referring to membership that any adult would seek.



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# Always Reforming

*J. D. Meredith*

J. Gresham Machen once said, "An account of personal experiences may be interesting for one of two reasons: (1) because the writer is in some way remarkable; (2) because, not being remarkable at all, he may be able to set forth in a concrete way the experience of a considerable body of men."<sup>[1]</sup> I submit this treatise in hopes that it may fulfill the latter purpose.

God has been very gracious to me. As a teenager, I was convicted of my sinful condition and need for Christ, and I rejoice that I now stand justified before God in Christ alone. I was reared in a theological tradition vastly different from the one that I now confess. During my university studies, God wonderfully challenged my thinking concerning the doctrine of man. This led to a theological journey that has driven my wife and me to embrace the doctrines of grace.

My adherence to these doctrines did not immediately affect vital decisions concerning church fellowship. Instead, I slowly began to see how much of our contemporary worship misrepresents the God of the Bible and the gospel of grace. During this time, my ministry goals changed dramatically. For many years I desired to serve in the pastorate, believing that the evidences of God's call upon my life was undeniable. The desperate state of the church, however, compelled me to pursue another avenue of ministry. In all of my wisdom, I determined that God had called me to a career in the academy. I concluded that this would allow me to continue a preaching ministry without having to deal with people. All of this I now attribute to a selfish desire to preach without the nuisance of pastoral ministry.

While I attended seminary in Florida, my wife and I visited many churches as we endeavored to find a congregation with a confessional theology. This venture ended in our arrival at Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral. Words cannot express the profound gratitude we have for the ministry of that church in our lives. I must convey deep appreciation to the body as a whole, for the blessings of that ministry were not in any way limited to those received from the pastors. Still, Tom Ascol and Steve Haines (two of the men for whom I am most grateful to God) invested themselves in my preparation for the ministry through their commitment to the internship ministry at Grace. I had been at Grace for nearly a year when I took part in this program. Although I profited greatly as an intern, I had already been experiencing the benefits of their wisdom before my formal participation. Fellowship in a church like Grace and involvement in an internship program should be a priority in the preparation of ministers who desire to see reformation in the Baptist churches of the twenty-first century.

One of the most important influences of Grace Baptist Church in my life involves my ministry goals. As I have indicated, I was somewhat disturbed by the state of the church at large and had decided to remove myself from immediate pastoral involvement. During the two years at Grace, God wonderfully reinvigorated my vision for the church and fueled my passion for reforming the church through the faithful preaching of the Word. Through my association with Grace, I have gained a new appreciation for the church as *the* institution ordained by God for the proclamation of the gospel around the world.

Several convictions have radically altered my vision for the church. First, I believe that the church must reclaim her place as the proper training field for pastors. In a significant way, the church has defaulted on this task relinquishing it to the seminary. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Educating future ministers of the gospel must be viewed as a pastoral duty. I fear that in many instances pastors have relegated this work to a place of insignificance believing that the seminary will fulfill the responsibility. D. G. Hart addresses this topic explaining: "Theological educators, pastors, and church members need to remember that seminaries don't have a legitimate monopoly on theological education, though such a monopoly does exist. That so many people equate the word *seminary* with the words *theological education* is an unhealthy situation not only for seminaries but also for churches and families."<sup>[2]</sup> This does not mean that the seminary has no place in theological education, but the seminary does not function as an indispensable institution for

training ministers. Undoubtedly, a heavy dose of expositional preaching and catechetical instruction would alleviate much of the widespread ignorance that pervades the church today and better facilitate the process of continuing theological education.

Second, I am greatly concerned about the professionalization of the ministry in our day. The cultural irrelevance many ministers feel has led them to seek solace in a professional ministry. David Wells contends: "Insecure ministers who are stripped of importance hope to be elevated through professionalization to the same social standing as other professionals, such as physicians and lawyers."<sup>[3]</sup> One of the clearest examples of this pursuit involves the desire for academic respectability. Spurgeon comments on the value of academic degrees declaring: "I used to think, sometimes, that if they had degrees who deserved them, diplomas would often be transferred, and given to those who hold the plough-handle or work at the carpenters bench; for there is often more divinity in the little finger of the ploughman than there is in the whole body of modern divines."<sup>[4]</sup> He continued explaining that "D.D." often appears to mean "DOUBLY DESTITUTE."<sup>[5]</sup> Rather than seeking satisfaction in social standing, pastors ought to view themselves as humble servants of Christ and his church. Our Lord provides the ultimate picture of what ought to be the meek servant-spirit of every minister of the gospel. After washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus interprets His action, "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'" (John 13:12-17). When we fail to recognize the servant nature of our office and seek standing among *other* professionals, we exalt ourselves above our Master.

Third, I am concerned that those of us who desire reformation would maintain faithful and powerful voices in this difficult hour. We must not succumb to the temptation to seek conciliation with those who deny the sovereign God of the Bible and cheapen the gospel of grace. David Wells accurately identifies the weakened leadership within the church. Explaining a false appeal to servant leadership, he opines: "Contemporary servant leaders are typically individuals without any ideas of their own, people whose convictions shift with the popular opinion to which they assiduously attune themselves, people who bow to the wishes of 'the body' from whom their direction and standing derive. They lead by holding aloft moist fingers to sense the changes in the wind. In all this they show themselves to be different indeed from the One who embodied what servanthood was intended to be and who never once tailored his teaching to what he judged the popular reception of it would be--unless he was an exceedingly poor judge of what the crowds and religious leaders had in mind when they heard him."<sup>[6]</sup> A great temptation faces those seeking reformation in the Southern Baptist Convention. Will we stand for a "big-tent" theology that downplays doctrine, or will we graciously stand for truth? I pray that God will grant great courage that we may fight for truth despite the cost.

In the last year, God has wonderfully provided a place for my pastoral ministry. In March 2001, I was called as pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church, Edinburgh, Indiana, and I rejoice daily in the privilege that I have to serve the flock of God. This opportunity has forced me to reflect on my goals and ambitions for the ministry. Although it would be impossible to enumerate all of them, several emerge as dominant themes for my ministry.

First, I desire to see reform in the churches of our day. I believe that the faithful preaching of God's Word is the foundational element in accomplishing this goal. Paul commissions Timothy with this very specific task: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:1-2a). In eschewing the professionalized ministry, we should wear proudly the title, "preacher of the gospel of Christ." To many, we may be viewed as simplistic or ineffectual because of faithfulness to the Word, but we ought to rejoice that we are in fact citizens of another world. A recovery of expositional preaching and teaching of God's Word, accompanied by sound theological instruction, must take place if we are to see a reformation in our day.

A second goal for my ministry involves faithful service to the flock of God. Whereas, I once sought a vocation that would allow me to avoid the difficulties of the church, God has created in me an intense love for both the people and the

pastorate. In 2 Timothy 4:2b, Paul continued his admonition to Timothy, "...correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (NIV). This comprehensive responsibility requires a sincere devotion to the people of God. Without it, the charge becomes not only difficult but virtually impossible. I pray that God will continue to grant me this grace and trust that He will keep this goal before my eyes as I seek to serve His church.

A third goal for my ministry entails training others for the ministry in accordance with 2 Timothy 2:2. My desire to devote my life to the church includes a deliberate investment in the lives of other gospel ministers. In his introduction to Spurgeon's *All Round Ministry*, Iain Murray notes: "While C. H. Spurgeon is still remembered as a popular preacher, it has generally been forgotten that the influence he exercised on ministers and theological students was possibly an even greater factor in his life than his own personal ministry."<sup>[7]</sup> Spurgeon understood the importance of training those who would faithfully continue when his ministry ended. I pray that one day God may enable me to disciple those who will remain on the front lines of the gospel ministry in the next generation.

Finally, I will endeavor to remain aware of those trends that are important in contemporary discussion. God has afforded me with a tremendous opportunity to pursue theological education. I do not believe that a minister of the gospel should lay aside the tools that he acquires for service. To the contrary, he should continue to hone them and stay abreast of those currents that threaten to produce discord and heresy in the body of Christ. For they who declare that theology should be confined to the academy and is not necessary for the preacher, I point to the proclamation of C. H. Spurgeon: "Brethren, if you are not theologians you are in your pastorates nothing at all."<sup>[8]</sup> Although he had little use for academic attainments, Spurgeon understood the necessity of a theological understanding for communicating the great truths of the Christian faith.

In conclusion, I would like to convey an important concept that I trust will govern my thinking and my ministry. I have heard this idea communicated many ways, but it can be simply stated: "We ought to be reformed and always reforming." I trust that those of us who desire reformation will not become arrogant thinking we have arrived. Instead, I pray that we will understand that by God's grace we have been reformed and we are dependent upon His grace as we are constantly reforming. May God keep us ever mindful that we are utterly dependent upon Him.

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## Always Reforming

[J. D. Meredith](#)

J. Gresham Machen once said, "An account of personal experiences may be interesting for one of two reasons: (1) because the writer is in some way remarkable; (2) because, not being remarkable at all, he may be able to set forth in a concrete way the experience of a considerable body of men."<sup>[1]</sup> I submit this treatise in hopes that it may fulfill the latter purpose.

God has been very gracious to me. As a teenager, I was convicted of my sinful condition and need for Christ, and I rejoice that I now stand justified before God in Christ alone. I was reared in a theological tradition vastly different from the one that I now confess. During my university studies, God wonderfully challenged my thinking concerning the doctrine of man. This led to a theological journey that has driven my wife and me to embrace the doctrines of grace.

My adherence to these doctrines did not immediately affect vital decisions concerning church fellowship. Instead, I slowly began to see how much of our contemporary worship misrepresents the God of the Bible and the gospel of grace. During this time, my ministry goals changed dramatically. For many years I desired to serve in the pastorate, believing that the evidences of God's call upon my life was undeniable. The desperate state of the church, however, compelled me to pursue another avenue of ministry. In all of my wisdom, I determined that God had called me to a career in the academy. I concluded that this would allow me to continue a preaching ministry without having to deal with people. All of this I now attribute to a selfish desire to preach without the nuisance of pastoral ministry.

While I attended seminary in Florida, my wife and I visited many churches as we endeavored to find a congregation with a confessional theology. This venture ended in our arrival at Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral. Words cannot express the profound gratitude we have for the ministry of that church in our lives. I must convey deep appreciation to the body as a whole, for the blessings of that ministry were not in any way limited to those received from the pastors. Still, Tom Ascol

and Steve Haines (two of the men for whom I am most grateful to God) invested themselves in my preparation for the ministry through their commitment to the internship ministry at Grace. I had been at Grace for nearly a year when I took part in this program. Although I profited greatly as an intern, I had already been experiencing the benefits of their wisdom before my formal participation. Fellowship in a church like Grace and involvement in an internship program should be a priority in the preparation of ministers who desire to see reformation in the Baptist churches of the twenty-first century.

One of the most important influences of Grace Baptist Church in my life involves my ministry goals. As I have indicated, I was somewhat disturbed by the state of the church at large and had decided to remove myself from immediate pastoral involvement. During the two years at Grace, God wonderfully reinvigorated my vision for the church and fueled my passion for reforming the church through the faithful preaching of the Word. Through my association with Grace, I have gained a new appreciation for the church as *the* institution ordained by God for the proclamation of the gospel around the world.

Several convictions have radically altered my vision for the church. First, I believe that the church must reclaim her place as the proper training field for pastors. In a significant way, the church has defaulted on this task relinquishing it to the seminary. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Educating future ministers of the gospel must be viewed as a pastoral duty. I fear that in many instances pastors have relegated this work to a place of insignificance believing that the seminary will fulfill the responsibility. D. G. Hart addresses this topic explaining: "Theological educators, pastors, and church members need to remember that seminaries don't have a legitimate monopoly on theological education, though such a monopoly does exist. That so many people equate the word *seminary* with the words *theological education* is an unhealthy situation not only for seminaries but also for churches and families."[\[2\]](#) This does not mean that the seminary has no place in theological education, but the seminary does not function as an indispensable institution for training ministers. Undoubtedly, a heavy dose of expositional preaching and catechetical instruction would alleviate much of the widespread ignorance that pervades the church today and better facilitate the process of continuing theological education.

Second, I am greatly concerned about the professionalization of the ministry in our day. The cultural irrelevance many ministers feel has led them to seek solace in a professional ministry. David Wells contends: "Insecure ministers who are stripped of importance hope to be elevated through professionalization to the same social standing as other professionals, such as physicians and lawyers."[\[3\]](#) One of the clearest examples of this pursuit involves the desire for academic respectability. Spurgeon comments on the value of academic degrees declaring: "I used to think, sometimes, that if they had degrees who deserved them, diplomas would often be transferred, and given to those who hold the plough-handle or work at the carpenter's bench; for there is often more divinity in the little finger of the ploughman than there is in the whole body of modern divines."[\[4\]](#) He continued explaining that "D.D." often appears to mean "DOUBLY DESTITUTE."[\[5\]](#) Rather than seeking satisfaction in social standing, pastors ought to view themselves as humble servants of Christ and his church. Our Lord provides the ultimate picture of what ought to be the meek servant-spirit of every minister of the gospel. After washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus interprets His action, "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'" (John 13:12-17). When we fail to recognize the servant nature of our office and seek standing among *other* professionals, we exalt ourselves above our Master.

Third, I am concerned that those of us who desire reformation would maintain faithful and powerful voices in this difficult hour. We must not succumb to the temptation to seek conciliation with those who deny the sovereign God of the Bible and cheapen the gospel of grace. David Wells accurately identifies the weakened leadership within the church. Explaining a false appeal to servant leadership, he opines: "Contemporary servant leaders are typically individuals without any ideas of their own, people whose convictions shift with the popular opinion to which they assiduously attune themselves, people who bow to the wishes of 'the body' from whom their direction and standing derive. They lead by holding aloft moist fingers to sense the changes in the wind. In all this they show themselves to be different indeed from the One who

embodied what servanthood was intended to be and who never once tailored his teaching to what he judged the popular reception of it would be--unless he was an exceedingly poor judge of what the crowds and religious leaders had in mind when they heard him." [6] A great temptation faces those seeking reformation in the Southern Baptist Convention. Will we stand for a "big-tent" theology that downplays doctrine, or will we graciously stand for truth? I pray that God will grant great courage that we may fight for truth despite the cost.

In the last year, God has wonderfully provided a place for my pastoral ministry. In March 2001, I was called as pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church, Edinburgh, Indiana, and I rejoice daily in the privilege that I have to serve the flock of God. This opportunity has forced me to reflect on my goals and ambitions for the ministry. Although it would be impossible to enumerate all of them, several emerge as dominant themes for my ministry.

First, I desire to see reform in the churches of our day. I believe that the faithful preaching of God's Word is the foundational element in accomplishing this goal. Paul commissions Timothy with this very specific task: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:1-2a). In eschewing the professionalized ministry, we should wear proudly the title, "preacher of the gospel of Christ." To many, we may be viewed as simplistic or ineffectual because of faithfulness to the Word, but we ought to rejoice that we are in fact citizens of another world. A recovery of expositional preaching and teaching of God's Word, accompanied by sound theological instruction, must take place if we are to see a reformation in our day.

A second goal for my ministry involves faithful service to the flock of God. Whereas, I once sought a vocation that would allow me to avoid the difficulties of the church, God has created in me an intense love for both the people and the pastorate. In 2 Timothy 4:2b, Paul continued his admonition to Timothy, "...correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (NIV). This comprehensive responsibility requires a sincere devotion to the people of God. Without it, the charge becomes not only difficult but virtually impossible. I pray that God will continue to grant me this grace and trust that He will keep this goal before my eyes as I seek to serve His church.

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Finally, I will endeavor to remain aware of those trends that are important in contemporary discussion. God has afforded me with a tremendous opportunity to pursue theological education. I do not believe that a minister of the gospel should lay aside the tools that he acquires for service. To the contrary, he should continue to hone them and stay abreast of those currents that threaten to produce discord and heresy in the body of Christ. For they who declare that theology should be confined to the academy and is not necessary for the preacher, I point to the proclamation of C. H. Spurgeon: "Brethren, if you are not theologians you are in your pastorates nothing at all." [8] Although he had little use for academic attainments, Spurgeon understood the necessity of a theological understanding for communicating the great truths of the Christian faith.

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# A Complete Pastoral Education

*Tom Hicks*

In the last two decades, the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention has reclaimed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and moved the denomination back to the theological foundation upon which it was originally built. As a result, the six Southern Baptist seminaries have reaffirmed their commitments to orthodox Protestant Christianity placing great emphasis on the original languages, sound exegesis, right interpretation and application of the Word of God. Such a sweeping repentance from theological liberalism to conservative orthodoxy is unprecedented in the history of denominations and of theological education. Thus, those who love the Scriptures are well justified in their expectation of a bright future.

Conservative Southern Baptists hope that God will use the ministers trained at these institutions to spark a wild fire of reformation that will sweep across the denomination. During my internship this summer with Pastor Fred Malone at First Baptist Church, Clinton, Louisiana, I became convinced that this can only take place if pastors are steeped in a deep understanding of the law and gospel and learn how to apply the gospel to their own hearts first and second to the hearts of the men, women and children in the pew.

## Means of Reformation

Reformation must occur at the level of the local church. The only way of effecting it is by training ministers of the gospel thoroughly in biblical shepherding. Certainly the seminary is an important and legitimate means of filling the minds of young men with the knowledge of the Scriptures and of equipping them with the necessary skills for accurate Bible study and for teaching them to engage in polemics against erring doctrinal positions. In a manner reminiscent of the seminary, the Scriptures record that Paul offered academic instruction outside of the local church structure as he taught his disciples to hold fast the fundamentals of the faith against those who spoke evil of the Way, "reasoning daily with them in the school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9). However, more help is needed.

## Internships

Because of its nature, the seminary by itself is not sufficient to train pastors. It can only be a servant of the church and it needs the church to finish the task. This is mainly true because it is not a very good laboratory for imparting the kind of practical and experimental understanding with which ministers of the gospel must be furnished in order to carry out their callings.

Often men leave the seminary and must work out for themselves many of the most important questions of practical ministry while already in a position of responsibility and authority. This would not be the case if experienced pastors took it upon themselves to train them for gospel ministry. Paul not only taught men at Tyrannus, but also invested himself into men within the context of the local church, urging Timothy to pass on the instruction he had received. "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). God's Word charges pastors with the weighty but happy responsibility of training other pastors. Internships are one way by which seasoned and established pastors may invest themselves into younger men who believe they are called to the office.

What are the most important lessons one pastor may pass to a man seeking the position for himself? Though it is helpful to learn the practical details about what it takes to be good at scheduling and to become equipped to deal with the minutia pertaining to administrative questions, those sorts of issues are not the things most needed by men training for gospel ministry. What the young man needs are principles of the heart, mind, and will to govern his whole ministry. In instructing his pastoral intern, Paul says,

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:22-26, NASB).

## **The Pastor's Heart - 2 Timothy 2:22**

The greatest hindrance to biblical pastoral ministry is the pastor's own heart. This is where the war is waged and battles are won or lost. The Bible calls on God's men to flee from sin and to pursue righteousness with those who call on the Lord Jesus Christ. A pastor's sanctification drives and controls every aspect of his ministry because whether he likes it or not, the degree to which he is able to lead his congregation in their growth is determined by the degree to which his own heart is filled with the grace of the gospel and therefore burns with affection for Jesus Christ.

An experienced pastor may have the greatest influence upon another seeking the pastoral office by teaching him to live under the influence of the gospel. Such training is crucial because before he can treat the souls of others, a pastor needs to grow in his comprehension of the law and gospel and learn to apply these truths to his own soul first. The law reveals the holy character of God, exposes sin, and boxes the sinner up in such a way that he has no place to run but into the arms of the Savior which are stretched wide and are ready to receive any who would come to Him. The pastor must know himself, learning to probe his heart prayerfully and deeply with the law of God, in order to locate the root of sin that it might be mortified. After he identifies his sin, it is essential for him to apply the soothing medicine of the gospel of Christ in order to treat the bleeding wound opened by the law and to bring healing to his heart. There is power in the gospel, and powerful pastors are men capable of applying the life and ministry of Christ to the lives and circumstances of other men because they are diligent to minister the grace and mercy of Christ to the sin in their own hearts first. When a man believes that Christ loves him and when he rests in the cross, he certainly will love Christ in return and gladly obey Him, being motivated by the gospel of grace. "Soul doctors" are made when pastors become students of the souls of men, and those who are good students of their own souls are most likely to become good students of the souls of others. Some of the most encouraging times during my summer internship were times when Pastor Fred Malone poured out his heart to me and spent hours with me in one on one instruction teaching me to be Christ centered in my thinking and to treat my spirit with the precious gospel of our Lord.

## **The Pastor's Mind - 2 Timothy 2:23**

To "refuse foolish and ignorant speculation" (2 Timothy 2:23) implies the opposite. The minister must give his mind to the standard of sound words revealed in sacred Scripture (2 Timothy 1:13), making them the end and focus of all his mental effort, always with a view to applying every doctrine of the faith to himself first and then to the members of the congregation. In the Scriptures, theology is never taught exclusively in abstract, but is always used in a way to bring comfort and encouragement to those who hear it; therefore, all biblical theology serves the local church and

finds its greatest expression in proclamation.

However, if the pastor is not taught to think in terms of sound Christ-centered application, then his messages may seem more like academic lectures or moralistic persuasive speeches than New Testament sermons. Teaching that fails to terminate in the hearts of men by means of the gospel of Christ is incomplete. For this reason, students of exegetical, biblical, systematic, and historical theology all reach their high point reflection and maturity in understanding when practical theological application works itself out in pastoral counseling and preaching. This is true because the end goal of theology is ministry to the person in the pew. If the pastor in training is taught to see Christ-centered applications of every doctrine of the faith, he will be better equipped to wrestle with the hearts and minds of his parishioners from the pulpit. Thus, he must be taught to think in these categories.

My mind was most stimulated and stretched this summer as I observed the way Pastor Malone applied the doctrines of the trinity, predestination, and the death of Christ to marriage relationships, Christian freedom to a grieving widow, the resurrection to a family mourning for a lost loved one, and the Sabbath to a hospital patient. Unless the lines connecting theology to the everyday lives of men are drawn, then biblical doctrine is likely to remain in the ivory tower of the academy, never seizing the hearts of men and never impacting them as significantly as they might.

## **The Pastor's Task - 2 Timothy 2:24-26**

Pastoral ministry is not about "setting those people straight," winning arguments, or making them do something. It's about loving them and leading them by serving them and by applying the power of the gospel to them, not by issuing commands of bare law void of any ability to change them but by heralding the good news of Jesus which alone is the power of God unto salvation. Though God's man must certainly be able to refute those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), his greatest strength must be in the application of the grace of God (2 Timothy 2:1; Ephesians 4:15). His call is to exhibit and exercise deep love for the congregation, patience, and willingness to forbear difficulty and personal offense for the sake of the gospel. Love and grace are the dominant characteristics of pastoral ministry in both counseling and preaching. In his service, the minister must love others without regard to how he is treated, to forsake personal interests, and to die to pride. Even as the Chief Shepherd loved the church to death, so His under shepherds are called to die for the church.

The pastor is called to be an example of growth in holiness, not setting himself up as the model of perfect righteousness or as the one who has it all together (Romans 7:14-24; Philippians 3:12-16), but of progress in sanctification (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17), consistently frank and honest about the fact that he has shortcomings though earnestly striving to conform to the moral law out of love for his Lord. Further, rather than merely giving answers to every question posed by his congregation, he is called to equip them to think in terms of the law and the gospel for themselves, so that they may know how to act and respond in a Christ-like manner to any of life's circumstances according to the Word of Truth and the gospel of grace revealed therein.

The Lord's servant is tender and gentle (1 Thessalonians 2:7), never lording it over the flock (1 Timothy 5:3), but leading with humility and washing the feet of those he has been charged to feed. Instead of a preacher arrogantly making a display of his personality from the pulpit, humility in preaching is the mark of the Lord's bond-servant. The goal of the minister's instruction is "love," and the primary way to teach others to love is to model it. If Christ is to shine through a man, then that man's personality must never be the controlling element of his leadership, but only the power of the gospel. God uses the gentleness and kindness of the pastoral minister to bring men to repentance as they hear and observe the gospel of Christ worked out in his words and in his life.

Another of the lessons I learned this summer is that wise, humble, and loving leadership begets wise, humble, and

loving followers. The attitude among the leadership at First Baptist Church Clinton was one of kindness, respect, patience, and willingness to forego personal agendas for the sake of the glory of Christ. There was no visible contention and I am convinced that this is due to the godly leadership of their pastor.

## Conclusion

If we desire the winds of reformation to blow through the local churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, then we need pastors who are committed to pastoring pastors. We need men who are not only committed to the inerrancy of Scripture but who understand and know how to apply its doctrinal content. We need men who grasp the biblical theology of law and gospel and who are able to apply these doctrines first to their own hearts and second to the hearts of those to whom they minister. In short, we need men taught to progress in sanctification, to pursue Christ, and to witness His gospel in word and deed to the people of God.



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## Learning the Work of Pastoral Ministry

*[Jonathan Leeman](#)*

In my third year of membership at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, I told my pastor over lunch I was feeling called to preach. My pastor, Mark Dever, replied that the call to the ministry was both internal and external--that only I could decipher the internal, but that our church was responsible for the external confirmation. "So let's get you involved in more teaching," was his first conclusion. "And don't think you are going anywhere until you do an internship," was his second.

I quit my job in July 2000, and spent the final five months of 2000 as a pastoral intern at CHBC. Broadly speaking, the internship gave me the opportunity to try out the many hats a pastor must wear in the local church. Tasks included preaching sermons, preparing Sunday school curricula, visiting shut-ins, preparing bulletins, assisting the church administrator, organizing a Christmas program, visiting various denominational and pastoral conferences, and arranging material in the church archives.

Perhaps more valuable than performing these tasks, however, was the frequent discussions with the pastor and pastoral staff about every imaginable element of the public gatherings of our church, what we called the "service review." After every Sunday evening service, the pastor and his gaggle of assistants and interns would convene in his study for two hours, over a meal of fast food, and take turns reviewing every event of the morning and evening services--every Sunday school lesson, announcement, song, prayer, and sermon. Everyone commented on every item under review: "How could that class be taught better?" "Did the announcements go too long?" "Did the music in that hymn drag?" "Was the sermon outline clear, or its application relevant?"

When conducted in the spirit of charity and encouragement, the service reviews provided feedback for the pastor, and cultivated deliberateness and thoughtfulness in the staff as we planned the activities of the church. In time, we learned to apply two criteria to every activity, spoken word, and lyric: Is it biblical? In addition, is it pastorally helpful, given the peculiarities of our time, place, and congregational personality?

Service reviews were not limited to Sunday evenings, but every church-related activity provided an opportunity for learning. For example, we would travel together on the way to a graveside service. En route, Pastor Dever would explain his general protocol for funerals. On the return home, we would then converse together over what we might have found encouraging or distracting.

Does this sound overly analytical? I cannot overstate how instructive these times were for us. Christ would often do this with his disciples when they withdrew from the crowds. He would explain himself and ask provocative questions. Although I had attended Capitol Hill for four years when the internship began, I was amazed by how much I learned. This was largely due to the pastor's use of every spare moment to interact purposefully with the young men on his staff.

There were two additional examples of this discipleship regimen. First, the pastoral staff gathered every Thursday morning to discuss weekly reading and writing assignments. My fellow interns and I read six assigned books and wrote thirty-one essays (3-6 pages) in five months! Secondly, I was initially assigned fifteen new church members to meet with over the ensuing months of my internship. After these meetings, I would discuss pastoral concerns about

an individual or family with Pastor Dever, comparing my observations with his. Again, this gave him the opportunity to cultivate my pastoral sensibilities.

At the conclusion of my internship in December 2000, I began a Masters of divinity at Southern Seminary and am now in my second semester. When I compare seminary with my time at Capitol Hill Baptist both as a member and as an intern, one lesson is clear: Seminaries do not make pastors; churches do. Seminaries might do well at teaching doctrine, but knowledge of doctrine *applied* can only be worked out in the context of other human beings--lots of them, with lots of hurts, and troubles, and opinions. An older pastor can teach a younger one in months what it might take years to discover on one's own.

Following are six lessons I learned from my internship:

1. A pastor must keep the good of the whole church at the forefront of his considerations and affections. Another church leader complained to Pastor Dever about a troublesome group in the church and he used the language of "they this" and "they that." He eventually interrupted this other leader with, "Remember, brother, 'they' are 'us.'"
2. The ability to delegate is crucial for a pastor whose time-expenditure must adhere to his biblically assigned responsibilities. A pastor should continually gauge his work with the question: What does Scripture say a pastor is and how a church should function? Pastor Dever frequently reminded us that he would allow any *program* to fail (other than preaching and teaching) that depended on him.
3. A pastor must be constantly mindful that God works over long stretches of time sometimes. The perfect word cannot be administered in every conversation. Moreover, the life of a church does not depend on any one meeting. Sometimes an assertive position must be taken but sometimes a closed-mouth shrug is best. Therefore, Pastor Dever will often state his position once, but never does he then twist an arm or exhaust every word that could be said. He leaves the Holy Spirit to convince.
4. A pastor must regard the disgruntled members of a congregation with a love seldom reciprocated by them. First Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings; I learned it should also be read at pastoral installations. More than anyone, a pastor is to be patient, kind, not envious, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, and keeping no record of wrongs. He must certainly not delight in evil but rejoice in the truth. In addition, if he expects to continue shepherding his flock for very long, he must always hope, always trust, and always persevere.
5. The head of the body must be one of the most encouraging and grateful members of the body. The head must be able to look down at the knee, for example, and thank the Lord for its faithful operation, even if the knee is sore. The head must know how to care for the knee, exercising and resting it in a right balance. Accordingly, I have never seen Pastor Dever miss an opportunity to thank someone for the work they are doing in the church, whether they are giving a Sunday evening devotion or working in the nursery. He even thanks his staff on a daily basis for those activities they are assigned to do by contract.
6. A church member's ability to submit to pastoral authority is often directly proportional to his or her teachability--the submissive are teachable, and the teachable submit. Moreover, the submissive and teachable members are probably most to be trusted in positions of authority. (In this sense, the pastor should be the most submissive and teachable of all). The person capable of obedience is a person with an awareness of the world outside of them, and the body as a whole. Submitting to someone over you implies you

understand the body is made up of many parts, each with a different role, and that each part must be faithful to its own role for the good of the whole body. Those who shirk authority are generally concerned only with themselves and have little awareness of the whole body, much less their dependence on it.

In conclusion, the Lord leads individuals into the ministry through all types of channels. My own experience suggests that the individual who moves straight into seminary without participating in an internship has been deprived of several wonderful opportunities. The practical "hands-on" experience helps the individual, as well as the church, discern whether the necessary gifts and calling of God are present. An internship also allows an individual to observe a given pastoral style at a distance conducive to analysis and reflection. Once an individual is in the pastorate, nothing is neutral. A pastor's every action will acquire at least some vested self-interest. Finally, an internship awakens an individual to the wounds his seminary lessons will eventually be called on to heal, and how crazy life in the ER can be. This can only make him or her much more focused student.



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## News

### Founders Fellowship Breakfast, Saint Louis, MO

On Tuesday, June 11, 2002 at 7:00 AM will be the annual Founders Fellowship Breakfast in room 240 on level two of the Cervantes Convention Center (America's Center). Guest speaker is Pastor Rogers Ellsworth of Benton, IL on the topic of "The Sovereignty of God and Pastoral Ministry. A full sit-down breakfast will be served. Cost is \$10.00 per person. Registration deadline is May 27, 2002.

### New Founders Press Title

Now available is Dr. Curtis Vaughan's study guide on *Ephesians*. This reprint is the first in a series of Founders Study Guide Commentaries to be published by Founders Press. This study guide was first published by the Convention Press of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 as the textbook for the Church Study Course on Ephesians. Zondervan Press then republished it in a revised form in 1977. That latter revision comprises the text of this present edition. *Ephesians* will retail for \$8.99 each. [Order online today!](#)

### Founders Twentieth Anniversary Book

A special book marking this milestone in the history of Founders is scheduled for publication. Select papers presented at each year's conference over the last twenty years are being compiled for publication in a book to be released Summer 2002.

### Reformed Courses Worldwide

For more information on these free courses contact Mount Zion Bible Institute at 2603 West Wright Street, Pensacola, FL 32505; phone: 850-438-1037; email: [school@mountzion.org](mailto:school@mountzion.org); website: [www.mountzion.org/institute.html](http://www.mountzion.org/institute.html)



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## Book Reviews

*Samuel Rutherford and His Friends*, Faith Cook, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992. Paperback, 168 pages. \$8.99.

Reviewed by [Ray Van Neste](#)

This little book is a gem of wisdom and spiritual insight distilled from the life and letters of Samuel Rutherford and some of his correspondents. Mrs. Cook obviously knows her subject well as she skillfully interweaves biographical sketches of the correspondents with Rutherford's counsel and confession to them. The book provides a brief biographical sketch of Rutherford and several of his correspondents, who include many of the important leaders of the church in Scotland in the perilous times of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this way, the book can serve as a supplement to the letters of Rutherford or as an introduction to them, as well as an overview glimpse of God's work in His church in these days. In addition to introducing Rutherford's correspondents, Cook also provides an overview of what Rutherford wrote to each one in their circumstances. In summarizing and discussing the correspondence of Rutherford with each person, Cook highlights his giftedness as a spiritual counselor. From both the lives of the correspondents and the counsel of Rutherford one can imbibe the ethos of these stalwart believers--a courage, conviction and forthrightness which seems too foreign in our day. There is weightiness to these men and women, which sets in stark contrast to the breeziness of our generation. As Mrs. Cook writes of some of the women to whom Rutherford wrote, 'It is immediately evident from these letters that some of these knew a degree of communion with Christ and a familiarity with the ways of God that is strangely rare in the Church of our day' (102).

There is not room here to touch all the high points of the book, so I will comment on a few relying largely on quotations and arranged by some of the different issues that Rutherford addressed. One interesting theme is the presentation of Rutherford as evangelist pleading with souls. This comes out especially in chapter three dealing with his correspondence with John Gordon, the Laird of Cardoness. Gordon had lived far from Christ and approached the end of his days. Rutherford wrote to him from exile with tenderness, alluring him with descriptions of the beauty of Christ, and with boldness, frankly confronting him with the terrors of judgment. His longing for the salvation of Gordon is seen as he writes:

Thoughts of your soul ... depart not from me in my sleep. Ye have a great part of my tears, sighs, supplications, and prayers. Oh, if [only] I could buy your soul's salvation with any suffering whatsoever, that ye and I might meet with joy up in the rainbow, when we shall stand before our judge. (44)

Mrs. Cook aptly presents his evangelistic passion in this brief portrait. Seeing this side of Rutherford, one of the Westminster divines (!), puts the lie once again to the idea that Calvinism undercuts evangelism.

Another theme is affection for Christ, which is a well-known aspect of his letters. Indeed Mrs. Cook states, 'The dominant theme of all these letters is the majesty and loveliness of the person of Christ' (11). Tellingly she also notes, 'We only wonder at his exotic language [about affection for Christ] because we are largely unacquainted with his joys' (11).

One of the chief points of profit, perhaps, is the discussion of the theme of dealing with grief and trials. In our days

of relative ease, it is possible to esteem our comfort too highly and to be surprised by affliction. Not so with many of the saints who have gone before us. 'Christians living in days far removed from the seventeenth century may perhaps think that a life of persecution is the exception rather than the norm, but it was not always so. "I am persuaded," wrote Samuel Rutherford to William Gordon, "that it is a piece of the chief errand of our life ... that we might suffer here for a time amongst our enemies..." (90). I will simply list some of the quotes gleaned by Mrs. Cook.

Kiss His wise and unerring providence...Learn to believe Christ better than His strokes, Himself and His promises better than His glooms... Let not the Lord's dealings seem harsh, rough, or unfatherly, because it is unpleasant. When the Lord's blessed will bloweth across your desires, it is best, in humility, to strike sail to Him, and be willing to be led any way our Lord pleaseth (58).

Humility is a strange flower; it grows best in winter and under storms of affliction (84-85).

Our pride must have winter weather to rot it (79).

If ye were not Christ's wheat, appointed to be bread in His house, He would not grind you (86; written to Alexander Gordon consoling him after the death of several of his children).

Rutherford provides a helpful model as he deals with the grieving, handling them tenderly but not fearing to speak clear and frank truth.

Lastly, Mrs. Cook shows how Rutherford, while dispensing spiritual counsel, felt no need to hide his own weaknesses.

Never does Samuel Rutherford stand apart from those to whom he writes, suggesting that he himself has attained to a high degree of holiness. With disarming honesty he confesses that he too finds the path of faith and godliness perplexing at times and contrary to the natural desires of his heart. "Believe me, that I find it to be hard wrestling to play fair with Christ, and to keep good quarters with Him," he admits, in a letter to John Gordon.... (45).

In another place, when writing to a younger man (William Gordon), he does not hide his weaknesses but rather writes, 'I never took it to be so hard to be dead to my lusts and to this world' (92). How tempting it is when speaking to those younger than us to speak as if we were greater than we are- but this, in addition to being sinful pride, is of no real help to those with whom we speak. Again, Rutherford is an example: 'Rutherford knew nothing of the triumphalism that has too often characterized much of the interchange between Christians in other times. He is ruthlessly honest with himself and consequently able to help others who are conscious of spiritual failure' (105). This genuineness and humility comes from one who 'truly feared the unwarranted praise of men' and once confessed: "My white side comes out on paper to men; but at home and within I find much black work, and great cause of a low sail, and of little boasting' (139).

This book is extremely helpful in putting forward a helpful example in ministry--one that is wise and bold, yet honest and humble. In fact, I think the book could be used with much profit by being read by a group of elders or local leaders together. It would help to train them in providing spiritual counsel as well as providing many personal lessons.

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*Seeking God: Jonathan Edwards' Evangelism Contrasted with Modern Methodologies*, William Nichols, Ames, IA: International Outreach, Inc. 564 pages, \$36.95.

Reviewed by [Richard Smith](#)

Alvin Plantinga wrote three books in the last decade in an effort to demonstrate what is called Reformed epistemology. It shocks some people to think that there is an epistemology that is Reformed. But if Reformed is biblical, then it would seem that it is a far more important issue (even vital) to set out a Reformed view of evangelism. But is there a Reformed evangelism? Surely we must admit that some of the evangelism practiced by Reformed people today is not distinguishable from that of Arminians with the stress placed on the choice of man. Was there a Reformed evangelism in the past? There was, and it was the evangelism practiced by the Puritans and Reformed ministers who followed them for the next century or so. The most famous proponents of Reformed evangelism in early America were Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards. But that form of evangelism is no longer recognized much less practiced, though it was the form of evangelism used by God to bring revivals and awakenings.

William Nichols brings the evangelism of the past into the present in this book by reprinting several sermons (some never published before) and writings of Jonathan Edwards. He also includes an introduction to each sermon that spells out in detail how Edwards practiced evangelism.

The rationale for getting this book into print is explained in the introduction by Nichols:

Over the years I have had opportunity to meet and talk with pastors who say they are students of the writings of Jonathan Edwards. But usually, in talking with them further and upon inquiring about their own evangelistic practices, I have found almost none who either understand or practice the evangelistic methodology of Edwards. I have often wondered: Where is the disconnect? What is the problem? Many obviously read Edwards; few understand how he did evangelism. This lack of understanding, and therefore lack of practical application of biblical theology to their own evangelism has left the modern day Evangelistic scene a mess. It is not a disaster waiting to happen; it is a full-fledged disaster that has already happened and almost nothing is being done to get things back on track. I am convinced that Jonathan Edwards can help us do that.

The issues of this book, then, are clear. Modern evangelicals would do well to go back to the evangelistic methods of Jonathan Edwards. Those methods must be clearly seen and practiced if there is to be true revival and true Christianity in our nation and world. But how does Nichols think that Edwards differs from the modern practice of evangelism? In virtually every way. The titles to the sermons demonstrate the differences with modern practice: "The Vain Self-Flatteries of the Sinner," "It Is God's Manner to Make Men Sensible of Their Misery and Unworthiness; Persons Ought to Endeavor to Be Convinced of Sin," and "God Is Very Angry at the Sins of Children."

In the introductions to these sermons and others Nichols shows that Edwards believed that sinners must realize that God is sovereign in salvation and that they should acknowledge that He is not obligated to save them. So the seeker should seek to humble his or her heart before God. Here is a clear and vital difference that Nichols demonstrates as the real issue between modern evangelism and the biblical evangelism practiced by Jonathan Edwards. Modern evangelism stresses the need for sinners to make a decision and pray a prayer. Reformed evangelism, as practiced by the Puritans, Reformed ministers and Edwards, stresses the necessity that sinners be convicted of sin and thoroughly humbled before God before they can be converted. They must have God change their hearts, understanding that they can in no way obligate God to save them. In other words, today the focus is on man and what he can do. But

Reformed evangelists have historically put the stress on our sovereign God and on sinners using the means God has provided them for seeking their salvation.

In the conclusion William Nichols leaves us with these powerful and searching words:

Our evangelism needs to be radically reformed. A little tweaking around the edges will not suffice. Simply adding a few key words to our presentation, like repentance, accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior, etc., is not enough. The difficulties with today's evangelism are enormous. Untold millions are being led straight to hell when they are certain heaven will be their destination.

With these words ringing in our ears, here is a tip on how to read this 564-page book. Read the book in order as each introduction builds upon the previous one so that a picture of true Reformed evangelism emerges piece by piece. This title is available from International Outreach, Inc., P.O. Box 1286, Ames, IA 50014. Phone: (515) 292-9594. Email: [wnichint@aol.com](mailto:wnichint@aol.com)



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## Letters

Dear Brother Ascol:

Please know that the work of Founders Ministries is deeply appreciated. In this age where pragmatism and man-centeredness is the be-all and end-all, I thank you for aiming the discussion back to the basics--the sovereignty of Almighty. I pray that the Lord will bless you with energy and strength and give you and the directors of Founders guidance.

Bless you, brother.  
H.L., Woodland, NC

*Response from the editor:*

Thanks for the encouraging words! Please continue to pray for Founders as the Lord brings us to mind. There are great opportunities and challenges in front of us. We want to be wise and good stewards. May the Lord prosper your labors.

In Christ,  
Tom Ascol

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Dear Dr. Thomas Ascol,

Greetings in Christ. I do rejoice for the first issue of the *Founders Journal* [#47] I received today. I really am eager to read everything in it and I'm almost done with it. I thank the Lord for it's really ministering to me, in my life as a pastor. "Pastoral priorities" has really encouraged me a lot. I feel recharged. I do pray that the Lord will use this magazine to touch many more lives for the glory of our merciful God.

Gratitude is the memory of my heart,  
Pastor L. (via email)

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Dr. Ascol,

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for the ministry of Founders Ministries. In February of 1998, the company I was working for closed its store in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was unemployed. I had heard about the Internet but had never "surfed." I found an article about your organization in *Christianity Today*. The first site I ever visited was Founders. And I am glad it was. The articles in the *Founders Journal* had been extremely insightful and helpful. I had not given reformed theology a thought because I didn't know where to go (got an introduction during

my Christian school days). Your site has helped me to start to explore and think and start down the road to reformed theology.

Thanks for your time and energy. I am one of many who is thankful.  
via email

*Response from the editor:*

Dear Brother:

Thanks for the encouraging note! God is doing a great work among us and we must press on with all the energy and resources that He entrusts to us. May He grant us both such resolve to live wholly for Him in these needy times.

In Christ,  
Tom Ascol

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Dear brothers and sisters,

We are group of Reformed Baptist believers from Odessa, Ukraine. We had been in Church which was called "Baptist" but it was not Baptist Church according dogma. Our leader group studied in seminary. He has discovered teaching about the Grace is truth. He became 5-point Calvinist (TULIP). When he came back to his Church he had to left it because his Church is Arminian doctrines Church. Therefore he have started Reformed Baptist group. But in future we would like to start Reformed Baptist Church. It is very hard here because Christians know not much about Grace doctrine. There is only Presbyterian Reformed Church but we don't share opinion to christen (baptize) children. Therefore, we would like to start Reformed Baptist Church where we could serve to God. We are looking for like-minded people who can pray for us, giving advises and encourage us. We would like to have friends who understand us.

Blessings,  
Y & S via email

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...We appreciate the gifts from Founders that accompanied our order. May the Lord grant Founders Ministries continual steadfastness in its endeavors to promote the doctrine of His grace and to advance His Kingdom.

With Christian Greetings,  
F. L., Singapore



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# On Regeneration

Charles H. Spurgeon

[Some of the language has been updated for the modern reader.]

The first work of the Spirit in the heart is a work during which the Spirit is compared to the *wind*. You remember that when our Savior spoke to Nicodemus he represented the first work of the Spirit in the heart as being like the wind that "blows where it wishes;" "so" he says, "is every one who is born of the Spirit." Now you know that the wind is a most mysterious thing; and although certain definitions pretend to explain the phenomenon, all of them leave the great question of how the wind blows, and the cause of its blowing in a certain direction, where it was before. Breath within us, winds around us, all air movements are mysterious to us. And the renewing work of the Spirit in the heart is exceedingly mysterious.

It is possible that at this moment the Spirit of God may be breathing into some of the thousand hearts before me; yet it would be blasphemous if anyone should ask, "Which way did the Spirit of God enter into such a heart? How did it enter there?" And it would be foolish for a person who is under the operation of the Spirit to ask how it operates: you do not know where the storehouse of thunder is located; you do not know where the clouds are balanced; neither can you know how the Spirit goes forth from the Most High and enters into the heart of man.

It may be that during a sermon two men are listening to the same truth; one of them hears as attentively as the other and remembers as much of it; the other is melted to tears or moved with solemn thoughts; but the one, though equally attentive, sees nothing in the sermon except that certain important truths were clearly declared; as for the other, his heart is broken within him and his soul is melted. Ask me how it is that the same truth has an effect upon the one, and not upon his fellow: I reply, because the mysterious Spirit of the living God goes with the truth to one heart and not to the other. The one only feels the force of truth, and that may be strong enough to make him tremble, like Felix; but the other feels the Spirit going with the truth, and that renews and regenerates him, and causes him to enter into that gracious condition which is called the state of salvation.

This change takes place instantaneously. It is as miraculous a change as any miracle we read about in Scripture. It is supremely supernatural. It may be mimicked, but no imitation can be true and real. Men may pretend to be regenerated without the Spirit, but they cannot be regenerated in actuality. It is a change so marvelous that the highest attempts of man can never reach it. We may reason as long as we please, but we cannot reason ourselves into regeneration; we may meditate until our hairs are gray with study; but we cannot meditate ourselves into the new birth. The new birth is accomplished in us by the sovereign will of God alone.

*"The Spirit, like some heavenly wind,  
Blows on the sons of flesh,  
Inspires us with a heavenly mind,  
And forms the man afresh."*

Ask the regenerate man how: he cannot tell you. Ask him when: he may recognize the time, but as to how he knows no more than you do. It is a mystery.

You remember the story of the valley of vision. Ezekiel saw dry bones lying scattered here and there in the valley. The command came to Ezekiel, "Say to these dry bones, live." He said, "Live," and the bones came together, "bone to his bone, and flesh came upon them" but they did not live. "Prophesy, son of man; say to the wind, breathe upon these slain, that they may live." They looked just like life: there was flesh and blood there; there were the eyes and hands and feet; but

when Ezekiel spoke there was a mysterious something given that men call life, and it was given in a mysterious way, like the blowing of the wind. It is even so today. Unconverted and ungodly persons may be very moral and excellent; they are like the dry bones when they are put together and clothed with flesh and blood. Nevertheless, they needed the divine breath of the Almighty--the divine *pneuma*, the divine Spirit, the divine wind--to blow upon them to make them live.

Say, my hearers, have you ever had such a supernatural influence on your heart? For if not, it may seem that I am being harsh with you, but I am simply being faithful: if you have never had more in your heart than you were born with, you are "in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." No, sir, don't sneer at that remark; it is as true as this Bible, for it was taken from this Bible, and you should listen carefully to this for further proof: "unless one is born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God." What is your response? It is useless for you to talk of causing yourself to be born again; you cannot be born again except by the Spirit, and you must perish unless you are. You see, then, the first effect of the Spirit, and by that you may answer the question.[\[1\]](#)

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And, my brethren, it is quite certain that *no man ever begins the new birth himself*. The work of salvation was never started by any man. God the Holy Spirit must begin it. Now, the reasons why no man ever started the work of grace in his own heart, are very plain and palpable: firstly, because he cannot; and secondly, because he will not.

The best reason of all is because he cannot--he is dead. Well, the dead may be made alive, but the dead cannot make themselves alive, for the dead can do nothing. Besides, the new thing to be created has no being. The uncreated cannot create. "No," but you say, "that man can create." Yes, but can hell create heaven? Then sin may create grace. What! Will you tell me that fallen human nature that has come almost to a level with the beasts, is competent to rival God; that it can emulate the divinity in working as great a miracle, and in imparting as divine a life as even God himself can give? It cannot. Besides, it is a creation; we are *created* new in Christ Jesus. Let any man create a fly, and afterwards let him create a new heart in himself; until he has done the lesser he cannot do the greater.

Besides, no man will. If any man could convert himself, there is no man that would. If any man said he would, if that were true, he is already converted; for the will to be converted is in great part conversion. The will to love God, the desire to be in unison with Christ, is not to be found in any man who has not already been reconciled with God through the death of his Son. There may be a false desire, a desire grounded upon a misrepresentation of the truth; but a true desire after true salvation by the true Spirit is a certain indication that the salvation is already there in the germ and in the bud, and only needs time and grace to develop itself.

But it is certain that man neither can nor will, being on the one hand utterly impotent and dead, and on the other hand utterly depraved and unwilling; hating the change when he sees it in others, and most of all despising it in himself. Be certain, therefore, that God the Holy Spirit must begin, since none else can do so.[\[2\]](#)

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When God first begins the work of changing the heart, he finds man totally averse to any such thing. By nature man kicks and struggles against God: he will not be saved. I must confess I never would have been saved, if I could have helped it. As long I could I rebelled and revolted, and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray: when he would have me listen to the sound of preaching, I would not. Moreover, when I did listen and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. When my heart was a little touched, I tried to divert it with sinful pleasures. And when that would not do I tried self-righteousness, and would not have been saved until I was hemmed in, and then he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort of his grace. It conquered my depraved will, and made me bow myself before the scepter of his grace.

So it is in every case. Man revolts against his Maker and his Savior; but where God determines to save, save he will. God

will have the sinner, if he designs to have him. God has never yet been thwarted in any one of his purposes. Man resists with all his might, but all the might of man--tremendous though it is on account of sin--is not equal to the majestic might of the Most High when he rides forth in the chariot of his salvation. He irresistibly saves and victoriously conquers man's heart.

To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life; but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second, swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today as an enemy of God with a wicked heart, hard as a stone, and dead and cold; but if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble--begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy. Other parts of salvation are done gradually but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace.[\[3\]](#)

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You may educate a nature until it attains the highest point, but you cannot educate an old nature into a new one. You may educate a horse, but you cannot educate it into a man. You shall train the bird that sits upon your finger but you cannot train a limpet into an eagle, nor is it possible for you to train by the best instruction the natural man into a spiritual man. Between the two there is still a great gulf fixed.

Can the natural man, by great and sustained efforts, at last come to be spiritual? No, he cannot.... Therefore, you may make yourselves the best of natural men. You may become the most patriotic of statesmen, you may become the most sober and discreet of moralists, you may become the kindest and most benevolent of philanthropists, but into a spiritual man you cannot bring yourself. Your very best efforts are useless, because there is a division, wide as eternity, between you and the regenerate man.

Can another man help us out of such a nature into a state of grace? By no means! As man is powerless for himself, so is he powerless for his fellow.... How, then, is it to be done? The Spirit of God alone can do it. O, sirs! This is a great mystery, but you must know it if you would be saved; it is a solemn secret, but it is one that must be known in your consciences, or else you must be shut out from heaven. The Spirit of God must make you new; you must be born again. "If a man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The same power which raised Christ Jesus from the dead must be exerted in raising us from the dead, the very same Omnipotence, without which angels or worms could not have had a being, must again step forth and do as great a work as it did at the first creation in making us anew in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There have been continuous attempts to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian Church itself tries to forget it, but as often as this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward with clarity, God is pleased to favor his Church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trumpet of God to awake the dead, and where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grate upon the carnal ear, though it excites enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it.

This was the staple preaching of Whitefield, and it was by this preaching that he was made as the mighty angel flying through the midst of heaven, preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature. He was always great upon that which he called the great R--Regeneration. Whenever you heard him, the three R's came out clearly--Ruin, Regeneration, and Redemption! Man ruined, wholly ruined, hopelessly helplessly, eternally ruined! Man regenerated by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone wholly made a new creature in Christ! Man redeemed, redeemed by precious blood from all his sins: not by works of righteousness, not by deeds of the law, not by ceremonies, prayers, or resolutions; but by the precious blood of Christ! Oh! We must be very pointed, and very plain about regeneration, for this is the very heart of the matter -- "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[\[4\]](#)

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit and the One Church," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 4* [electronic edition] (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997), 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "The Work of the Holy Spirit," vol. 4, 185-186.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., "The New Heart," vol. 4, 667-68.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., "Natural or Spiritual," vol. 7, 872-74.



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## ***On Regeneration***

*Charles H. Spurgeon*

[Some of the language has been updated for the modern reader.]

The first work of the Spirit in the heart is a work during which the Spirit is compared to the *wind*. You remember that when our Savior spoke to Nicodemus he represented the first work of the Spirit in the heart as being like the wind that "blows where it wishes;" "so" he says, "is every one who is born of the Spirit." Now you know that the wind is a most mysterious thing; and although certain definitions pretend to explain the phenomenon, all of them leave the great question of how the wind blows, and the cause of its blowing in a certain direction, where it was before. Breath within us, winds around us, all air movements are mysterious to us. And the renewing work of the Spirit in the heart is exceedingly mysterious.

It is possible that at this moment the Spirit of God may be breathing into some of the thousand hearts before me; yet it would be blasphemous if anyone should ask, "Which way did the Spirit of God enter into such a heart? How did it enter there?" And it would be foolish for a person who is under the operation of the Spirit to ask how it operates: you do not know where the storehouse of thunder is located; you do not know where the clouds are balanced; neither can you know how the Spirit goes forth from the Most High and enters into the heart of man.

It may be that during a sermon two men are listening to the same truth; one of them hears as attentively as the other and remembers as much of it; the other is melted to tears or moved with solemn thoughts; but the one, though equally attentive,

sees nothing in the sermon except that certain important truths were clearly declared; as for the other, his heart is broken within him and his soul is melted. Ask me how it is that the same truth has an effect upon the one, and not upon his fellow: I reply, because the mysterious Spirit of the living God goes with the truth to one heart and not to the other. The one only feels the force of truth, and that may be strong enough to make him tremble, like Felix; but the other feels the Spirit going with the truth, and that renews and regenerates him, and causes him to enter into that gracious condition which is called the state of salvation.

This change takes place instantaneously. It is as miraculous a change as any miracle we read about in Scripture. It is supremely supernatural. It may be mimicked, but no imitation can be true and real. Men may pretend to be regenerated without the Spirit, but they cannot be regenerated in actuality. It is a change so marvelous that the highest attempts of man can never reach it. We may reason as long as we please, but we cannot reason ourselves into regeneration; we may meditate until our hairs are gray with study; but we cannot meditate ourselves into the new birth. The new birth is accomplished in us by the sovereign will of God alone.

*"The Spirit, like some heavenly wind,  
Blows on the sons of flesh,  
Inspires us with a heavenly mind,  
And forms the man afresh."*

Ask the regenerate man how: he cannot tell you. Ask him when: he may recognize the time, but as to how he knows no more than you do. It is a mystery.

You remember the story of the valley of vision. Ezekiel saw dry bones lying scattered here and there in the valley. The command came to Ezekiel, "Say to these dry bones, live." He said, "Live," and the bones came together, "bone to his bone, and flesh came upon them" but they did not live. "Prophesy, son of man; say to the wind, breathe upon these slain, that they may live." They looked just like life: there was flesh and blood there; there were the eyes and hands and feet; but when Ezekiel spoke there was a mysterious something given that men call life, and it was given in a mysterious way, like the blowing of the wind. It is even so today. Unconverted and ungodly persons may be very moral and excellent; they are like the dry bones when they are put together and clothed with flesh and blood. Nevertheless, they needed the divine breath of the Almighty--the divine *pneuma*, the divine Spirit, the divine wind--to blow upon them to make them live.

Say, my hearers, have you ever had such a supernatural influence on your heart? For if not, it may seem that I am being harsh with you, but I am simply being faithful: if you have never had more in your heart than you were born with, you are "in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." No, sir, don't sneer at that remark; it is as true as this Bible, for it was taken from this Bible, and you should listen carefully to this for further proof: "unless one is born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God." What is your response? It is useless for you to talk of causing yourself to be born again; you cannot be born again except by the Spirit, and you must perish unless you are. You see, then, the first effect of the Spirit, and by that you may answer the question.[\[1\]](#)

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And, my brethren, it is quite certain that *no man ever begins the new birth himself*. The work of salvation was never started by any man. God the Holy Spirit must begin it. Now, the reasons why no man ever started the work of grace in his own heart, are very plain and palpable: firstly, because he cannot; and secondly, because he will not.

The best reason of all is because he cannot--he is dead. Well, the dead may be made alive, but the dead cannot make themselves alive, for the dead can do nothing. Besides, the new thing to be created has no being. The uncreated cannot create. "No," but you say, "that man can create." Yes, but can hell create heaven? Then sin may create grace. What! Will you tell me that fallen human nature that has come almost to a level with the beasts, is competent to rival God; that it can emulate the divinity in working as great a miracle, and in imparting as divine a life as even God himself can give? It cannot. Besides, it is a creation; we are *created* new in Christ Jesus. Let any man create a fly, and afterwards let him create

a new heart in himself; until he has done the lesser he cannot do the greater.

Besides, no man will. If any man could convert himself, there is no man that would. If any man said he would, if that were true, he is already converted; for the will to be converted is in great part conversion. The will to love God, the desire to be in unison with Christ, is not to be found in any man who has not already been reconciled with God through the death of his Son. There may be a false desire, a desire grounded upon a misrepresentation of the truth; but a true desire after true salvation by the true Spirit is a certain indication that the salvation is already there in the germ and in the bud, and only needs time and grace to develop itself.

But it is certain that man neither can nor will, being on the one hand utterly impotent and dead, and on the other hand utterly depraved and unwilling; hating the change when he sees it in others, and most of all despising it in himself. Be certain, therefore, that God the Holy Spirit must begin, since none else can do so.[\[2\]](#)

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When God first begins the work of changing the heart, he finds man totally averse to any such thing. By nature man kicks and struggles against God: he will not be saved. I must confess I never would have been saved, if I could have helped it. As long I could I rebelled and revolted, and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray: when he would have me listen to the sound of preaching, I would not. Moreover, when I did listen and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. When my heart was a little touched, I tried to divert it with sinful pleasures. And when that would not do I tried self-righteousness, and would not have been saved until I was hemmed in, and then he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort of his grace. It conquered my depraved will, and made me bow myself before the scepter of his grace.

So it is in every case. Man revolts against his Maker and his Savior; but where God determines to save, save he will. God will have the sinner, if he designs to have him. God has never yet been thwarted in any one of his purposes. Man resists with all his might, but all the might of man--tremendous though it is on account of sin--is not equal to the majestic might of the Most High when he rides forth in the chariot of his salvation. He irresistibly saves and victoriously conquers man's heart.

To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life; but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second, swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today as an enemy of God with a wicked heart, hard as a stone, and dead and cold; but if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble--begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy. Other parts of salvation are done gradually but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace.[\[3\]](#)

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You may educate a nature until it attains the highest point, but you cannot educate an old nature into a new one. You may educate a horse, but you cannot educate it into a man. You shall train the bird that sits upon your finger but you cannot train a limpet into an eagle, nor is it possible for you to train by the best instruction the natural man into a spiritual man. Between the two there is still a great gulf fixed.

Can the natural man, by great and sustained efforts, at last come to be spiritual? No, he cannot.... Therefore, you may make yourselves the best of natural men. You may become the most patriotic of statesmen, you may become the most sober and discreet of moralists, you may become the kindest and most benevolent of philanthropists, but into a spiritual man you cannot bring yourself. Your very best efforts are useless, because there is a division, wide as eternity, between you and the regenerate man.

Can another man help us out of such a nature into a state of grace? By no means! As man is powerless for himself, so is he powerless for his fellow.... How, then, is it to be done? The Spirit of God alone can do it. O, sirs! This is a great mystery, but you must know it if you would be saved; it is a solemn secret, but it is one that must be known in your consciences, or else you must be shut out from heaven. The Spirit of God must make you new; you must be born again. "If a man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The same power which raised Christ Jesus from the dead must be exerted in raising us from the dead, the very same Omnipotence, without which angels or worms could not have had a being, must again step forth and do as great a work as it did at the first creation in making us anew in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There have been continuous attempts to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian Church itself tries to forget it, but as often as this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward with clarity, God is pleased to favor his Church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trumpet of God to awake the dead, and where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grate upon the carnal ear, though it excites enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it.

This was the staple preaching of Whitefield, and it was by this preaching that he was made as the mighty angel flying through the midst of heaven, preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature. He was always great upon that which he called the great R--Regeneration. Whenever you heard him, the three R's came out clearly--Ruin, Regeneration, and Redemption! Man ruined, wholly ruined, hopelessly helplessly, eternally ruined! Man regenerated by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone wholly made a new creature in Christ! Man redeemed, redeemed by precious blood from all his sins: not by works of righteousness, not by deeds of the law, not by ceremonies, prayers, or resolutions; but by the precious blood of Christ! Oh! We must be very pointed, and very plain about regeneration, for this is the very heart of the matter -- "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[\[4\]](#)

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit and the One Church," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 4* [electronic edition] (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997), 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "The Work of the Holy Spirit," vol. 4, 185-186.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., "The New Heart," vol. 4, 667-68.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., "Natural or Spiritual," vol. 7, 872-74.



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