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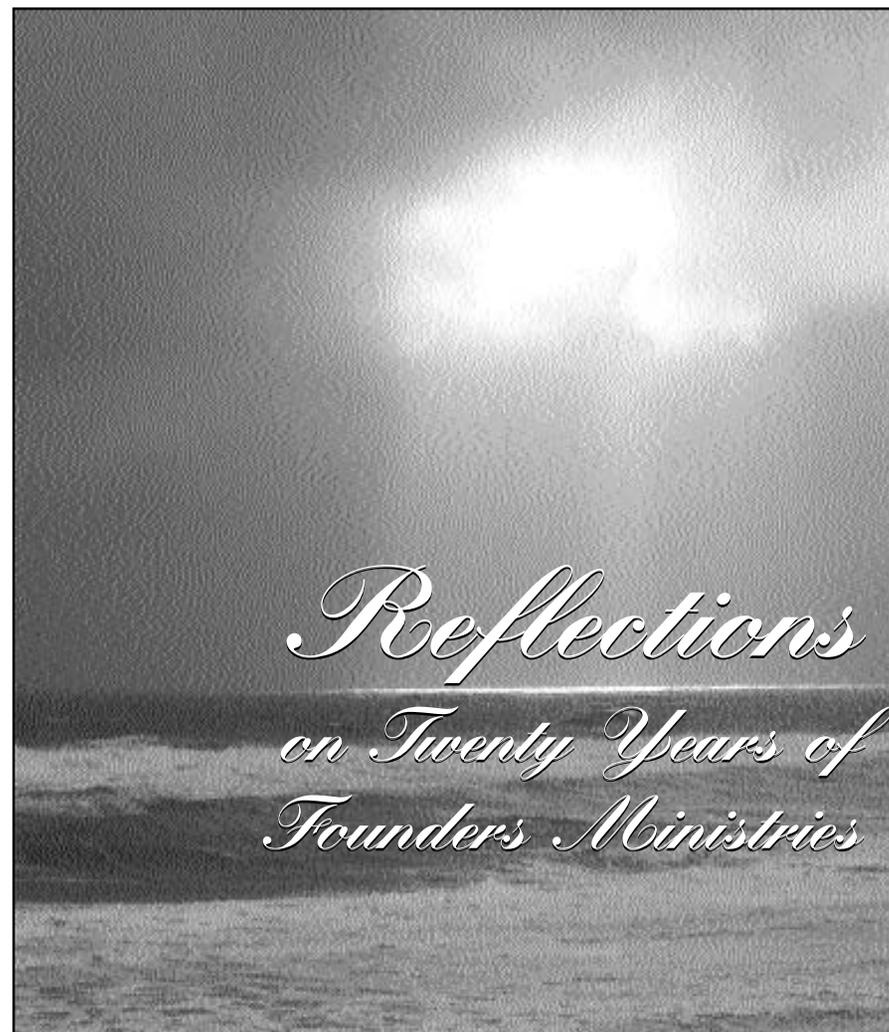
# The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Southern Baptist principles

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Tropical Storm, Panama City Beach, FL. Photo by William D Lollar.

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# The Founders Journal



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# Reflections on Twenty Years of Founders Ministries

*Tom Ascol*

THE LATE JAMES BOICE ONCE POINTED OUT that we tend “to overestimate what God will do in one year and greatly underestimate what He will do in twenty.” I have discovered that tendency in my own thinking about reformation and revival. It is hard to believe that the Southern Baptist Founders Conference has been around that long, but the recent meeting in Birmingham, Alabama constituted our twentieth gathering. The euphoria of the first conference caused some of us who were there to think that we were on the brink of a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit that would sweep across the nation and around the world in a matter of years if not months. By the time the fourth or fifth conference had come and gone, the organizing committee had to fight disillusionment and even entertained suggestions that what we were trying to do simply could not be done.

Now, twenty years later, we can look back with thanksgiving and praise to God for what He has done among us. During those years thousands of students, pastors and church leaders have participated in the annual conference. Before moving in 1991 to the campus of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama the conference met for eight years on the campus of what is now Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Many additional ministries have also emerged out of the conference since its inception.

Six regional conferences are currently meeting across the country. Founders Fraternalists have been organized to encourage pastors in a more regular way and meet in 18 different locations. *The Founders Journal* is in its twelfth year of publication. Founders Press has published fifteen books. Our web site attracts over 200,000 hits each month. The Founders Internship ministry has provided for church-based training for several men who were preparing for the pastorate.

In addition to all this, Founders Ministries has also had a part in inspiring conferences and reformation efforts in several nations around the world. A growing number of pastors and churches are being encouraged to pursue biblical reformation in local congregations. That has been the goal of Founders from our inception—to see healthy churches joyfully and wholeheartedly pursuing that new life in Christ that the Bible clearly sets before us.

By God’s grace, this is happening. The Gospel of God’s grace is being rediscovered in our day. Churches are being renewed and reformed according to the Word of God. New churches are being planted with firm commitment to the doctrines of grace and biblical church order. A whole generation of younger pastors is being raised up by God to keep pressing forward in this great cause. The Lord has indeed done far more in the last twenty years than we could have imagined at the start. The advance of reformation transcends geographical and denominational boundaries. It is humbling and gratifying to look back and see how God has been pleased to use the efforts of Founders Ministries to make His

truth known. That He has done so illustrates His revealed *modus operandi* of using “foolish,” “weak,” “base” and “despised” vessels to accomplish His purposes on the earth (1 Corinthians 1:27–28).

The twentieth meeting of the Founders Conference precedes by a few months the fiftieth issue of the *Founders Journal*. Both milestones are worth noting with praise and thanksgiving to God. The first conference was planned and organized as the result of a prayer meeting that took place on November 13, 1982. On that occasion seven men gathered in a motel room in Euless, Texas to consider what could be done to call pastors and church leaders back to the historic, biblical principles that had characterized Southern Baptist church life at the founding of the convention in 1845. After spending half of the day in prayer, those men agreed to plan a conference that would be based upon the doctrines of grace as they had been historically articulated by our Southern Baptist forebears.

It was an interesting collection of men in that room. Ernie Reisinger was the senior voice of experience. He was then serving as Pastor of North Pompano Baptist Church in North Pompano, Florida. Today he is retired and living in Cape Coral, Florida. R. F. Gates was a full-time evangelist from Shreveport, Louisiana. He still lives there, serving as an elder and evangelist in the Heritage Baptist Church. Tom Nettles was a Professor of Church History at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee. Today he is a Professor of Historical Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Fred Malone was preparing for PhD studies at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas and planting Heritage Baptist Church in that city. Today he is Pastor of First Baptist Church in Clinton, Louisiana. Bill Ascol was Assistant Pastor at Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport. Today he is the Pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in that same city. Ben Mitchell was an MDiv student at Southwestern and was helping Fred with the church plant. Today, he is a professor of Ethics at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. I was also there that day. I was an Assistant Pastor at Spring Valley Baptist Church in Dallas and an MDiv student at Southwestern. Today I pastor the Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

Ernie Reisinger was the one who had given the most careful thought to our deliberations before we met. He made all the arrangements and prepared for us to read selected Psalms and hymns along with our prayers. Ben Mitchell chaired the meeting and led us through the agenda that Ernie had prepared. After several hours of considering concerns and challenges we agreed to organize a gathering for pastors and seminary students who were interested in seeing theological and spiritual renewal take place within the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

A Statement of Principles was drafted, assignments were made, and the result was the first Southern Baptist Conference on the Faith of the Founders (quickly—and mercifully—shortened to “Founders Conference”).

Following is the original Statement of Principles that was drafted in that hotel room:

#### **The Motive**

The motive of the conference is to glorify God, honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches by providing encouragement to Southern Baptists in historical, biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies.

#### **The Purpose**

The purpose of the conference is to establish and continue an annual meeting under the oversight of a local Southern Baptist Church for Southern Baptist ministers, elders, deacons, and theological students.

#### **The Nature**

The desire is to be a balanced conference in respect to doctrine and devotion expressed in the doctrines of grace and their experimental application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness. This is to be accomplished through engaging a variety of speakers to present formal papers, sermons, expositions, and devotions, and through the recommendation and distribution of literature consistent with the nature of the conference.

#### **The Subjects and Procedures**

The theological foundation of the conference will be the doctrines of grace (election, depravity, atonement, effectual calling, and perseverance) and specifically related truths. These subjects will be presented doctrinally, expositionally, homiletically, and historically. Each conference will concentrate on the experimental and pastoral application of the respective doctrines.

After six years the conference was moved from the oversight of a local church to being governed by a board of trustees and supported by several local churches. Other than that, those same principles that were articulated to guide the conference continue to guide the expanded work of Founders Ministries today.

More than 250 presentations have been made at the National Founders Conference over the last two decades. That number is more than doubled when the Regional Conferences are considered. Such themes as Sanctification, Law and Gospel, World Missions, Biblical Evangelism, Preachers and Preaching, Pastoral Ministry, The Puritans, Baptist History and Heritage, The Invitation System, Ecclesiology and The Sufficiency of Scripture have been addressed.

The journal has similarly addressed a wide variety of topics from doctrinal, historical, biographical, expositional, devotional, pastoral and practical points of view. Even a cursory review of the individual conference messages and journal articles would immediately dispel the myth that Founders Ministries is only concerned with Calvinism. Our burden and aim has been and remains the recovery of the Gospel and the reformation and revival of local churches.

God has been pleased to strengthen the hands of the growing number of believers who have been captured by this vision. We have more reasons to be encouraged today than at any time in the previous twenty years. With all the good that we can observe taking place around us, there is still much more going on than can be measured. There is far more seed in the ground than there are plants that have already sprouted.

So join with us in giving thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness and blessing over the past twenty years. And pray that He will pour out His Spirit on us in a powerful, earth-shaking way as we press forward by His grace toward the next twenty.

## News

### Founders Twentieth Anniversary Book

A special book marking this milestone in the history of Founders is scheduled for release this fall. Select sermons and papers presented at each year's conference over the last twenty years have been compiled for publication in a book including messages from John Piper, John MacArthur, Ligon Duncan, Don Whitney, Walter Chantry, and many more! Place your pre-publication order before December 1, 2002 and receive the book at the discounted price of \$14.95 (\$24.95 retail). Include a check or money order for \$14.95 plus \$2.25 per book for shipping and handling costs and send your order to: Founders Press, P.O. Box 150931, Cape Coral, FL 33915.

### Founders Study Guide Commentary Series

The next commentary in the series for publication is *1 Corinthians* by Curtis Vaughan and Thomas Lea. The release of this title is anticipated by the end of the year. Watch for it on our website ([www.founders.org](http://www.founders.org))!

### The Gospel Among the Jewish Nation

Baruch and Bracha Maoz, ARBCA missionaries in Israel are planning their next deputation trip to the USA for 2004. If you are interested in Israel and the progress of the gospel among the Jewish nation and would like Baruch to address your group or church in 2004, you are invited to contact him by e-mail at [maozsec@attglobal.net](mailto:maozsec@attglobal.net). Further information regarding their ministry can be found on their website ([www.graceandtruthbulletin.org](http://www.graceandtruthbulletin.org)).

### B. H. Carroll CD

Carroll's, *Interpretation of the English Bible* is now available on CD in Word Perfect, Word and Adobe Acrobat formats. The disk contains all seventeen volumes of the original work. Though the files are not easily identifiable on the disk, they can be accessed and completely reformatted into your own word processor. Contact K. David Oldfield for information and ordering at 5325 E. Woodland Drive, Post Falls, ID 83854-4505 or by email at [kdoidaho@earthlink.net](mailto:kdoidaho@earthlink.net).

## The Covenantal Integrity of the Local Church

*Jim Elliff*

CHAPTER 5 OF 1 CORINTHIANS HELPS US consider the covenantal nature of the New Testament Church. This is a short chapter with only 13 verses out of which I wish to uncover five observations. After those five observations, I would like to give practical consideration to our assimilating members into a local church and how to give oversight of them.

In 1837 a protracted meeting was held in Eatonton, Georgia. A number of people had been converted and one day they were all gathering by the river for a baptism. One of the persons being baptized was a teenage girl. Her name was Caroline—shortened, Carrie. Carrie had come to Christ with a great deal of conviction. She said in her own testimony, “I desire to be even more devoted to my Savior than I have ever been to the world.” There at the riverside was one of her friends who was yet unconverted whose name was Julia. Julia, in fact, had been very close to Carrie in all of kinds of worldly exploits. So this unsaved girl was now watching the baptism of her closest friend. Somebody recorded the event in what I think is rather eloquent terminology:

Of course everybody was there. The banks of that little stream were lined with crowds of interested spectators...Julia, of Monticello, her bosom friend and companion in her worldly course, seemed loathe to leave her even for a moment and clung to her till she reached the water's edge. A hymn was sung and [minister C. D.] Mallory made a few remarks and offered prayer, when [minister John] Dawson took Caroline by the hand and led her down the shelving bank into the limpid stream. They had attained about half the desired depth, when she requested him to stop a moment, and, turning to those on the bank, waving her hand, she said, “Farewell, young friends! Farewell, Julia!” The effect was electrical. The whole audience convulsed, and tears rained down from eyes unused to weeping...Upon coming up out of the water, Julia rushed forward to meet her friend, embracing her, and crying out in agonizing tones, “Oh, Carrie! You must not leave me! Mr. Dawson, pray for me. Mr. Mallory, pray for me?” (Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion*, New York: Oxford, 1997, p. 16).

This moving account properly illustrates that great division between the world and the church. Here is a young girl who saw herself as leaving the companions of the world for the companionship and the fellowship of the

local church. She would now have a new set of friends. She would find her great joys among that new set of friends. More than likely, she would spend her life among them in this very community. As a believer she was now choosing to live entirely differently than she had before—God giving her the grace to do that. That’s the proper picture and that’s what baptism helps us to see—that is, it is a visible way of seeing that tremendous difference and that great line between the world and the church. In our day, most take this coming into the church in a much lighter vein. We don’t see it so deeply and meaningfully as Caroline saw it when she was baptized so many years ago.

The Corinthian Church was a church that had begun to blur the distinction between the world and the church. They were a problem-filled fellowship, not unlike many of our churches today. One of their problems had to do with this blending of the world and the church by their attitude concerning an evil person among them.

1 Corinthians 5 describes the sin the church was committing and how they were violating the covenant that was between them. Notice the forceful way the Apostle Paul tells the church to act in relationship to this individual who has sinned. There are five or six very strong phrases such as “*take them away*” or “*put them away*” or “*do not associate with them,*” etc. Look for those and feel the impact of this passage:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

You can sense the Apostle’s intense desire to keep the covenant community pure. Five observations coming out of this text of Scripture will help us to uncover the meaning—some of the import—of our covenant relationship with each other in the membership of a local church.

## The Church is a Society with Rules

The first observation is found in verses 1 and 2. “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” The observation from these first two verses is very simply this: *When you enter into the church of the living God, you are joining a society with rules.*

Obviously the rule that is glaring at us right here is the command: there will be no sexual immorality in the church. That is not the only rule, however. If you go on down in the text, you find that Paul says in verse 11, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, [one form of which has already been mentioned] or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

There will be no extortion; there will be no idolatry; there will be no greed; there will be no drunkenness; there will be no reviling. There will be no deacon who reviles. There will be no Sunday School teacher who is covetous. There will be no member who is a drunkard on the sly. There are rules in the church.

The Apostle Paul is actually shocked at what these people are doing. He’s sort of gasping as he hears this report and says what he says with his mouth agape. He’s trying to display to them that this is a very foolish and difficult place in which they find themselves because they have actually condoned sexual immorality—and that of a sort that even Gentiles condemn. In other words, even among the world, which is what the word “Gentiles” really conveys, there is a measure of decorum and some conviction that this is wrong. Even in our day of an elasticized conscience, most of society, even the unbelieving society, would say that it is wrong for a man to have his father’s wife in a sexual relationship. So, Paul is absolutely shocked. But the church on the other side, rather than being shocked and having a kinship with the apostle in his amazement, is tolerating it beautifully.

Paul attributes their failure to be shocked to simple arrogance. He says they are puffed up instead of mourning, indicating that they are proud of their tolerance. We think in our day that such toleration is high in the hierarchy of virtues and, therefore, a person surely is not Christian unless he or she is tolerating every kind of indiscretion. Some of us speak as if this was a new thought pattern but it’s an old Corinthian problem.

It is also somewhat difficult for churches to realize that we have rules and we must abide by them because somehow some of us think that such strictness mitigates against a good and correct concept of grace. In other words, here is a person who has come along having lived a sexually immoral life, let’s say, or

having lived in the world and done many awful things, but he comes to Jesus Christ and the Lord does not take his former life into account—He erases everything that has happened before and He receives him by grace on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done.

So we say, the church must not have any rules because if we come to Christ by grace and are fully accepted by grace we must be accepted graciously by the church regardless of what we are doing. But that's not what this text teaches. This text teaches that when we come into the church, we come into a society with rules.

I don't believe we are strict enough in our churches. Below is one congregation's rules about membership. I am not saying I espouse what they are doing or how they are saying it. But, I want to show you one congregation that at least has some strictness about what it means to be a member. They say this in their by-laws:

Any member who does not have a registered attendance, identified financial support, definite service contribution, and/or expressed interest in loyalty within a six month's period, shall be notified by the Board of Directors in writing within 30 days prior to any congregational meeting that he or she has been placed on an inactive member list and is not eligible to vote at any meeting of the church.

Again, I'm not suggesting that this group has discovered the best way to deal with membership. I'm just saying, here is a group that has some strictness about what it means to be a member.

Would you like to know who these people are? This by-law comes from the Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles—the famous gay, lesbian, transvestite and bisexual organization. Now what I'm telling you is this: they are stricter than you are. Chances are very good that if you had a homosexual or bisexual person in your congregation, your church would be puffed up and would tolerate what they find, or, at a minimum, your church would not know what to do, nor would it have the will to do it. On top of that, most churches have no enforceable rules about membership. Which group then is the strictest? This text teaches that a local church is to have rules and members must abide by them.

### The Church is a Society that is to Judge Its Members

The second observation is found in verses 3–5: “For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has done this deed.” By the way, he does not mention a continued action here but a single completed action, (i.e. “this deed”), and he mentions that twice. He continues, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

The second observation is this: *The church is a society that judges its*

*members.* In fact that the very word “judge” is used here in the passage ought to forever dispel the concept that Christians never judge. Christians do judge. It's true that Jesus said, “Judge not lest you be judged,” but what He meant, of course, is that we are not to have that kind of critical judgment which puts down another in order to elevate ourselves. But to judge the members of a covenant community is absolutely necessary for the church to do. In fact, in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians we find a full explanation about how courts ought to be set up within the church to judge between brothers. There are a number of passages that speak to the judgment that is made by believers. Every church discipline situation is a judgment situation. The church is clearly a society that judges its members.

Now the Apostle Paul is very exercised here. The commentator Hendrickson said that he takes the gavel in his hand, so to speak, and chairs the meeting of the local church even though he is absent. He says, “even though I'm not with you as though I were present with you, my spirit being present with you.” He's so adamant about what he believes and so sure that this man ought to be judged that, in essence, he says, “Just think of me as being there, and I'll tell you ahead of time what my decision is. This man is to be expelled.” Then he adds to that, “not only as if I were there with my apostolic authority, but with the name or the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as well!” In other words, he is absolutely sure where Jesus stands on this issue also.

“Deliver the man to Satan.” Now the delivering to Satan is simply another way of saying that they were to excommunicate the man from the church. Simply put, here is a man professing to be a Christian and claiming to be under the headship of Christ by his membership in the local church, but in fact he is acting as a non-Christian. He is to be put away from you and put out into the world where Satan is the authority. Satan, being a cruel taskmaster, will make it hard on his body and hopefully he will be converted before the Day of the Lord. As he remembers what the church was like, what he has heard from the church and all those who loved him, perhaps he will yet be truly converted. I think that is the essence of what is being said. Again, the second observation again, is this: The church is a society that judges its members.

### The Church Has Good Reason to Expect Its Members to Conform to the Rules

The third observation is this: The church not only has rules and must judge its members, but *the church has good reason to expect members to conform to the rules.* Note verses 6 through 8: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore, purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

The good reason is, of course, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. He is saying to these people, “You are the unleavened of God.” In the Old Testament picture in the Passover, the Jews would take a period of days to clean

up every speck of leaven from their house before Passover. Leaven represented evil and all of the leaven, therefore, was to be removed. Then they were able to sacrifice the Passover Lamb. Paul says, in paraphrase, “Christ has been sacrificed and you are, therefore, the unleavened as the church of God. That’s who you are, but somehow you have added to yourselves this man who has done this evil and it has caused some leaven (or evil) to enter into the fellowship. You had better be careful to remove it. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. Purge this leaven out from you.”

What would happen if you left a chicken you were planning to cook on the counter for about two weeks before using it? I don’t know where maggots come from, but I am sure that they would show up in that chicken. They would be there crawling in and out of the carcass right on your counter. The place would stink and you would know you have a contaminated piece of meat. Now what if you took that contaminated piece of meat and you put it in a container with a fresh chicken? What would happen? Well, obviously, the fresh chicken would overwhelm the contamination of the rotten chicken, correct? No! It doesn’t ever work that way, does it? Rather, the rotten chicken would actually contaminate the fresh chicken and ruin it.

Somehow we have gotten the idea that we should tolerate sin in our churches and be so magnanimous that any kind of person may be allowed among our church people. We think, somehow, we will surely improve them. But the opposite is actually happening. What the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 is true. Do you believe it? It is true that there are people who struggle with sin and want desperately to rid themselves of it. We should be glad to have people who are weak, yet seeking help. But this is another case.

We cannot just *say* it is true that evil people contaminate the rest, however, without corresponding action. If these evil persons among you are not lovingly disciplined, your supposed gracious spirit will be the ruin of some. A little leaven does leaven the whole lump of dough. So if you’ve got that Sunday School teacher who is getting drunk in private or that greedy businessman who steals from his employer, or that person who is slandering others, you are arrogant to permit this to continue. Haggai 2:10–14 and Hebrews 12: 14–16 tell us that very clearly. Even if no other Scripture mentioned it, this passage would be enough. In fact, common sense itself ought to tell us that there is good reason to judge those who are consistently disobedient among us.

### When a Church Judges Its Members, It Removes Its Most Precious Gift—Fellowship

The fourth observation is found in verses 9–11:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a

brother [a so-called brother], who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

The fourth observation is this: *Ultimately, when a church judges its members, it withdraws its most precious gift—its fellowship.* Because our churches are so worldly and mixed, we haven’t really known the joys and the beauty of a covenant community as it’s supposed to be. We therefore think it has very little potency to actually remove somebody from the church. But if you’ve ever known the beauty of relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ and have tasted the sweetness of that kind of relationship, it would almost destroy you to think of being removed from it.

When I think of my own propensity to sin and the foolish things that I could do, and then think that I could stupidly fall into some kind of gross sin and lose fellowship with the people that I love the most in all of this world, it’s just too much for me. Such a thought stops me in my tracks and it makes me say I don’t want to be that kind of man. I want to be careful about the way that I live.

Paul declares that the church is not even to eat with such a one. In fact several very strong statements are made, aren’t they? Look at verse 2: “That he might be taken away from among you.” And he says in verse 5: “Deliver such a one to Satan.” Next he urges in verse 7: “Purge out the old leaven.” Then he reminds them in verse 11: “I have written to you not to keep company with anyone . . . .” And the end of verse 11 says: “Not even to eat with such a one.” Then finally when we get to the end of the chapter, verse 13, he charges: “Put away (or expel) from yourselves the evil person.”

When you discipline a person who is not repenting, you will come to that extreme place where the person is to be put away from you. What do those words mean? Do they mean that the person should not be permitted to the Lord’s Table? Yes, he is, at least, affirming that. The Lord’s Supper is the greatest expression of our union with Christ and with each other. In fact, it’s probably what is meant by the metaphor he uses in verse 8: “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven.” He is saying, do not let us come to the Table of the Lord with the old leaven or the leaven of evil, maliciousness, etc. Yes, it means that certainly.

It also means that we put him out from the membership of the church by taking him off the rolls so that he does not contribute to the decision-making of the church or have the privilege of representing the church. It also means that he would not be given the appellation, “Christian,” or “brother.” Could it possibly mean as well that the person is not even allowed to sit with you in the meeting for worship? I believe so. He may be allowed to attend some evangelistic meeting where the gospel is being explained but not in the worship of the church. You see, the early church of Corinth and other early churches, it appears, took communion every Lord’s Day. There would be communion and very often a meal together. We find this in chapter eleven. So this restriction of being removed from communion would certainly be applicable to their regular gathering.

What is the most common occasion for that fellowship if it’s not our gathering together under the preaching of the Word and prayer, the sharing the

“one another” and communion on the Lord’s Day? What is fellowship if it is not at least that? When you are meeting for the express purpose of worshipping God and having fellowship with believers, you must not allow the man under discipline to enjoy that privilege. I know that 1 Corinthians 14 speaks of a non-believer wandering in to the church and being convicted by the prophetic word. But this is not the man who is expressly being forbidden this privilege. This language is awfully strong where it says, “taken away from among you” or “expel” or “put away from yourselves the evil person.” “Do not even associate with them.” “Do not even eat with them.”

We have a meal in our church every Sunday when we gather together, but we’re not even to eat with that person. Our fellowship is the most precious gift we have to give our professing brothers and sisters, but God says ultimately we must withdraw that to keep the church pure and to do the best for the sinning person. You see, church discipline is not just for the individual. It hopes that the person under the cruel mastery of the devil might come to his senses and be saved for the day of the Lord. But, I believe it is mainly for the purity of the church. God intends for His church to be pure.

### Failure to Purge Out Those Who are Wicked Among You is Flagrant Disobedience

My final observation is found in verses 12 and 13: “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.” The observation is simply this: *Failure of the church to purge wicked people from among them is flagrant disobedience on the church’s part.*

To fail in this is a double disobedience and a double shame. On the one hand, it is the hosting of evil in your midst that is wrong and dangerous. But the other shame is this: the church is not obeying the clear command of God. And that is the emphasis in this text. When he says, “expel from yourselves that evil person,” he quotes Old Testament passages from the book of Deuteronomy. There it is mentioned in the singular. The subject “you,” the implied “you” of the imperative, (*you* put away, *you* expel) is in the singular in Deuteronomy. But the Apostle Paul changes that to the plural, and speaks to the whole church. He says “you together” purge away or expel this person from your midst. It is an obvious and plain command from the Lord Himself. We cannot deny that God has commanded this and failure on the part of the church to do this is clearly sin on the church’s part.

This is the reason why churches who come to their senses about their failure to be a church and to protect the preciousness of the covenant relationship will often be on their faces in repentance when they see what God requires. They will say, “Oh God, we as a church have disobeyed You. We have taken lightly Your command to protect the fellowship of the church. This is sin and dangerous neglect on our part.” It’s something for the church to repent of, and there is a lot of information in the Scriptures about churches as a whole repenting of sin.

### Practical Matters: How Do We Do What God Commands?

Finally, let’s consider a few practical matters.

What do you do when a person wishes to come into the membership of the local church and you have a high view of the preciousness of our covenant relationships? I want to suggest that four matters need to be brought up in an interview—an extensive interview, or perhaps, if necessary, a series of interviews—with the individual who wishes to be part of your church. Joining a church should not be superficial exercise.

First of all, there should be a great deal of time given to understanding whether this person has an authentic conversion. We must go into some detail here, not just securing the simple expression from the person, “I was converted at this time and in this setting,” but a careful kind of questioning through each of the details of the applicant’s conversion and life. We are not just looking for the history of an experience, but whether the person has understanding and shows evidence of a genuine change. You must look very hard at the life and the present condition. As far as I can tell from Scripture, we cannot determine that a person is a Christian simply on the basis of his verbal testimony, but we look at his life *now* to see if he is a believer. Is he really a changed person?

One of the leaders in understanding Welsh revivals is a man by the name of Eifon Evans. A number of his books have been very helpful to me. He has compiled several of his monographs into one book called *Fire in the Thatch*. In speaking about the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales and how people entered into membership with them, he mentions a series of questions they asked candidates for membership during one period of their history. These questions show the seriousness with which they took membership:

Are you convicted of sin? Have you been awakened by God’s grace? Do you admit your moral inability to do good in and of yourself? Do you accept the imputed righteousness of Christ in salvation and that God’s Spirit alone is the author of that faith whereby you believe? Have you felt the Spirit of God inclining you to forsake sin and to embrace Christ? Have you counted the cost of following Christ? Though you have not yet received the witness of the Spirit, do you prove in your heart that you desire God with your whole heart and that you will not rest until you have Him? Are you unwilling to rest until you know that you believe and truly hate all sin, until you have received the Spirit adoption within you? Do you accept and assent to the fundamental truths of the trinity, election, original sin, justification by faith, and perseverance in grace as taught in the 39 Articles? [As you know, early Methodist were part of the Anglican Church and their confession] Is it the love of Christ that constrains you to join our society, and are you prepared to abide by these rules? (Eifon Evans, *Fire in the Thatch*, Bryntirion: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1996, p. 113).

In our congregation, we’ve found the interviews with those petitioning for

membership to be wonderful sessions and often emotionally moving. If possible, all of our elders will meet with an individual coming into the church. These sessions last awhile and we talk carefully through everything. The meetings are not in the style of an inquisition, but are kind and gracious in every way. Some of them have been extensive conversations, wrestling with the issue of when or even if the person is a Christian, even though he professes to be. In some cases we have been surprised at what we have found as we probed and looked. In some cases individuals coming in have been amazed at what they discover regarding *when* they became a true Christian and whether they *now* needed baptism following true conversion.

Secondly, you need to get from that individual a willingness to be under the teaching as found in your statement of faith or your confession. It is important to have a confession. There are various ones you might choose from. Our confession is the modern edition of *The 1689 London Baptist Confession* with a few modifications. You might choose *The 1644 Baptist Confession*, or you might choose even *The Baptist Faith and Message*. You might wish to modify your confession in some way, or to write your own, because this is to be a document that fits as closely as possible what you believe the Bible says. It is important to realize that a confession is only a summary of what the church believes the Bible teaches and does not at all have the authority of the Bible itself.

You will not want to make full comprehension and endorsement of your confession mandatory for persons upon entering into the church. Some of these people will be new Christians, some of them are reading this kind of thing for the first time, and others may have limited ability to comprehend such a document. Some of them will not come to you understanding any of the fine points of theology that an extensive confession like the *1689* would bring out, so you don't expect that. It goes without saying that there are certain, cardinal doctrines that all must believe to be a Christian, but total conformity is not a requirement. To require full endorsement from incoming members is a sure way to have just four or five of you meeting as a church for the rest of your life.

You should, however, secure conformity to your confession in your leadership. All of your pastors, and those especially who have the job of extending the pastoral responsibility of teaching, should agree to the same confession. You are simply asking the incoming member to express to you that he or she understands that the theology of this confession is what will underlie all that will be taught. Give him a copy of the confession for their perusal sometime in the membership process. Of course, if he has questions in the initial interview, you will be happy to answer them. (You may find helpful the document, "How to Use a Confession of Faith" at [www.ccwonline.org](http://www.ccwonline.org) under "pastoral tools").

A third matter you will wish to take up with the incoming believer is an actual agreement to a covenant, which is a set of pledges the members make to each other. This may be done as a serious of questions the candidate for membership verbally answers, or by having him sign a covenant document. Timothy George states that "covenants were the ethical counterpart to confessions of faith. Confessions dealt with what one believed; church covenants spoke about how one should live" (Timothy George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996, p.14). Below is an illustration of a covenant. Some of the phrases and ideas are taken from other older

covenants. Additional concepts have been gathered from more modern ones.

*By the grace of God we have been led to repent of our sin and believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We have confessed our faith and been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now, therefore, in the presence of God and by His grace, we joyfully and solemnly enter into a holy covenant with the members of North Pointe Baptist Church.*

*We engage to walk together in Christian love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Unless providentially hindered, we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but faithfully attend the church's meetings for worship, prayer, study, and fellowship, and will use our spiritual gifts for the common good. We pledge to faithfully participate in the ordinances of the church, and endeavor after unity of mind in doctrine. We will both submit to the church's discipline upon ourselves and lovingly assume our responsibility to participate in the discipline of other members, as taught in Scripture. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to this church for its general ministry and expenses, the relief of the poor, the cause of reformation and revival, and the spread of the Gospel throughout all nations. We will strive by God's grace and power to live as Christ in the world; and denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we will seek to fulfill our calling to lead a holy life and to be salt and light. We will be just and honest in our dealings and faithful in our responsibilities and commitments. We will abide by the standards of sexual purity, ethical integrity, and spiritual fidelity as taught in the Bible. We will reject all heretical beliefs and practices, using Scripture as our final authority.*

*We purpose to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember one another in prayer, to help one another in sickness and distress, and to cultivate Christian compassion and courtesy. Believing that the pursuit of peace with others and personal holiness accompany true faith in Christ, we will be slow to take offense, always eager to seek the reconciliation Christ commands, and will work to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We resolve to practice personal and family worship, to train our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and to seek the salvation of our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, and of all the world. We promise that if, in the providence of God, we leave this church we will diligently seek to unite with another church where we can continue to carry out the spirit and principles of God's Word. (compiled first by Don Whitney and modified extensively by the elders of North Pointe Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri ([www.npbwebsite.org](http://www.npbwebsite.org)).*

A covenant is a select set of rules and admonitions found in the Scriptures that are useful for our walking together before God, in harmony and decorum, as those who represent the church and Christ in the world. It will not include every rule that could possibly be mentioned, although it includes a great number. Even though you are free to adopt the North Pointe covenant, you

may not like our wording, and you may disagree on a point here or there. This is why it is your responsibility to come to a covenant statement you believe properly states those matters God has commanded concerning how you are to live. I strongly suggest that you work slowly through whatever covenant you are adopting so that the believers will be able to offer their input and will have true ownership.

Finally, it is important that those petitioning for membership have a willingness to be disciplined by the church in the event they live an aberrant life. You may compose a discipline policy document to sign or have them formally agree in some other way to whatever statements are in a constitution concerning how the church disciplines. (Find a sample of a discipline policy under “ministry tools” at [www.ccwonline.org](http://www.ccwonline.org)).

After these issues are addressed satisfactorily, the person is ready for baptism leading to membership, or, if already baptized, to membership. For us, that means that they will share their testimony and their willingness to be in covenant with us before the whole church after which the church approves their membership and commits to love them even to the point of discipline. This takes church approval because we know that ultimately it is the church that will have to discipline them out of their fellowship at a later date if they enter into sin and persist without repentance. All of the above prepares the believer for his or her life in the local church and sets the stage for loving discipline when necessary.

Our forebears disciplined a sizeable number of people. This was true in all denominations. In the earliest days of the Baptist work in America to the 1800s there was a considerable amount of discipline. Again, in *Democratic Religion*, Wills states that in Georgia 3–4% of the Baptist people were brought to a church trial, and 1–2% actually had to be excommunicated on a yearly basis. These statistics we take to be somewhat representative of other parts of the country. They included discipline for non-attendance. We have neglected our responsibilities for a long time in this arena, but our backlog of undone work is no excuse for delay.

You who are leaders have been entrusted with a body of professing saints. You are not permitted to gather them and then fail to watch over them. You have a command from God as to the church’s covenantal nature. What will you do with that? We cannot blame others who have presented us with the problems for those which we are also passing on to the next generation.

## Book Review

Garry Wills. *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*. New York: Doubleday, 2000. Hardcover: 326 pages. \$25.00 Retail.

Reviewed by Erroll Hulse

This informative and highly readable volume is written by a well-known Roman Catholic writer. Wills has won several awards for his books. He is adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University in the USA.

It is a crucial book because it lifts the lid and enables us to see contemporary Roman Catholicism as it really is. It also reveals the gulf that has developed between the majority of practicing Roman Catholics around the world and the hierarchy which we call the curia. The book is especially important in America where many evangelicals are divided over ECT.

Wills divides his subject into two categories: historical dishonesties (11–70) and doctrinal dishonesties (71–230). The rest of the book is devoted to the quest for truth.

He introduces his subject by quoting Roman Catholic Lord Acton’s famous axiom, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Lord Acton, 1834–1904, (Sir J. E. E. Alberg, *First Baron Acton*) was speaking of papal absolutism. Gone are the days when a dissolute teenager could be elected Pope (John XII of the tenth century) because of his family connections and die a decade later in the bed of a married woman. Andrea Orcagna (c 1308–1368) painted the “Last Judgment” and depicted the papal crown in the fires of hell telling forth the message that the Pope is a terminal sinner damned forever (that part of Orcagna’s painting forms the dust cover of Wills’ book). While sexual scandal in the higher echelons, assassination, and Mafia-like corruption, are not typical now “there is still a gap, a widening lacuna [lacuna: a gap or missing part] between the teaching organs in Rome and the laity in the pew.”

This is important because there are large numbers of believing Catholics (some would claim to be evangelical) who blithely ignore Rome’s doctrines as Wills ably demonstrates. These Catholics would not dream of leaving the mother Church. They simply accept passively that there is a lot wrong with the papacy but there is nothing they can do about it. They reason that at least their Church is the historic true Church and therefore safer and better than Protestantism which is fragmented and riddled with its own problems.

### Historical dishonesties—the holocaust

This part of the book deals with the question of the Jews and the holocaust and could, with profit, be read alongside the recent book by John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope—the Secret History of Pius XII*, (Viking, 430 pages, £17.99). In

the latter, Cornwell (a Catholic), points to the fact that the Catholic Church in Germany was strong enough to have quashed the Nazi movement so that there would never have been a Jewish holocaust. But Pope Pius XII, Eugenio Pacelli, was in anti-Semitic and in league with Hitler. Pacelli saw Hitler as a bulwark against Communism. Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope* gained considerable attention in the media. Pacelli is an embarrassment to Rome as is the whole saga of sinful silence with regard to the disgraceful treatment of the Jews from 1933 to 1945. This is illustrated by a Roman-Jewish woman who survived Auschwitz. She asserted, "Pacelli was an anti-Semitic Pope, a pro-German Pope. He didn't take a single risk. And when they say the Pope is like Jesus Christ, it is not true. He did not save a single child. Nothing!"

How does the Catholic Church handle this debacle? A major attempt was made to address the issue at Vatican II. After much difficulty the following final statement was made:

True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6); still, what happened in his passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, or upon the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such a view followed from the holy Scripture— Besides, as the Church has always held and continues to hold, Christ in his boundless love freely underwent his passion and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation (25).

Observing the above, Wills points out that it is astonishing that there is no recognition of past persecution or any expression of sorrow and repentance.

Before we make judgment ourselves I challenge you to make up a statement of how you regard Jews. I suggest a biblical response as follows:

It is clear from the events of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 that the wrath of God did fall on that generation of Jews responsible for the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. It may well be that the 40 Jewish leaders who swore that they would not eat or drink until they had killed the apostle Paul (Acts 23:12) themselves perished in the obliteration of Jerusalem in AD 70. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16 we read, "The wrath of God has come upon them at last." Yet we do not exult in that but rather weep with Jesus who saw the AD 70 disaster and described it (Luke 19:41–44). The attitude that we should cherish for all Jews, wherever they may be found, is that expressed by the apostle Paul in Romans 9:1–5. The Nazi movement was diabolical and the holocaust was part of that wickedness. As believers we are utterly opposed to the persecution or victimization of any part of the human race. We oppose racism whatever its form.

Wills' thesis is to show how the Roman hierarchy has glossed over the Jewish holocaust and over the Jewish question generally. Part of that gloss has

been to canonize Edith Stein, a Jewish woman who converted to Catholicism and died a Carmelite nun in Auschwitz. Edith Stein died for no other reason than she was Jewish. She never performed a miracle which is a condition of canonization. Wills' concern is the use of deceit to establish good impressions to cover bad sagas.

## Doctrinal Dishonesties

### *Contraception*

In 1968 the papacy issued an encyclical letter on contraception which Wills describes as the most disastrous document of the century. This affected a vast number of people. The problem with the ban on contraception is the lack of biblical authority. He shows very well that the attempt to use the Onan passage (Genesis 38:9) to endorse the papal position is ill-grounded and is in fact absurd.

### *The Priesthood*

This is perhaps the most significant part of Wills' work as he completely dismantles the doctrine of the Roman Catholic priesthood. He shows that there is no basis for celibacy. He points to the fact that there is not a word in the New Testament to support the idea consecrating the bread and wine. In fact there is no case whatsoever for a special order of priesthood in the New Testament apart from the idea of the priesthood of all believers.

It is unpleasant reading but he goes on to show that celibacy has led to disastrous consequences. Research endorses this. For instance in 1990 a conservative estimate showed that about twenty percent of priests are sexually active with women at any one time, and twenty percent of priests are homosexually active (186). Alongside this is the problem for the Roman Catholic Church of ever diminishing numbers applying for the priesthood. Emptying or empty and defunct monasteries and nunneries are a world-wide phenomena.

Wills' tackles the terrible widespread problem of paedophilia in the Roman Catholic Church. The way in which this has festered and been covered up is criminal. A survey showed that from 1983 to 1987 an average of one case a week was reported. Not one diocese in America has been without its paedophilia case. Even worse, whole cultures of paedophilia have been uncovered (see conspiracy of silence page 175 ff).

This damaging reality is confirmed in England by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor who, in a gathering of priests on September 4, 2001, made the headlines with the claim that Christianity is almost vanquished in Britain. The cardinal spoke of the damage and shame brought to his Church by the scandal of paedophile priests. He said that priests, and especially bishops, had not been sufficiently aware of the "insidious" and "pathological" nature of child abuse and had not treated all allegations with the seriousness they merited. (*Times*, 6 September 2001). The cardinal simply makes admissions but Wills, in his book, takes the lid off and what is seen inside is horrendous!

### *Marian Politics*

Wills shows that the Marian doctrines of the Catholic Church have been used to further the agendas of the Papacy. “Modern Popes tell priests to think of themselves as virgins consecrated to the Virgin” (204). Wills repudiates the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (210ff). “When the Vatican Council argued in 1859 that the Pope was not infallible the Pope himself responded by asserting that he had already proved his infallibility in the formula that he had defined as the Immaculate Conception” (215).

In this review I have limited myself to major issues. The author of this book is concerned for truthfulness and that is commendable. He exposes some errors which have caused great personal harm and damage to innumerable souls (sexual immorality and paedophilia) and other errors of a more general character (like the canonization of Edith Stein)—matters which have been cunningly and deceitfully manipulated to bolster the public image of Rome. There is disappointment in this volume inasmuch as the author has no idea of the saving power of the gospel (justification by faith alone). He stoutly rejects the doctrine of substitutionary atonement (307). The book is valuable for the information which has been researched and documented. The author’s grasp of history is excellent. Sadly the spiritual thrust of his writing is minimal.

# John the Baptist—the Silence That Breaks the Silence

*David Kingdon*

**T**HE ISSUE OF BAPTISM—who should be baptized and why—is part of a wider debate concerning the nature of the church. Is the church to be defined in terms of believers *and* their children or as composed of believers only, whether adults or children? And the debate about the nature of the church is part of a yet wider debate as to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. How is this to be understood? Is there such a fundamental continuity that the new covenant is but a new *administration* of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:9–14). Or is it really *new* in such a way that *administration* is woefully inadequate to describe it because it does not do justice to its radical, eschatological newness?

It is unfortunate that the key issue of the relationship between the Testaments is often not addressed in the debate over baptism. Too often the relationship is assumed without being considered as an essential preliminary to the debate itself. Yet how the relationship is understood will inevitably influence the exegesis of particular texts and determine the shape of any theology of baptism that lays claim to be considered biblical. John S. Feinberg is surely on the right track when he states:

Evangelicals agree that God has spoken and that the Bible is his word. But God has not revealed all of his word at once. How are we to relate what he said through the prophets of old to what has been revealed through his apostles? Without an answer to this question it is difficult to know how to use both Testaments in formulating either doctrine or practice. An example of a doctrinal issue that hinges on this question is one’s understanding of the church. Are Christians to formulate their concept of the church on the basis of both Testaments, claiming so much continuity between the people of God that one may see the church in the OT? Or is there such a discontinuity between Israel and the church that one’s understanding of the church must be formed solely on the basis of the NT?<sup>1</sup>

Though Feinberg overstates the issue in terms of an either/or—continuity or discontinuity—without allowing that there can be continuity *and* discontinuity within a schema of promise and fulfillment, in his basic contention he is certainly correct. One’s doctrine of the church is related to how one understands the relationship between the two Testaments. This is recognized by Robert L. Raymond:

It is clear that both antipaedobaptists and paedobaptists argue by way of inference from more fundamental theological premises, focused largely on the relationship between the testaments, with the former stressing a dis-

penansational discontinuity at this point in the covenant of grace, the latter stressing the continuity of the covenant of grace respecting this matter.<sup>2</sup>

How fundamental the assumption of continuity is in the baptismal debate can be seen from the proposition of Charles Hodge: “If the Church is one under both dispensations; if infants were members of the Church under the theocracy, then they are new members of the Church now, unless the contrary can be proved.”<sup>3</sup>

It is this assumption that enables Reformed paedobaptists to jump so easily from the circumcision of Abraham’s household (Genesis 17) to the baptism of the infant seed of believers now, and to be so untroubled by the lack of positive evidence of the baptism of infants in the New Testament. Indeed, the silence of the New Testament is seen as a positive virtue by Pierre Charles Marcel:

In reality the silence of the New Testament regarding the baptism of infants militates in favor of, rather than against, this practice. To overthrow completely notions so vital, pressed for more than two thousand years on the soul of the people, to withdraw from children the sacrament of admission into the covenant, the Apostolic Church ought to have received from the Lord an explicit prohibition, so revolutionary in itself, that a record of it would have been preserved in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Now the question that needs to be put is this: “Is there reason to believe that Reformed paedobaptists have overlooked a key element in redemptive history that calls into question their common assumption that it is possible to jump from circumcision to the baptism of infants?” I believe there is. It is the ministry of John the Baptist which we must now consider.

### The place of John the Baptist in redemptive history

It is significant, as F. F. Bruce observes, that all four Gospels “preface their narrative of the ministry of Jesus with a brief summary of John, and the evidence of Acts suggests that this reflects primitive Christian preaching.”<sup>5</sup> Mark’s Gospel, indeed, sees the ministry of the Baptist as marking “the *beginning* of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Peter, too, in the household of Cornelius emphasizes the place of John in redemptive history: “You know what has happened throughout, Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...” (Acts 10:37–38). Paul also recognizes the pivotal significance of the Baptist’s ministry when addressing the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch: “Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel” (Acts 13:24).

It is clear that in the early Church the ministry of John the Baptist is seen as marking the boundary between the age of the promise of the kingdom of God and the arrival of the kingdom in the person of Jesus-Messiah. This is true, according to the testimony of Acts, for both the key apostles—for Peter, the apostle to the Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

It is also clear that neither Peter nor Paul were the originators of this view

of John the Baptist’s place in redemptive history. The Gospels uniformly trace it back to Jesus Himself. It is He who assigns to John his place in the unfolding of the story of redemption.

When we examine the four Gospels we cannot but be struck by the space and the attention that are given to the Baptist. From this testimony we may extract a number of features:

#### (1) *He is the forerunner of the Messiah.*

He, according to Jesus, is “the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you’” (Matthew 11:10, quoting Malachi 3:1; cf. Also Exodus 23:20). In Johhanine terms he “came as a witness to testify concerning that light...He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness of the light” (John 1:7–8). Other prophets before John “spoke of the grace that was to come” (1 Peter 1:10), but only John had the privilege of being the forerunner of the promised Messiah.

#### (2) *He is more than a prophet.*

In what sense is the Baptist designated by Jesus as “more than prophet” (Matthew 11:10)? Why is he singled out from the rest of the Old Testament prophets in this way? D. A. Carson supplies us with the answer: “Not only was he, like other OT prophets, a direct spokesman for God to call the nation to repentance, but he himself was the subject of prophecy—the one who, according to Scripture, would announce the day of Yahweh.”<sup>6</sup> John had borne witness to Jesus (Matthew 3:11–12; John 1:29). Jesus now bears witness to him. To no other prophet does Jesus bear such witness, for only John has the unique relationship to Jesus that he does.

#### (3) *He is the climactic point of all OT prophecy.*

“For,” says Jesus, “all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John” (Matthew 11:13). *Until* could include or exclude John, but the following verse makes it clear that John is to be reckoned among the prophets, for he is the Elijah who was to come. The whole prophetic corpus reaches its climax in John the Baptist. He is the last in the sequence that cumulatively builds up to the advent of Messiah. All the prophets before John say that Messiah is coming, but John is able to say that he has come (John 1:29).

It is clear that John occupies a unique place in the biblical story—as unique in its way as that occupied by Mary, the mother of Jesus. As she was “highly favored” (Luke 1:28) so, too, was John the Baptist. For did not the Lord Jesus declare as much, prefacing his testimony with a solemn “Amen”? “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11).

Yet our Lord immediately adds that “he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” With these words he underscores the radical, epochal disjunction that there is between the kingdom of God, now arriving with and in Jesus Messiah, and the whole prophetic period that preceded it. John may be the climactic point of all Old Testament prophecy, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. This does not mean that John is excluded from the kingdom as an individual, no more than any of the Old

Testament saints were. What it does mean is that with respect to the development of God's redemptive plan John, in his role as forerunner, is outside the kingdom of heaven. "He is the last of the old order, as the subsequent identification with Elijah (v. 14) will make clear."<sup>7</sup> Thus even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Unlike John who is in prison awaiting his end, he or she would see the kingdom coming in power and thus be able to point to Jesus the King without the ambiguity which John experienced at this point (Matthew 11:2–3).

#### (4) *John calls out a remnant people for the Lord.*

John called upon Israel to repent in view of the soon coming judgment of God when his wrath would be poured out upon a disobedient nation. He calls for a radical turning to God, a returning to God from their rebellion back to true covenant obedience. This is the burden of his preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). And his call is urgent, for "the axe is already at the root of the trees" (v. 10).

To those who responded to his message John administered baptism in the Jordan River. Those who were baptized confessed their sins (Matthew 3:6) and were committed by their baptism to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (v. 8).

John's baptism was a radical innovation. It was administered to Jews, not proselytes from among the Gentiles. It was a once only rite, so it is marked off from the repeated lustrations of contemporary Judaism in general and from those practiced in the Qumran community in particular. And, it was administered to persons already circumcised.

According to John, descent from Abraham and status as members of the community, were of no avail unless there was genuine repentance issuing in real moral fruit in one's life (vv. 8–9). Not only may God narrow Israel down to a remnant—as He did more than once in the course of Israel's history—but He may also raise up true children of Israel from "these stones," perhaps, as Carson suggests, stones lying in the river bed.<sup>8</sup> (Both Hebrew and Aramaic have a pun on "children" and "stones").

When John baptized Jesus he associated Him with the remnant people of Israel. Jesus underwent baptism at the hands of John, not because He had sins to confess but because in undergoing the rite He identified Himself as the "Suffering Servant" with those He came to save. In so doing, both John and Jesus fulfilled all righteousness (v. 15; note that "us" refers to John and Jesus). They were *together* obeying God's righteous will.

John's baptism, then, was baptism for a remnant—the baptism of a people from within the nation of Israel, who were preparing the way for the Lord (Mark 1:2–3). And the baptism that Jesus permitted his disciples to administer (John 4:2) seems to have had much the same significance (John 3:22–26).

## The Significance of John's Baptism in the continuing Debate

As we have already noticed the baptism of John does not figure very much in the continuing debate about baptism. Reformed paedobaptists simply ignore it in their concern to establish the proposition that the circumcision of infants

is now replaced by the baptism of infants. Reformed Baptists have responded to their position by arguing that the antitype of circumcision in the flesh is the circumcision of the heart, that is regeneration. Typical of their response is that of C. H. Spurgeon. In a sermon on "Consecration to God Illustrated by Abraham's Circumcision" he said:

It is often said that the ordinance of baptism is analogous to the ordinance of circumcision. I will not controvert that point although the statement may be questioned. Supposing it be, let me urge on every believer here to see to it that in his own soul he realizes the spiritual meaning both of circumcision and baptism and then consider the outward rites. For the thing specified is vastly more important than the sign. "Well," saith one, "a difficulty suggests itself as to your views for an argument is often drawn from this fact that inasmuch as Abraham must circumcise all his seed we ought to baptize all our children." Now observe the type and interpret it not according to prejudice but according to Scripture—in the type the seed of Abraham is circumcised—you draw the inference that all typified by the seed of Abraham ought to be baptized, and I do not cavil at the conclusion, but I ask you, who are the true seed of Abraham? Paul answers in Romans 4:8, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." As many as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, are Abraham's seed. Whether eight days old in grace, or more or less, everyone of Abraham's seed has a right to Baptism, but I deny that the unregenerate whether children or adults are the spiritual seed of Abraham... The answering person in type to the seed of Abraham is, by the confession of everybody, the believer. And the believer ought, seeing that he is buried with Christ spiritually, to avow that fact by his public baptism in water according to the Savior's own precept and example.<sup>9</sup>

Spurgeon is a good model to follow, which I did in my *Children of Abraham*.<sup>10</sup> However, further reflection has brought me to see that simply to respond to the circumcision/baptism analogy so fundamental to the paedobaptist case for infant baptism fails to do justice to the place of John the Baptist in redemptive history. As far as it goes Spurgeon's reply is adequate, but it is a response to an agenda set by Reformed paedobaptists and, in effect, it allows them to skip over the ministry of the Baptist as if it had no significance for the on-going debate about the subjects of baptism. But it has, as I shall now attempt to show.

#### (1) *John's baptism is an innovation.*

This point has already been made, but it now requires further consideration. When, in the temple courts the chief priests and elders question Jesus' right to cleanse the temple (Matthew 21:12–13), asking him "By what authority are you doing these things?" and "Who gave you this authority?" His counter question puts them on the spot. Jesus replied, "I will tell you by what

authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (vv. 23–25).

The dilemma of Jesus' opponents is obvious. If John's baptism was from heaven then they should have believed the message he preached and submitted themselves to the baptism he administered. If they admitted that it was from men they faced an explosion of popular wrath, for "the people...all hold that John was a prophet"—that is he is a God-sent messenger whose authority is "from heaven" (verse 26). In the light of this interaction between our Lord and the leaders of the Jews it seems right to conclude that John's baptism is an innovation. It is *John's* baptism, not an ancient rite with its roots in Jewish lustrations. It is not proselyte baptism, assuming that it was being practiced at the time. John's baptism is administered to Jews, not to Gentile converts to Judaism, as proselyte baptism was. John's baptism of repentance is a radical innovation instituted on his own (derived) authority as a prophet sent by God. It marks a new development in the unfolding history of redemption, for John baptizes *Jews* who are willing to enter God's remnant people through a baptism of repentance. It is therefore rightly described as *John's baptism*.

A further point is to be noticed. We have already remarked on the connection between the baptizing ministry of John and that of the disciples of Jesus. Here in the dispute in the temple courts Jesus links his work with that of John the Baptist. His assumption is that they both act upon the same authority. Their commission has a common source—it is "from heaven." Thus, as Floyd V. Filson points out, "Jesus knows that his work and John's are connected, and that the Jewish leaders, in failing to see that God had sent John, had forfeited their right to judge John's successor."<sup>11</sup> The importance of this point will become evident later.

### (2) *John baptizes already circumcised people.*

Again we have already noticed this fact, but now we need to draw out its implication. In baptizing people who had already been circumcised, it is very likely that John does not see baptism as replacing circumcision, but as being a new rite that comes in alongside it. This new rite is appropriate as a sign of entry into the remnant people of God in a way that circumcision is not. Whatever the spiritual reality that circumcision points to—the circumcision of the heart—the fact remains that it is the identifying sign of the Jewish nation, not of the remnant within that nation. One has only to compare what was required for circumcision with what John looks for in those whom he baptizes to appreciate how different the two rites are from each other. "For the generations to come *every male* among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those *born* in your household or *bought* with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised" (Genesis 17:12–13). When we read the following the contrast is very stark indeed: "*Confessing their sins*, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Matthew 3:6). A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:5), not circumcision, is the appropriate sign of the remnant called out through the preaching of the Baptist.

If the two rites—circumcision and baptism—differ so markedly from one another, and in where they are placed in the unfolding of God's redemptive

plan, it is not surprising that John and man should not have seen baptism as replacing circumcision. Nor is it surprising that in the early church Jewish believers practiced circumcision *and* administered baptism. There is not a hint in the New Testament that Jewish believers ceased to have their male children circumcised. Indeed, the evidence is that even Paul, who so strongly resisted any attempt to impose circumcision upon Gentile believers, agreed that it should continue among his fellow Jewish believers. Acts 21:21 mentions that a *false* report about Paul had been spread among the "many thousands" of Jews who had believed (v. 20). This was that he was teaching "all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to run away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs." At the suggestion of James and the elders of the Jerusalem church, Paul publicly demonstrated the falsity of the report by joining in the purification rites of four men who had made a vow. He also paid their expenses. The intended result is made plain: "Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law" (v. 24b).

In continuing to have their male children circumcised, believing Jewish parents clearly took their cue from John the Baptist who did not see his baptism as replacing circumcision. Now, if this is the case, why should we expect that the two rites of circumcision *and* baptism were administered to male infants? Circumcision certainly, but not baptism.

Douglas Wilson, a strong paedobaptist, rightly perceives the problem faced by those who continue to advocate the classic Reformed case for infant baptism. He observes that when the Baptist claim that there are no examples of infant baptism in the New Testament is challenged "it is challenged with inadequate arguments from silence—the purported babies of the Philippian jailer being one example. If we only produce examples in the New Testament where *maybe* they baptized infants, we may legitimately conclude that *maybe* we should too. This is hardly a solid foundation upon which to build a basic parental duty—if duty it is. All too often paedobaptists grant that the New Testament offers no examples of infant baptism, and then seek to establish their case on grounds of continuity with the Old Testament."<sup>12</sup> While I do not find Wilson's arguments for infant baptism convincing, his admission of the inadequacy of the classic case is significant, as also is his recognition that "the transition from the older administration to the new took almost *half a century*."<sup>13</sup> However, Wilson fails to notice the significance of John the Baptist's place in redemptive history. Had he done so he would have begun to appreciate that there are other weaknesses in the classic case for infant baptism.

### (3) *John did not baptize infants.*

The evidence is very clear that John did not baptize infants. His baptism is administered to those who confess their sins. By its very nature as the identifying sign of a people turned again to God—a remnant people—it requires repentance. It is "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). Both Matthew and Mark emphasize the element of confession: "confessing their sins, they [the baptizands] were baptized by him [John the Baptist] in the Jordan River" (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5). Nothing in the text suggests that they confessed the sins of their infants or that their infants were baptized with

them. William Hendriksen, a paedobaptist comments, “Without confession of sins no baptism! For those who truthfully repented of their evil state and wicked conduct baptism...was a visible sign and seal of invisible grace (cf. Romans 4:11), the grace of forgiveness and adoption into God’s family.”<sup>14</sup> This is a statement to which all Baptists could give hearty assent.

Those who are capable of confessing their sins are clearly not infants who cannot yet talk, as Francis Turretin clearly recognizes. He writes: “John admitted none to baptism but those who confessed their sins; because his business was to baptize adults.”<sup>15</sup>

We have already noticed that the disciples of Jesus administered a baptism that was identical with that practiced by John—a baptism of disciples who commit themselves in baptism to the lifestyle of God’s remnant people (John 4:1–2). We have also noticed that our Lord acknowledged that His work and that of John are intimately connected. He avers to the Jewish religious leaders that John’s baptism has behind it the same authority as His own dramatic act in cleansing the temple—it is from heaven. Clearly, then, He was endorsing a baptism that was not for infants, but only for those capable of confessing their sins.

An important implication follows from this. If John the Baptist only baptized those who were capable of confessing their sins, and if the disciples of our Lord followed the same practice with His approval, why should it be so difficult to believe that the apostolic Christ did *not* practice infant baptism?

### Concluding observations

I shall now draw together the threads of my argument thus far. My hope is that my paper may help to move the debate over the subjects of baptism onto new and more fruitful ground.

#### *(1) Paedobaptists need to do justice to the place of John the Baptist in redemptive history.*

To go on maintaining that it is possible to make a simple move from the circumcision of infant *males* to the baptism of *infants* is to ignore the significance of the ministry of the Baptist. However, as I have attempted to show, responsible biblical/theological exegesis will not allow us to do so. Given the way in which the Gospel writers see John as the pivotal figure in the transition from the old dispensation to the new, eschatological dispensation, and given the clear endorsement of his ministry by our Lord, it is no longer helpful for paedobaptists to argue for infant baptism as if John the Baptist never existed. He did, and so proper weight needs to be given to his role in redemptive history.

For their part, Reformed Baptists, if they give proper weight to John’s role in redemptive history, need not allow their paedobaptist friends to set the agenda as they have done in the past. In the light of John’s ministry the neat schema of circumcision/baptism is to be questioned. For in baptizing only those capable of confessing their sins, John clearly abandons the principle of you *and* your seed (Genesis 17:10). Furthermore our Lord, in endorsing John’s baptism, clearly did the same.

According to the paedobaptist argument, John should have baptized infants as well as adults since he would, as a Jew, have accepted the principle of “thee and thy seed.” Yet he did not baptize infants. How do paedobaptists account for this? I suggest that on their own premises they are caught in a very difficult position. They could maintain, firstly, that since John did not baptize infants without a clear command *not* to do so, he had acted without divine authorization. This is unthinkable in the light of his mission as God’s messenger.

Secondly, paedobaptists could argue that in the case of his repentance baptism the principle (of “thee and thy seed”) did not apply. If they choose to argue in this way they must show why the principle should not apply to Christian baptism which is also, among other things, a repentance baptism (e.g. Acts 2:38).

It seems to me that there can be no escape for paedobaptists from the dilemma posed by John’s baptism. Either John baptized infants (which they admit that he did not) or he did not upon the covenant principle of “thee and thy seed.” If he did not uphold this principle, most likely because it was set aside by the repentance baptism that he was authorized “from heaven” to administer, then why should it be insisted that our Lord and his apostles continued to uphold it?

To insist that the principle of “thee and thy seed” is meant to continue in force beyond the ministry of John the Baptist is to assume that the clock of redemptive history be turned back and the principle be re-established, having for a time been set aside. But this would be without precedent in Scripture. The movement of redemptive history is progressive and cumulative, not retrogressive. The repentance baptism of John leads on to the repentance-baptism of the first disciples of Jesus and his apostles, not away from it.

A further point remains to be made. It is this. Paedobaptists accuse their Baptist brethren of a lack of generosity towards infants. Typical is Professor John Murray. He writes,

If children born of the faithful were given the sign and seal of the covenant, and therefore the richest blessings which the covenant disclosed, if the New Testament economy is the elaboration and extension of this covenant of which circumcision was the sign, are we to believe that infants in this age are excluded from that which was provided by the Abrahamic covenants. In other words, are we to believe that infants may not properly be given the sign of that blessing which is enshrined in the new covenant? Is the new covenant in this respect less generous than was the Abrahamic?<sup>16</sup>

This ungenerous, hardhearted Baptist would reply that he is no less restrictive than John the Baptist! In other words, if due attention is paid to the practice of John the Baptist the paedobaptist appeal to our emotions loses its force.

#### *(2) The silence of the New Testament as to the baptism of infants can be given a more convincing explanation than is the case in Reformed paedobaptism.*

When challenged by the average dispensational Baptist about this silence the instructed paedobaptist is unfazed. The silence is just what one would expect. In the absence of a clear command in the New Testament rescinding

the giving of the covenant sign to infants we should expect that sign, now baptism in water, to be given to infants, both male and female.

But is there not a more convincing explanation of the silence of the New Testament? And does not this do justice to the history of redemptive revelation in a way that traditional paedobaptist apologetic fails to do? I submit that the silence of the record of John's ministry as to the baptizing of infants is a far better explanation of the silence of the New Testament about infant baptism. The silence is eloquent testimony to the fact that the principle of "thee and thy seed" was set aside by the baptism of John, a baptism which being "from heaven" had divine authorization behind it. As such it required no specific command, for the authorized practice and the confession of sins that was demanded, was command enough. In short, the silence of the Baptist is the silence that breaks the silence!

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> John S. Feinberg (ed.), *Continuity and Discontinuity—Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, (Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1988), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1998), 936.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, (James Clarke, London, 1960), 555.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Charles Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, (trans. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, James Clarke, London, 1953), 152.

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, (Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1972), 152.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* in Frank E. Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1984), 263–4.

<sup>7</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1985), 194.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, op. Cit., 103.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 4, (Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1868), vol. 14, 695–6.

<sup>10</sup> David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham—a Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children*, (Carey Press, Haywards Heath, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, in *Black's New Testament Commentaries*, (A. and C. Black, London, second edition, 1971), 226.

<sup>12</sup> "Circumcision in the New Covenant," *Christianity and Society*, vol. 4, number 4, October 1994, pp. 22–28. The quotation is from p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, in *New Testament Commentary*, (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1974), 200.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Theology*, Section IV, question 22, quoted T. E. Watson, *Baptism not for Infants*, (1962 reprinted, Henry Walter, Worthing, 1972), 22.

<sup>16</sup> John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, (Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia, 1962), 51–2.

# Letters

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Dear Mr. Nicole:

I found your critique of *The Openness of God* to be just what I expected from a Reformed theologian (without warmth, a lack of gentleness, and oozing with arrogance). I will forgive you for that, because I have grown not to expect warmth, gentleness and humility out of a theologian, particularly a conservative reformed one (I was a seminary student for 10 years at two different seminaries).

What is unpardonable for someone allegedly seeking truth in a climate of intellectual honesty is your lack of willingness to admit Clark Pinnock has accurately identified many problems, spiritual and theological (at least deep mysteries), in puritanical and reformed theological formulations and confessions. You also betray a profound lack of understanding of the development of Platonic metaphysics in the mind and theology of Augustine which influenced subsequent generations' understanding of the nature of the being of God, up to and including the Reformation (complicated with Aristotelian logic and ontology). I humbly suggest you educate yourself with such books as *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* by a Process Theologian Daniel Day Williams (I myself do not agree with everything in Process Theology), if you wish to provide a retort that is sound and in accordance with truth.

Please tell Mr. Tom Nettles I said "hi." I used to be a student of his at T.E.D.S.

Peace of Christ,  
M. F. via email

Response from the editor:

Mr. F\_\_\_\_\_:

*I will pass along your letter to Dr. Nicole. He will receive it, I am sure, with the same grace and humility which have characterized his 50+ year teaching career during which he became recognized as one of the world's foremost evangelical theologians. Dr. Nicole does not need me to defend him. But your condescending admonition that he educate himself deserves at least a brief comment. Though I don't know your age, from what you have written I would guess that before you were born Dr. Nicole had already mastered Aristotelian, Platonic and neo-Platonic thought, to say nothing of the writings of Augustine and the leading sixteenth-century Reformers.*

*If you ever get the opportunity, I encourage you to visit his personal library in Orlando, Florida. If possible, try to arrange for him to give you a personal, guided tour. His comments about the contents, histories and authors of the books are in themselves an educational experience well worth a special trip. You will need to allow 45 minutes to an hour, provided you get the abbreviated tour.*

*Like any fallen creature, Dr. Nicole can be accused of many things. However, being uneducated in theology is not one of them.*

*Blessings,  
Tom Ascol*

Response from Dr. Roger Nicole

Dear M\_\_\_\_\_:

*Dr. Ascol has forwarded to me your recent letter in which you criticize my review of *The Openness of God*.*

*You might be surprised to find that Dr. Pinnock and I entertain an amicable relationship in spite of the great difference in our convictions.*

*I am reasonably acquainted with Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, and I do not believe that Reformed theology has been led into deviations because of any of these men. Process thought does not attract me because you cannot do anything with “becoming” unless you start with being.*

*In closing let me point out to you that your letter does not appear free of the defects for which you castigate me: “without warmth, lacking in gentleness, and oozing with arrogance.” May our Lord help both of us to overcome such tendencies.*

*Roger Nicole  
M.A. Sorbonne, Paris  
Th.D. Gordon Divinity School  
Ph.D. Harvard University*

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Dear Dr. Ascol,

I feel compelled to write and thank you and your contributors for the wealth of spiritual knowledge and inspiration I receive from the *Founders Journal*. I have been receiving it now for seven years or so, and have not been disappointed with any issue.

I was introduced to the “Doctrines of Grace” in 1970, during my ministry at Toowoomba Central Baptist Church in Queensland, Australia. One of my deacons invited me out for supper one evening, and after the meal he produced a box with quite a few old musty books, which he was clearing out of his garage. He suggested that I might like to look at them to see if there was anything of interest among them before taking them to the local tip. I was not greatly excited about the prospect, but because of his kindness took the box home and pushed it into a corner of my study. I had immigrated to Australia from Northern Ireland, where I entered the Baptist ministry, so by this time I had been ministering for about 10 years. I would have called myself a conservative gospel preacher, and although I strongly believed in the sovereignty of God, the Arminian overtones in my ministry were very strong.

I was preparing for my Sunday ministry one day when my eye caught the box of old musty books. I felt a little guilty that I had forgotten all about them,

so there and then I decided to look at them. I shook the dust off them, and began to read, it was not long before I realized that I had a treasury of biblical knowledge. In that box were eight volumes of Richard Sibbes, ten volumes of Thomas Goodwin, and other volumes by Thomas Brooks, John Flavel, Stephen Charnock etc.. As I began to read I realized how insipid and empty my ministry was and became committed to this new-found structure of truth, which I had so firmly resisted and rejected in the past. My preaching and ministry took on a new dimension altogether as I grew in my knowledge of the “Doctrines of Grace.”

I was able to restore all of Richard Sibbes volumes, and many others, and they still hold a foremost place in my library. Although I am retired now, I still preach around the churches in an interim capacity, and have found there is a great hunger for the deeper things of God. People are sick of the humanistic and paganistic slop they are being fed. It is a great privilege to preach the “Doctrines of Grace” because they are so true, not only to biblical revelation, but to the very character and holiness of God. There is no other system of theology that rightly honors God.

Let me encourage you and those who assist you to stay strong in the proclamation of these great truths, for therein, as you know, will be enormous blessing. It is marvelous to hear what is happening in the Southern Baptist Convention! Praise God!! Would to God He might favour Australia in His will and purpose with a breath of revival. How we long for it.

I didn't mean this email to be an epistle, and I hope I have not bored you, but I was awake from 12.30am to 2.30am last night and sat in my study reading the *Founders Journal* and it thoroughly blessed my soul.

Thank you again for your continued ministry.  
Love and grace in our Sovereign Lord.

B.S. via email

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I thank God for the ministry of the Founders. God in his grace has removed the blinders from my eyes and has opened my heart to understanding the doctrines of grace. God used an old deacon in my church, the preaching and writing of John Piper, and your ministry to deliver me from man-centered ministry.

My heart aches because my theological education addressed Reformed Theology with contempt and, therefore, I did too. I almost feel as though my years of education were wasted. I am now seeking God as to what I should do. I long to know his plan and I know he will show me what to do.

I also have realized that not many people are open to the doctrines of grace. Except for my wife, the old deacon and his wife in my church, I would be alone. Thank you for your ministry, it encourages me.

In Christ,  
M.F. via email