



How to Fire Your Pastor

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How to Fire Your Pastor

Tom Ascol

"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality" (1 Timothy 5:19-21, NKJV).

Several years ago I preached a message with the same title as this article to the church I serve in Cape Coral. When I mentioned my intentions to a pastor friend, he said, "Tom, haven't you heard that you never put a loaded gun into the hand of your enemy?" My response then remains my conviction now. First, I do not consider the church I serve to be my enemy. Far from it. Though some individuals from time-to-time have positioned themselves as my enemies, the church as a whole has been and remains the body of Christ and therefore a wonderful means of grace in my life. When a pastor starts viewing the church as his enemy it is a sure sign that he has outlived his usefulness to that congregation.

Secondly, in the sense in which my friend meant it, church members already have a gun. As one who is charged with the responsibility to lead and nurture the flock of God, I want to do everything I can to make sure that it is loaded with the proper ammunition and fired in a right direction.

Even the pastor who rejects any form of congregational government must face the fact that the members have a huge say in his tenure. Regardless of formal suffrage policies, all church members vote in two ways: with their feet and their pocketbooks. Many ministers who have never been officially dismissed have nevertheless been forced out of office by the withdrawal of support by the members.

The pastor-church relationship is a sensitive and vitally important issue. The proper dissolution of that relationship in difficult circumstances needs to be carefully considered in the light of biblical teachings. Untold harm has been done to the reputation of Christ's kingdom by the improper firing of pastors. By this I do not mean to suggest that it is never proper for a church to remove a pastor from leadership. There are, sadly, occasions when such a step should be taken for the glory of God and the welfare of the church. When faced with this course of action, however, a church is not free simply to ignore biblical teachings while taking the path of expediency.

Evangelical pastors of all denominational stripes today are being dismissed in epidemic proportions. A few years ago studies showed that 2000 Southern Baptist ministers were being formally dismissed each year from their pastoral responsibilities. This figure does not include others who were forced out in less formal ways. Bill Bright's Global Pastors Network (GPN) estimates that 1500 pastors are removed from their ministries each month!

Many denominations and state conventions have established departments to deal with "church-minister relations." Personnel are now in place whose primary responsibility is to mediate between pastors and congregations who are in conflict.

A new type of insurance has recently become available called pastoral dismissal or termination insurance. It is being promoted with the ominous warning that no pastor really has job security. "It could happen to you. Then what will you do?" Obviously, there is a market for this product. Too often that market has been expanded by the unjustified

actions of a misguided congregation.

However, as I have already suggested, there are churches that suffer under the leadership of pastors who, quite honestly, ought to be dismissed. It is a two-way street. Churches can be hard on pastors. But it is equally true that pastors can be very hard on churches.

Most men who make a start in pastoral ministry do not last long. Research from GPN indicates that eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will abandon it within the first five years. Others continue on who have no business doing so. They abuse God's flock by teaching heresy, exercising authoritarian leadership or engaging in personal immorality. Scandalous illustrations of these types of pastoral malpractice abound.

Any man guilty of such abuse should be removed from his office and helped to turn away from his sin. Sadly, many churches languish under lethal ministers because of inertia. They know that something ought to be done, but are not sure what it is or how to proceed. Out of fear of doing the wrong thing, they often do nothing and merely hang on, hoping for the best.

Two realities lie behind much of the confusion and misunderstanding about how to deal with difficulties in the pastor-church relationship. These realities should never be played against one another but should always be remembered together. When controversy erupts, the tendency is to focus on only one of them to the neglect of the other. What are these two realities?

First, the pastor, by virtue of God's ordination, is in a position of spiritual authority in the church and therefore, is due respect and esteem by virtue of his office. Regardless of his person (though that is not unimportant) the office which he holds is worthy of esteem and respect by the whole congregation. Church members should demonstrate by their conduct that they desire their pastors to serve with joy and not with grief, "for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17). It is wonderful when there are personal reasons also to esteem, love and admire the pastor; but even if such are hard to find in the man, the office itself requires respect.

Second, the pastor is a mere man--a real man--who is, like everyone else, a frail creature of dust. He is subject to the same passions as other men and is liable to the same temptations and the same sins, just like others.

To remember only the respect and esteem that is due to the office will inhibit one's ability to recognize and deal with real sin on the part of the pastor. Many loyal church members have been blinded to the failures of their pastors out of sincere respect for the office.

On the other hand, if one wants to find fault with a pastor, it is easy to do. Pastors are sinful and regularly deal with problems and temptations like everyone else. It is easy to pick a pastor apart. If the fact of his humanness is not balanced with the reality that, despite his sin God has placed him in this office that must be esteemed and respected, then it will be too easy to declare open season on all his faults.

So what does a church do when members become convinced that a pastor needs to be removed? While there is no formula or step-by-step outline in the Scripture telling us how to dismiss a pastor, there are some very clear principles. These principles should govern any procedure adopted by a congregation to deal with this unfortunate event.

First, consider Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy. Paul sent this letter to Timothy to encourage him in his work of leading and serving the church in Ephesus. After outlining the qualifications for elders and deacons in chapter 3, Paul

explains why he addresses the subjects he does in the letter: "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (3:14-15). He wants Timothy to know and to be able to teach others how to behave and conduct themselves in the church.

In 1 Timothy 5 Paul turns his attention again to the issue of elders and pastors and notes that elders who rule well, especially those who labor in word and doctrine, are to be financially remunerated for their labors in a manner that corresponds to the expertise with which they dispense their responsibilities. "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'" (5:17-18).

Our interest is in verses 19-21 as we consider the question of how a church should go about dismissing its pastor. Paul indicates that there is a wrong way and a right way to dismiss an elder. It is important to identify both. It may be right to remove a pastor but it is never right to do so in the wrong way.

How should a pastor *not* be fired? He should not be dismissed based on rumor or innuendo. The pastor should be known as a man of Christian character and conduct, or else he never should have been placed in the office. There should be demonstrable evidence of his mature, Christian character. Paul addresses the whole issue of qualifications for pastors, bishops or elders (which, for the purpose of this article are used interchangeably) in 1 Timothy 3. Little is said of their duties. One would be hard-pressed to come up with a full job description for a pastor based on the first seven verses. But it is not hard to come up with a character sketch of what pastors ought to look like. God is obviously concerned with the character of the men put in the office of pastor.

If the church has done its homework and taken seriously its responsibilities then the pastor should be a man who has from the beginning demonstrated the kinds of qualities Paul lists in these verses. Whenever a rumor about the pastor comes wafting across the wind--either in the congregation or in the community--and that rumor is unsubstantiated, it should not be allowed to overshadow what is already known to be true about the pastor's character and his Christian conduct. Love hopes all things and those who love their pastor should be very slow to believe a bad report about him.

A second instructive passage related to this is 1 Thessalonians 5:12. Here Paul says, "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." In other words, because of the job that pastors are called to do, and the office they are fulfilling, the congregation is to esteem them "very highly in love." To entertain (much less start!) a rumor about a pastor that would cast aspersion upon his character or conduct is a violation of the kind of respect that is owed. It also has the potential to undermine his credibility and hinder his ministry. In fact, the church member who is determined to obey 1 Thessalonians 5:12 will be unwilling to listen to such accusations.

Anyone at any time can start a rumor that has absolutely no basis in reality. Anyone can make an unfounded, unsubstantiated charge against an individual, particularly if that individual is in a leadership position. Spiritual leaders should not become suspect because of rumor or innuendo. Neither should a process of dismissal be instigated based on a single, unsubstantiated accusation. Paul wrote very unambiguously, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except from two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19). In other words, just one witness is not enough.

In the Old Testament, it was part of the Mosaic code that an Israelite could not be indicted and convicted based upon the testimony of one person. Deuteronomy 17:6 says, "Whoever is worthy of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witness, but he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." This was a safeguard built into the covenanted community, in the political realm in which the Israelites lived. One person could not simply make an accusation against his Israelite brother and on that basis see his brother executed.

Paul takes this teaching and actually elevates it in his application to the elders in the congregation. Pastors are protected against a charge that is brought by a single individual. Paul is not simply saying that a pastor cannot be indicted and convicted based upon the testimony of one. He is saying that if there is only the testimony of one person, that testimony is to be thrown out of court. It is not to be entertained or heard. It is not to be brought to the docket. Without substantiation, the charge is not even to be entertained.

Is Paul building walls to protect pastors from ever being accused of serious sin? Not at all! Rather, he is establishing for us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, proper guidelines and parameters in which we must walk if we are going to bring charges of serious sin against an elder or pastor.

Pastors are extremely susceptible to false accusations by virtue of the nature of their work. Think of counseling. Who can prevent a disgruntled person from charging a pastor with improper speech or conduct in a one-on-one situation? Even with people whom I trust implicitly, I try to be very careful and not give any occasion, as best I know the possibilities, where an accusation could be charged against me by someone who may want to do in the reputation of the church I serve or its ministry. It is simply prudent for pastors to avoid situations that make them easy prey for rumormongers.

The Apostle Paul was very much aware of how vulnerable pastors are to such charges. In 2 Timothy 4:1-4 he says this to Timothy: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing in His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

What do you think was the tendency of those who had listened to Timothy when he tried to convince them, rebuke them and exhort them? Paul warned Timothy that some would turn away from sound teaching and be swayed by fables. It would be very easy for these disgruntled hearers to turn the tables against Timothy and speak falsely of him. Paul was very much aware of how easy an accusation or charge can be made without any substantiation and do great damage to the efforts of ministry in the congregation.

The Apostle Paul himself had experienced similar opposition to the truth of the gospel. In 2 Timothy 2:11-13 he said this is how he had lived: "persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured. And out of them all, the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Paul knew that every Christian who determines to live godly in Christ Jesus is setting himself on a course facing opposition and persecution. This is certainly true of ministers of the gospel.

John Calvin, in his Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:18, made a wonderful statement on this whole subject:

For none are more liable to slanders and calumnies than godly teachers. Not only does it arise from the difficulty of their office, that sometimes they either sink under it, or stagger, or halt, or blunder, in consequence of which wicked men seize many occasions for finding fault with them [in other words, the pressures of the ministry sometimes get weighed down so much that the temptations become more formidable and the defenses are weakened and sometimes these slip-ups and sins do come in light of that]; but there is this additional vexation, that, although they perform their duty correctly, so as not to commit any error whatever, they never escape a thousand censures. And this is

the craftiness of Satan, to draw away the hearts of men from ministers, that instruction may gradually fall into contempt.

This is very insightful and to the point. In the Old Testament, when Absalom was allowed to return to Jerusalem while David was king, remember what Absalom did? As the people came to David to have their cases solved, and as David was busy and unable to hear all the cases, Absalom, the Scripture says, "began to steal the hearts of the people away from David." Through innuendoes, doubts and question marks placed in the minds of the Israelites, he stole their hearts from David. This is exactly what can happen with ministers, and when it happens, it causes the instruction of the Word of God, which they are commissioned to give to the people, gradually to fall into contempt. Calvin continues:

Thus not only is wrong done to innocent persons, in having their reputation unjustly wounded, (which is exceedingly base in regard to those who hold so honourable a rank,) but the authority of the sacred doctrine of God is diminished.

And this is what Satan, as I have said, chiefly labours to accomplish;... Not only so, but as soon as any charge against the ministers of the word has gone abroad, it is believed as fully as if they were already convicted....

We need not wonder, therefore, if they whose duty it is to reprove the faults of all, to oppose the wicked desires of all, and to restrain by their severity every person whom they see going astray, have many enemies. What, then, will be the consequence, if we shall listen indiscriminately to all the slanders that are spread abroad concerning them?

It is easy to make an accusation, spread a rumor, or begin speaking with innuendoes that undermine the credibility of the voice--the mouthpiece--that God has placed in the church to instruct from the Word of God, and we must guard against it. Paul had been falsely accused when he wrote this letter to Timothy. In Jerusalem he had been accused of desecrating the temple by taking a Gentile into the court beyond where the Gentiles were allowed to enter. Though he was not guilty, nevertheless the charge was made and he wound up being imprisoned and ultimately sent to Rome. The difficulties he faced there, along with the opportunities to preach the gospel, can all be traced back to false accusations.

Among the Corinthians, Paul was also accused of being one thing when he was present and something altogether different when he was absent--specifically of being a hypocrite. Paul had to defend not himself but the office of apostle which God had commissioned him to fulfill. This he does in 2 Corinthians 10-11.

The same thing happened among the churches in Galatia. He was accused of teaching something that he never taught. He had to come and defend his teaching as an apostle of Jesus Christ among those churches.

Pastors must exercise great care to avoid putting themselves at unnecessary risk in this matter of opening up avenues for unfounded rumor and accusation. Simple wisdom must be used regarding planning and procedures, setting up schedules and agendas, particularly with counseling sessions. All of these things must be brought into the light of the reality that Satan will seize upon opportunities to cause false accusations to be made. Even after you have done your best, as congregation and as pastor, there is no way to guarantee absolutely the stifling of all rumors. It cannot be done. You cannot prevent accusations completely from coming.

What happens when an accusation is made against a minister? The public ministry of the Word is undermined. There

is a question mark that begins to arise in the listeners. "Could it be true?" "This man is preaching the Bible, but what about that rumor?" The question mark remains there. Also, the very character of the minister as well as the church is called into question by the community. "Did you hear about that pastor?" "What kind of church is that if they have a pastor who does that?" The gospel itself may well be hindered in the lives of individuals as it was among the Galatians when the rumors and accusations against Paul were believed by some.

When an unfounded accusation is made by an individual against the pastor, not only is this accusation not to be acted upon, it is not even to be received. Rather, 1 Timothy 5:19 ought to be cited and the accuser ought to be asked if he or she has another witness to substantiate the accusation. If not, we are not to receive it. The Scripture tells us not to even listen to or entertain an accusation that is unsubstantiated. If it cannot be substantiated, you and I must not participate in the sin of the accuser by listening to it.

The Puritans had a saying that the person who gossips has the devil on his tongue, and the person who listens to gossip has the devil in his ear. Paul here says, don't even listen to an accusation that comes from only one witness.

What about a situation where a single individual steps forward to accuse a pastor of a criminal offense such as embezzlement or sexual abuse? The ongoing scandals in the Roman Catholic Church as well as in many prominent Protestant congregations make this issue painfully relevant. Any attempt to silence victims or cover up the misconduct of leaders is shameful and does not serve the cause of God and truth. Where criminal charges are filed, a criminal investigation should be conducted by proper civil authorities.

Both the church and minister are placed in awkward situations in such cases and must carefully heed the Apostles Peter's instructions in 1 Peter 4:14-16, 19:

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter..... Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:14-16, 19).

The result of the criminal investigation will provide further evidence that sheds light on individual's accusation. Often, other victims are discovered or more information is uncovered that becomes corroborating evidence against the pastor (such as missing funds discovered by an auditor). The church must weigh this evidence carefully and proceed with biblical steps of removing the pastor if his guilt is demonstrable. If the evidence suggests he has been falsely accused, that should be declared by the church and the practical issue of his future effectiveness in the church as well as possible discipline against the accuser should be considered.

Have you ever fallen prey to the subtle snares of Satan in this issue and entertained an unwarranted accusation against an elder? If so, then you have violated this passage. If the accusation was not brought by two or three witnesses then you have become ensnared in that accuser's sin. Next time, act upon the principle of 1 Timothy 5:19 and resist that temptation.

That's how *not* to dismiss a pastor. Don't do it on the basis of rumor and innuendo and don't do it on the basis of one accuser only. How then are you to go about dealing with the sin of a pastor that is serious enough to require his dismissal?

First, verses 19-21 require two or three witnesses before the accusation is even entertained. This may be what has happened: You know that this pastor has done this, but the next consideration is, do you have a witness? If you do, then the accusation may be entertained and brought to the proper church leaders.

Then, in the investigation that ought to follow, a church is to research the accusation and the specific charges to see if they can be sustained. If the charges can be substantiated and there is reason to believe, from the mouth of two or three witnesses, based on the evidence that is brought forth, that something serious is going on, then the charges ought to be taken to the church by the leaders.

When accusations arise, they ought to be handled this way as a matter of simple Christian prudence. The leaders of the church have been recognized by the whole congregation as men of integrity and trustworthiness--men who have pledged themselves to serve the congregation by following as best they can the principles of God's Word and giving leadership and direction to the procedures of following that Word, no matter what the consequences or where it will lead. Those leaders are obligated to make a very careful and detailed investigation of the whole issue, to research it and go through the evidence, to hear testimony and bring in witnesses, to see what is going on, how it has arisen, and get to the bottom of the issue. That is their duty and their responsibility before God for the welfare of the congregation.

If, in their detailed investigation, the charge cannot be proved, the matter should be resolved without formal accusation and charges being brought against the minister. However, the question still remains: Why was the charge made? There must be some problem somewhere. Something may be going on--maybe a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication--but nevertheless, there is a problem even though it may not reside in the actual content and essence of the accusation.

However, if the charge can be proved and the pastor does seem to be guilty of serious sin, then the matter is not to be whitewashed or dealt with lightly. Paul says, "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may also fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). If the investigation concludes that yes, there is more, there is doctrinal or moral sin of serious nature, then the pastor should be addressed and rebuked publicly by the congregation. When a problem escalates to such a serious level then the congregation must decide whether the pastor had disqualified himself from public ministry in the church, and remove him if he has.

The protection that God has given for good men in the office of elder is not to be misused to protect bad men by allowing them to get away with scandalous sin.

These are the procedures to be followed. In verse 21, the Apostle Paul brings a very sober note, a very weighty charge, right on the heels of the instruction: "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality." The procedure is to be followed with strict justice. There is to be no prejudice, no pre-judging. No one is to say, "Well, we already know where this thing is going to go so we're just going to go through the motions." No, we will, under God and recognizing that we stand before God, seek to evaluate the evidence and follow it wherever it leads. We will draw the conclusions that are required and endure the consequences as the Word of God instructs us, without prejudice and without partiality. In other words, if we are called upon to engage in the investigation and bring the matter before the congregation, we should, in our mind's eye, take a blanket and put it over the faces of all of the principle parties involved so that we are not improperly influenced by relationships. We must look at the evidence without partiality and seek, on the basis of that evidence, to come to the truth of the matter as we cry out to God to be spared from making a mistake. We are to proceed with strict justice.

This process is to be followed with grave solemnity: "Before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels ..."

Paul is painting a picture of the heavenly tribunal: God Himself, the Lord and Sovereign of the universe; Jesus Christ, whom He has appointed to be Judge of this universe; and in His service, the elect angels who always are there doing their bidding without hesitancy. Paul says that you stand before God, His angels and Christ himself, before whom you must give an account eternally, as you discharge this responsibility and seek how to carry out this grave matter that has been brought into the life of the church.

Pastors are not above sin. They are not above the temptations of grievous sins, both doctrinally and morally. When a pastor is guilty of doctrinal or moral sin in a grievous way, he should be dealt with for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and His glory, whom he represents, for the sake of the church of Jesus Christ, which he serves and for the sake of his own soul.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ and we have been told in Scripture that one day the church will be free from spot and wrinkle. That be a glorious day! But that day is not yet. We still have spots and we still have wrinkles. We still have to deal with the reality of sin that remains in the church. Sometimes the church has to deal with scandalous sin and tragically there have been times in local churches where congregations have had to deal with scandalous sin in the lives of their pastors.

It should be our desire and prayer that the Lord would spare His churches and pastors from ever having to come to the point of dealing with these kinds of issues in a formal way. No elder wants to bring the kind of reproach upon Christ's church and His gospel that would require these strong steps to be taken by a congregation. But if the need arises, let us be faithful to follow biblical principles in whatever steps we must take. And, let us refuse to be ensnared by those who would bring sinful accusations against the leaders that God has appointed in His church.



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I Thank God for the Call to Preach

Allen Harrison

It's hard to believe I have been involved in the ministry of the gospel for over fifty-one years. What a joy it has been, even with an assortment of difficult times along the way. I only wish I could do it all over again and again. Thank you, Lord, for calling me to preach! What a privilege it has been and still is.

I did not always feel that way about preaching. As an extremely shy teenager, I could not understand why the Lord would be pressing upon me a concern about preaching. It didn't make any sense at all and this controversy with Him continued for some time. One day, without warning, my desires were radically changed. I wanted to preach, even though I knew little of what was involved in the ministry. Looking back, I see the gracious hand of our sovereign God overruling my obstinate reluctance and giving me new desires that were not natural for me. The sovereignty of God was very evident at the very beginning of my ministry, even though I could not have discussed it in any understandable manner. I knew it was true in my experience, I would later see it clearly in the Scripture.

God's sovereign providence had already been revealed in some earlier experiences in my family. My oldest brother was killed in flight training in the early months of World War II. He was in a building on the airbase when two planes collided overhead. The trajectory of their fall brought them down on that particular building. As a young boy I could not believe it was a sheer "accident." God had to be involved, but no one had ever taught me about His providence, especially the hard providences! A few weeks before the end of the war, my other brother's plane was shot down on a bombing mission over Tokyo. It was not his regular time to fly, nor his regular plane and crew. He was a substitute bombardier on that mission. Out of thirty planes in the group only one was lost that night, the one he was on. Again, was this "incredible bad luck" or the sovereign purpose of an all wise heavenly Father? My family believed God was in control, even though the pain was so great. Still, God's sovereignty was not explained to me from Scripture. That came years later.

While a student at Baylor University I was told of a church in Waco where they sold good books to students at discount prices. I walked down to the Tabernacle Baptist Church and was greeted by the pastor, Dr. A. Riley Copeland. He asked if I had any "pink tracts." Well, I had given away many tracts but none of them had been pink! He filled my hands with tracts written by A. W. Pink (I had not heard of him before). Returning to the dorm I began to read these messages and realized I had never heard this truth preached. But I knew it was true. There was too much Scriptural emphasis on the greatness and grace of God. Soon I bought Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* and my life was never the same! I still have, and read, that old red hardback copy I bought nearly fifty years ago. No, it is not for sale!

In those days, a Baptist ministerial student in Texas was expected to attend Southwestern Seminary. While at Baylor I had learned about Dallas Theological Seminary and I really felt that is where I should get some great training for the ministry of the Word. That was their emphasis. I did spend a very profitable year at Dallas but at the advice of Dr. Criswell I transferred to Southwestern and eventually got a degree there. Dr. Criswell said, "Son, if you are going to work with Southern Baptists you need to go to one of our seminaries. But while you are at Dallas get all you can, you may not get it later!" While at Dallas my friends and I wrestled with the issues of limited atonement, etc. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson was a great help in solving some of those questions that kept us up into the wee hours of the mornings. The doctrines of grace were becoming very precious. I did not yet know that the background of my denomination had been almost totally Calvinistic (a word I was feeling more comfortable with). I kept wondering

why I had not heard these wonderful truths about the grace of God in the preaching I had heard all my life. Good men had been used of the Lord to help in my spiritual journey, but these great doctrinal truths had not been a part of their public ministry.

I pastored two rural churches while in Baylor and Seminary. Those dear people will have special rewards for helping train this young preacher with their counsel and patience. My first full time ministry was in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. I attempted to be an expository preacher. The study was a great help to me and there was some evidence of the Lord's blessing. However, I was beginning to see that not everyone in our Southern Baptist life was as excited about the doctrines of grace as I was. A few debates came up over Scriptures that some of the folks had never thought about too carefully. A dear older lady in that South Texas congregation was a great encouragement. She had formerly been a Presbyterian and gave me her copy of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. I still have it. But I did not know until later that our Baptist forefathers had found that wonderful document to be a helpful guide in formulating our early confessional statements. Why had I not heard that long before?

As time passed, I became increasingly concerned that methodology should correspond to theology in my ministry. Did I really believe that God sovereignly saves sinners through the work of the Holy Spirit applying the truth of the Word? Was I responsible to secure some sort of response to the truth preached? I came to see that both Scripture and experience indicate that my responsibility is to clearly set forth the truth of the gospel and look to the Lord alone to produce the results. This is easy to say, but the task of altering popular methodology to correspond to biblical theology can be challenging. Belief and practice, however, must come together.

It was while pastoring the First Baptist Church, Ozark, Missouri that I came to the place where conscience would not allow me to continue with the traditional altar call system. Having seen it done all my life, having practiced it myself (with growing reservations), I reached a point in my thinking that something must be changed! I had not read anyone else's thoughts about this matter, but felt there must be many people likewise troubled about this practice and the apparent problems it produced. But again, why were we not hearing of the need of having theology and methodology "in sync"? Could it be that our theology had become such an indefinite matter that we were trying to cover our lack of convictions by the use of psychological and emotional appeals that resulted in comfortable statistics? I only knew that I had to make some drastic changes.

With some trepidation, I shared with our congregation in Ozark a list of reasons why I could no longer give a traditional altar call. The Scriptures did not justify it, church history did not provide a sound basis for it, and I had seen too many people spiritually and emotionally injured by its use. Amazingly, the congregation accepted the changes suggested and many expressed their encouragement and agreement. I felt as if a very heavy weight was lifted. I could preach more freely and urge people to respond to the Lord. If they desired to remain after a service they could express their spiritual concerns with me, some of our deacons, or any Christian present. It was no longer a rigid form of response that was required. One lady told her unsaved husband, "You can go to church now, listen, and get up and walk out. No one will embarrass you." He had some bad experiences with altar calls before. She was right, he could come, listen, think, and leave, if he so desired. Anyone should be able to do that without feeling manipulative pressure upon his emotions. When someone says, "I understand you do not give an invitation," I usually reply that I do give about a thirty-five or forty minute invitation! The message from the Word is the invitation. But I have not given an altar call since 1968. Convictions and practice should go together.

No, there have not been great numbers respond in my fifty-one years of preaching the gospel. I have never pastored large congregations nor preached to great numbers of people. But the Lord has given evidence of His gracious work in the lives of some, perhaps (and probably) more than I have been able to discern. I have a note in my Bible that always encourages me: "Heaven will be the best and safest place to hear the results of our labors." I like that. I believe that.

It is great to preach without depending upon pressure--psychological or emotional--to move people to respond to the truth of the gospel. I really do think the matter of the altar call is one of the most important issues for us to deal with in our local churches and in our denomination. We have seen some encouraging things happen among us in recent years. Wouldn't it be something if we really saw a great change in some of our methods of dealing with people that would indicate we really do believe in the sovereignty of God? Our statistics would probably look a bit different, but we could learn to live with the honesty!

Looking back over a half century of ministry my heart overflows with gratitude. I am still amazed that I have had this incredible privilege. To have the opportunity of preaching the gospel of the grace of God is, outside our own salvation, the greatest gift God could give a human being. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul writes, "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts." This verse is sort of a summary of how I see the ministry. It is a gracious gift from God and it is to be carried out in view of our accountability to Him--not regarding success, but faithfulness. It may be a lot more successful than we yet know. Or, possibly, a lot less. He knows and that is enough.

There is a lot to discourage ministers of the gospel today. Hasn't there always been? Paul's testimony to the Corinthians helps us deal with discouragement. In 2 Corinthians 4:1 he writes, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." The minister of the gospel is first of all a man who has "received mercy"--mercy in his own soul, and added mercy for the task of telling others about His mercy. Since this is true, we do not lose heart. We do not throw in the towel! We do not easily give up this greatest of all opportunities, this preaching, this telling the old, old story whether anyone seems to be listening or not. We must be passionately committed to this one central task--the faithful ministry of the Word of our sovereign and gracious God.

Young preachers, don't lose the passion in your ministry. Be zealous and earnest to make the truth of the gospel known. Thirty, forty, fifty years from now, when you sit down and reflect upon the faithfulness of God to you, your family, and the people in your care, may you also be filled with an indescribable sense of thanksgiving. Just think of it, God called you to be a preacher. Now that really is amazing grace!



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The Sovereignty of God and Pastoral Ministry

[Roger Ellsworth](#)

Every pastor knows the difficulty of his work. We, the feeblest of men, have been called to do the greatest of tasks. We have been called to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to sinners "fast-bound in sin and nature's night." We have been called to shepherd souls. As we think about our work, we find ourselves crying with the apostle Paul: "...who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). The work often seems to be too difficult for us. We often find ourselves discouraged and weary.

- The nature of the work is such that we are almost always doomed to feel a sense of insufficiency--the standards are so high and our efforts so poor.
- The workload is crushing.
- The expectations of our people are often unrealistic. Every sermon is to be more interesting--more entertaining!--than the last. The church is to march from victory to victory, reclaiming inactive church members and winning the lost.
- The outward results are often few and far between.

It is not surprising that so many pastors so often feel that they have come to their wits' end. I am so very thankful that I can offer all my fellow-pastors this word of encouragement: the God we serve is sovereign.

What is the sovereignty of God? John Benton says it is "God's supreme and detailed control over all that comes to pass in heaven and on earth." Donald MacLeod says that God's sovereignty includes ownership, authority and control. God owns every atom. God has the right to control every atom. And God exercises that right. Augustine put it this way: "Nothing, therefore happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen. He either permits it to happen, or He brings it about Himself." Jerry Bridges writes: "The spider building its web in the corner and Napoleon marching his army across Europe are both under God's control."

God's sovereignty means He does what He wants to do, when He wants to do it and without having to give an explanation for why He did it. Most of our church members give verbal assent to the sovereignty of God, even agreeing with this definition. It is when we begin to work out the details that we find our members falling off the wagon. Here is one of the details that they find most disconcerting: the salvation of sinners is included in God's sovereignty. To say otherwise is to deny sovereignty. If there is anything beyond the pale of God's sovereignty, He is not truly sovereign.

God's sovereignty in salvation means that He saves whom He will, and those whom He saves owe nothing at all to themselves. They are saved because God graciously chose them in eternity and regenerated and called them in history. They cannot even take credit for their faith because it is the gift that He Himself sovereignly bestows.

Knowing that so very many in our congregations find such truths to be terribly disconcerting, we pastors find it very easy to equivocate on the issue. We tell ourselves that we are truly preaching the Bible, but the sad fact is many of us have elevated man to the status of God's co-sovereign. We then lament the fact that so many in our churches give no evidence at all of wanting to live for the Lord. Why should they? A little God does not inspire great service.

On the other hand, let one see that he came into this world with condemnation written all over him, that he was deservedly hell-bound because he was, by nature, a God-hater and that he was both helpless and hopeless but that God, in grace, saved him--and that individual will want to worship and serve the Lord.

But what about the sovereignty of God as it relates to pastoral ministry? Several things can be said in response to this question.

The Sovereignty of God Focuses Our Worship on God Instead of on Ourselves.

Since God is the Sovereign of the universe, every worship service should be radically centered on Him and firmly devoted to exalting Him. But how much of what we call worship is truly this way? How much of it is God-centered and how much man-centered? How many of our sermons are about ourselves, our experiences, our desires, our felt needs? How many of our songs are about the same things?

Our defense for modern worship is that we have to give people what they want or they will not come to church at all. Those who hold this view will find very strange John Piper's opening sentence in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*: "People are starving for the greatness of God."

And well they should! There is so little of the greatness of God in our services and in our preaching. Instead of the mighty God of the Scriptures, who graciously plucks sinners from eternal wrath, we have the little god who does favors for us.

Instead of responding to the cry for the greatness of God, the church seems set on trivializing God. Donald W. McCullough writes,

...reverence and awe have been replaced by a yarn of familiarity. The consuming fire has been domesticated into a candle flame, adding a bit of religious atmosphere, perhaps, but no heat, no blinding light, no power for purification. When the true story gets told, whether in the partial light of historical perspective or in the perfect light of eternity, it may well be revealed that the worst sin of the Church at the end of the twentieth century has been the trivialization of God.

The Sovereignty of God Makes Our Preaching God-Centered Instead of Man-Centered.

God is to be the focus of our preaching. We are to preach the sovereign God who sovereignly gave His Word and sovereignly saves through that Word. The fact is that God is the hero of every Bible passage, But, what strange days these are! God is conspicuously absent from much of our preaching. Jesus feeding the 5000 has become more about the little boy than about the Lord. David slaying Goliath has become how to kill the giants in your life. Bishop John R. Moore has rightly said: "We've humanized God, deified man, and minimized sin."

If we truly understand and appreciate the sovereignty of God, we will preach...

- the Bible as the Word of the sovereign God.
- man as the creation of the sovereign God.

- sin as rebellion against the sovereign God.
- eternal destruction as the just judgment of the sovereign God.
- the incarnation as the sovereign God taking our humanity.
- the life of Christ as the sovereign God providing the perfect righteousness that He Himself demands.
- the cross as the atonement of the sovereign God.
- the resurrection as the sovereign God declaring His satisfaction with Christ.
- faith as the gift of the sovereign God.
- sanctification as the ongoing, sure work of the sovereign God.
- heaven as the victory of the sovereign God.

These words from Michael Horton serve as a much needed corrective for us:

I advocate the "redemptive-historical" approach to preaching, which treats the Bible as an unfolding drama of redemption rather than as a handbook of timeless principles... Instead of trying to make the Bible relevant for "today's busy Christian," I suggest that we allow the Bible to arrest us, condemn us, justify and free us. We need more preaching that focuses on God and what he has done, is doing, and will do in history, and less on ourselves and how we can be happier with God's help.

The Sovereignty of God Makes the Cross of Christ Unspeakably Glorious to Us.

The cross of Christ is the means by which the sovereign God provided the salvation that He planned before the world began. To save His people, God had to take their sins out of the way. Are we clear on this? God could not just ignore sin. To do so would be tantamount to Him denying His holy character. God cannot deny Himself. The great, surging question of the ages, therefore, is this: How could a holy God at one and the same time judge sinners--as His holy character demands--and let those same sinners go free--as His grace demands?

The cross is the triumphant answer. It is the place where God honored both the demands of His justice and His grace. Justice was honored because God did indeed judge sin. Jesus Christ actually became sin for His people receiving in His own person the wrath of God against them. Justice looked upon that and was satisfied.

But the cross also honored the demands of God's grace. Because Jesus suffered the wrath of God in the stead of His people and because God only demands that the penalty be paid once, there is no wrath left for those people. Both God's justice and God's grace looked upon the cross of Christ and clapped their hands.

Once we see the nature of the cross, we will find it impossible to preach without having it in view. We will, like Charles Spurgeon, find ourselves, no matter what text we take, making a beeline for the cross.

The Sovereignty of God Encourages Evangelism.

God's elect will most certainly come to Christ. The Lord Jesus himself said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:44).

Do you remember Paul's experience in Corinth? The apostle encountered fierce opposition there. But the Lord spoke to him and said, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to

hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). It was so certain that these people would come to faith in the Lord that He could speak of them as if they had already come.

One of the primary objections to the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners is that it cuts the nerve of evangelism and missions. Untrue! It does exactly the opposite. Knowing that those whom God has chosen will definitely respond encourages us to spread the gospel.

Think of it in terms of a simple illustration. Suppose someone were to ask you to go to a corn field and look for diamonds. Would you be inclined to go? But suppose he told you that he had scattered a thousand diamonds in that same field on the previous night and you could have as many as you could find. Would that make a difference in your willingness to go?

The Sovereignty of God Sweetens Our Trials.

As we have noted, there is no shortage of trials and difficulties for the pastor. These are oftentimes so very severe that we wonder how we shall find the strength and peace to go on. That strength and peace comes only as we rest in the sovereignty of God. Nothing--absolutely nothing--comes to us except from the Father's hand. Even those people who seem to go out of their way to make life miserable for us? Yes! Firm reliance on the sovereignty of God will teach us to say of these what Joseph said to his brothers, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good,..." (Genesis 50:20a).

Romans 8:28 teaches us that everything from the Father's hand is for our good. Here is the rub--our view of what constitutes good is often a far cry from God's. We think we know what good is. It is to have pleasant, happy circumstances. But the context of Romans 8:28 makes it clear that the good God is pursuing is far different. It is nothing less than conforming us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). This is God's purpose for us. Do we understand that this purpose requires Him to take a far different approach with us than if His purpose were merely our comfort? We may look at our circumstances and wonder whether God truly has our best interests at heart. But we can never look at the cross of Christ without being assured that He does.

Let us resolve, then, not to focus so much on what God is doing in our circumstances but rather on doing what God has commanded. We might say God has two books--the book of His promises and the book of His providence. We are responsible to read the book of His promises, drawing from the strength we need to face our trials. God Himself will finally read to us the book of His providence. When He does, it will all make sense. And on that blessed day, we will finally be able to fully understand the words of Charles Tindley's hymn:

Trials dark on every hand
And we cannot understand
All the ways that God will lead us to that blessed promised land;
But He'll guide us with His eye,
And we'll follow till we die;
We will understand it better by and by.



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The Importance of Defending the Trinity

[Gannon Murphy](#)

One of the first clues that tip off the seminal importance of the historic doctrine of the Trinity is the perennial smoke of controversy that has surrounded it throughout the history of the church. Antitrinitarianism is a positively ancient cancer that has festered and re-festered in a multitude of forms over the last two millennia. Indeed, the seemingly endless demand for a cogent and sturdy defense of biblical Trinitarianism provided many of the church fathers with the motivation they needed to pen some of the most powerful apologetical works ever issued. Tertullian's, *Against Praxeas* (second century), Gregory of Nyssa's, *On Not Three Gods* (fourth century), and Augustine's, *On the Holy Trinity* (early fifth century) are just a few examples of works defending the Trinity. The Trinity was also the central issue at several early church councils such as those in Nicea (325) and Constantinople (382) where the heretical, antitrinitarian teachings of Arius and his followers were sternly repudiated. Significant spurts of antitrinitarianism continued, however, and carried themselves well over into the Middle Ages (especially in Peter Abelard and the Nominalists), through the period of the Reformation (as in Faustus Socinus and his followers, the Socinians), and well into the period of the Enlightenment in which antitrinitarian congregations began sprouting up all over Europe and were carrying over to America.^[1] Indeed, a steady stream of vehement antitrinitarianism can be traced all the way through the first century right up to the present day where it is made brazenly manifest in such groups as the Unitarians, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Theosophical Society, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The doctrine of the Trinity is consistently among the first of those teachings to be banefully attacked by the opponents of the historic, Christian faith. Cultists and religious devotees of multitudinous persuasions come against Trinitarianism with a venom uncommon in most other arenas of doctrinal controversy. Missionaries for the Mormon church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam, for example, often receive training in specific methods targeted at "refuting" the Trinity.

Why is this? Why all the hubbub? What is so threatening about a doctrine which some would care to deem merely "academic," "heady," "too speculative," "contradictory" or "confusing"? The answer is really quite simple: If the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not true, then Jesus Christ is not Who He said He was, namely, God the Savior. But if it is true, resistless logic points to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus Christ is indeed, the *logos sarx*, the Word in human flesh Who "made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Enemies of the Holy Trinity know that if the fabric of Trinitarianism can be torn down, then Jesus was but a mere man, perhaps a prophet at best, but certainly not the *Theanthropos*, the Godman--100 percent man, 100 percent Deity (Philippians 2:5-7) as the Bible and the historic creeds of Christendom affirm. And if Christ was not these things, then He did not render sufficient satisfaction for our sins by virtue of His death and on the cross and victorious resurrection three days later. Indeed, as Paul affirms, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). If the Trinity is not true, then Christ is not God the Son resurrected and, plain and simple, Christians worldwide are worshipping a dead man. So how important is the Trinity and its defense? I'd say it doesn't get more important than this!

The Bible, of course, never actually uses the word "Trinity." Rather, the term--since coined by Tertullian in the second century--"has simply been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."^[2] Biblical passages affirming both the "Oneness" and the *Triunity of this Oneness* are in ample supply. Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms that "The Lord our God is *one* Lord" while passages such as Matthew 28:19 and 2Corinthians 13:14 both make explicit use of the "Trinitarian formula."^[3] The divinity of Christ is also affirmed in various places like Colossians 2:9 where Paul calls Jesus "the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (see also Philippians 2:5-7; John 8:58, 17:5; Revelation 2:8).

Contrary to the claims of skeptics and antitrinitarians, the doctrine of the Trinity does not go *against* reason, but rather beyond it.^[4] There is an unbridgeable difference between these two assertions. The Trinity is a *mystery*, not a

contradiction. Properly formulated, the doctrine declares that "God is *one* in nature (or essence) and *three* in person" thus doing no violence to reason. If, on the other hand, the doctrine were to declare that God is "one in nature *and* three in nature," then, indeed, we would have an irreconcilable contradiction. For, in this case God is said to be both one and three *at the same time and in the same sense* which is a patent violation of the law of noncontradiction which governs all rational thought and without which all intelligible discourse would be impossible. That the Trinity is logically tenable does not, however, alter its status as an intractable theological mystery. How the three Persons of the Trinity co-inhere one another in the Divine perichoresis, though noncontradictory, is beyond the human capacity to understand. *Finitum non capax infinitum*, the finite cannot contain the infinite.

The doctrine of the Trinity cuts right to the core of the very constituent nature of God. For this reason, the doctrine is an essential teaching of the Christian faith *with salvific import*. For, as we have seen, it is inextricably interwoven with Who Christ is--the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). To reject the Trinity is to reject the God *Who Is*.

We should not agonize over the mysteriousness or complexity of this doctrine. Rather, we should take great comfort in it. For, a most glorious aspect of the Trinity is the manner in which it represents the eternal relationality of God, *in perfect love*. St. Augustine spoke at length of this *Tri-unity* of love. Love, he said, involves a *lover*. Thus, the Father might be likened to the Lover; the Son to the One loved, and the Holy Spirit to the bond of love.^[5] C. S. Lewis once put it this way, "The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person."^[6] The Trinity, then, makes the very fact of love possible--an important and comforting fact indeed. When a person becomes a Christian, that person enters in to the Triune love. Some theologians, including a professor I once had in seminary, sometimes even refer to God's saving work (as well as the entire panoply of redemptive history) as "the Trinification of the world."^[7]

The prodigious energies that the great apologists of Christian orthodoxy throughout the centuries have poured into defending the historic doctrine of the Trinity should humble the pervasive laxity and docility of the church today with regard to this cardinal tenet of the faith. It is not simply a "heady speculation" or "abstract doctrine" without real, live import for our lives. The Trinity grounds our salvation in the immutable reality of the Godhead. It is not on optional or marginal teaching. The Christian faith is not such that we can pick and choose our doctrines and affirm one central tenet while we drop another. Where the essentials of the faith are concerned, you cannot say, "Hey, at least I've got 9 out of 10!" Its an all or nothing deal. St. Augustine says, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." The doctrine of the Trinity falls into the first category. This is not a debate over end-times scenarios, modes of baptismal administration, old earth vs. young earth, or similar in-house issues which we should debate with vigor but not divide over. Rather, the Trinity is a doctrinal hill that all Bible-believing Christians must be willing to die on and to defend with the utmost of fortitude. Paul says, "Watch your life and doctrine closely..." Why? Paul says, "...because if you do, *you will save both yourself and your hearers*." This is a matter of eternal salvation and is precisely why we must not be lax toward it but must be ready to offer a defense--in an age where it is unpopular to do so--of the paramount importance and centrality of the Trinity.

Notes

¹ C. G. Singer, "Unitarianism" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 1126.

² G. W. Bromiley, "Trinity" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 1112

³ Herbert Lockyer (Editor) "Trinity" *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 1073.

⁴ Norman Geisler, "Trinity" *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 730

⁵ Ibid., 733

⁶ C. S. Lewis, "The Trinity" *The Joyful Christian* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 47

⁷ James Beilby, Lecture on the Doctrine of God, *Bethel Theological Seminary* (October 2000).



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The Importance of Defending the Trinity

[*Gannon Murphy*](#)

One of the first clues that tip off the seminal importance of the historic doctrine of the Trinity is the perennial smoke of controversy that has surrounded it throughout the history of the church. Antitrinitarianism is a positively ancient cancer that has festered and re-festered in a multitude of forms over the last two millennia. Indeed, the seemingly endless demand for a cogent and sturdy defense of biblical Trinitarianism provided many of the church fathers with the motivation they needed to pen some of the most powerful apologetical works ever issued. Tertullian's, *Against Praxeas* (second century), Gregory of Nyssa's, *On Not Three Gods* (fourth century), and Augustine's, *On the Holy Trinity* (early fifth century) are just a few examples of works defending the Trinity. The Trinity was also the central issue at several early church councils such as those in Nicea (325) and Constantinople (382) where the heretical, antitrinitarian teachings of Arius and his followers were sternly repudiated. Significant spurts of antitrinitarianism continued, however, and carried themselves well over into the Middle Ages (especially in Peter Abelard and the Nominalists), through the period of the Reformation (as in Faustus Socinus and his followers, the Socinians), and well into the period of the Enlightenment in which antitrinitarian congregations began sprouting up all over Europe and were carrying over to America.^[1] Indeed, a steady stream of vehement antitrinitarianism can be traced all the way through the first century right up to the present day where it is made brazenly manifest in such groups as the Unitarians, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Theosophical Society, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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We should not agonize over the mysteriousness or complexity of this doctrine. Rather, we should take great comfort in it. For, a most glorious aspect of the Trinity is the manner in which it represents the eternal relationality of God, *in perfect love*. St. Augustine spoke at length of this *Tri-unity* of love. Love, he said, involves a *lover*. Thus, the Father might be likened to the Lover; the Son to the One loved, and the Holy Spirit to the bond of love.^[5] C. S. Lewis once put it this way, "The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person."^[6] The Trinity, then, makes the very fact of love possible--an important and comforting fact indeed. When a person becomes a Christian, that person enters in to the Triune love. Some theologians, including a professor I once had in seminary, sometimes even refer to God's saving work (as well as the entire panoply of redemptive history) as "the Trinification of the world."^[7]

The prodigious energies that the great apologists of Christian orthodoxy throughout the centuries have poured into defending the historic doctrine of the Trinity should humble the pervasive laxity and docility of the church today with regard to this cardinal tenet of the faith. It is not simply a "heady speculation" or "abstract doctrine" without real, live import for our lives. The Trinity grounds our salvation in the immutable reality of the Godhead. It is not an optional or marginal teaching. The Christian faith is not such that we can pick and choose our doctrines and affirm one central tenet while we drop another. Where the essentials of the faith are concerned, you cannot say, "Hey, at least I've got 9 out of 10!" It's an all or nothing deal. St. Augustine says, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." The doctrine of the Trinity falls into the first category. This is not a debate over end-times scenarios, modes of baptismal administration,

old earth vs. young earth, or similar in-house issues which we should debate with vigor but not divide over. Rather, the Trinity is a doctrinal hill that all Bible-believing Christians must be willing to die on and to defend with the utmost of fortitude. Paul says, "Watch your life and doctrine closely..." Why? Paul says, "...because if you do, *you will save both yourself and your hearers.*" This is a matter of eternal salvation and is precisely why we must not be lax toward it but must be ready to offer a defense--in an age where it is unpopular to do so--of the paramount importance and centrality of the Trinity.

Notes

¹ C. G. Singer, "Unitarianism" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 1126.

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⁴ Norman Geisler, "Trinity" *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 730

⁵ *Ibid.*, 733

⁶ C. S. Lewis, "The Trinity" *The Joyful Christian* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 47

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The Importance of Defending the Trinity

Gannon Murphy

One of the first clues that tip off the seminal importance of the historic doctrine of the Trinity is the perennial smoke of controversy that has surrounded it throughout the history of the church. Antitrinitarianism is a positively ancient cancer that has festered and re-festered in a multitude of forms over the last two millennia. Indeed, the seemingly endless demand for a cogent and sturdy defense of biblical Trinitarianism provided many of the church fathers with the motivation they needed to pen some of the most powerful apologetical works ever issued. Tertullian's, *Against Praxeas* (second century), Gregory of Nyssa's, *On Not Three Gods* (fourth century), and Augustine's, *On the Holy Trinity* (early fifth century) are just a few examples of works defending the Trinity. The Trinity was also the central issue at several early church councils such as those in Nicea (325) and Constantinople (382) where the heretical, antitrinitarian teachings of Arius and his followers were sternly repudiated. Significant spurts of antitrinitarianism continued, however, and carried themselves well over into the Middle Ages (especially in Peter Abelard and the Nominalists), through the period of the Reformation (as in Faustus Socinus and his followers, the Socinians), and well into the period of the Enlightenment in which antitrinitarian congregations began sprouting up all over Europe and were carrying over to America.^[1] Indeed, a steady stream of vehement antitrinitarianism can be traced all the way through the first century right up to the present day where it is made brazenly manifest in such groups as the Unitarians, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Theosophical Society, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The doctrine of the Trinity is consistently among the first of those teachings to be banefully attacked by the opponents of the historic, Christian faith. Cultists and religious devotees of multitudinous persuasions come against Trinitarianism with a venom uncommon in most other arenas of doctrinal controversy. Missionaries for the Mormon church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam, for example, often receive training in specific methods targeted at "refuting" the Trinity.

Why is this? Why all the hubbub? What is so threatening about a doctrine which some would care to deem merely "academic," "heady," "too speculative," "contradictory" or "confusing"? The answer is really quite simple: If the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not true, then Jesus Christ is not Who He said He was, namely, God the Savior. But if it is true, resistless logic points to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus Christ is indeed, the *logos sarx*, the Word in human flesh Who "made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Enemies of the Holy Trinity know that if the fabric of Trinitarianism can be torn down, then Jesus was but a mere man, perhaps a prophet at best, but certainly not the *Theanthropos*, the Godman--100 percent man, 100 percent Deity (Philippians 2:5-7) as the Bible and the historic creeds of Christendom affirm. And if Christ was not these things, then He did not render sufficient satisfaction for our sins by virtue of His death and on the cross and victorious resurrection three days later. Indeed, as Paul affirms, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). If the Trinity is not true, then Christ is not God the Son resurrected and, plain and simple, Christians worldwide are worshipping a dead man. So how important is the Trinity and its defense? I'd say it doesn't get more important than this!

The Bible, of course, never actually uses the word "Trinity." Rather, the term--since coined by Tertullian in the second century--"has simply been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."^[2] Biblical passages affirming both the "Oneness" and the *Triunity of this Oneness* are in ample supply. Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms that "The Lord our God is *one* Lord" while passages such as Matthew 28:19 and 2Corinthians 13:14 both make explicit use of the "Trinitarian formula."^[3] The divinity of Christ is also affirmed in various places like Colossians 2:9 where Paul calls Jesus "the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells

bodily" (see also Philippians 2:5-7; John 8:58, 17:5; Revelation 2:8).

Contrary to the claims of skeptics and antitrinitarians, the doctrine of the Trinity does not go *against* reason, but rather beyond it.^[4] There is an unbridgeable difference between these two assertions. The Trinity is a *mystery*, not a *contradiction*. Properly formulated, the doctrine declares that "God is *one* in nature (or essence) and *three* in person" thus doing no violence to reason. If, on the other hand, the doctrine were to declare that God is "one in nature *and* three in nature," then, indeed, we would have an irreconcilable contradiction. For, in this case God is said to be both one and three *at the same time and in the same sense* which is a patent violation of the law of noncontradiction which governs all rational thought and without which all intelligible discourse would be impossible. That the Trinity is logically tenable does not, however, alter its status as an intractable theological mystery. How the three Persons of the Trinity co-inhere one another in the Divine perichoresis, though noncontradictory, is beyond the human capacity to understand. *Finitum non capax infinitum*, the finite cannot contain the infinite.

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Book Reviews

Dale Ralph Davis. *The Wisdom and the Folly: An Exposition of the Book of First Kings*. Geanies House, Fern, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2002. Paperback, 350 pp. £8.99/\$14.99

Reviewed by [Ray Van Neste](#)

Dr. Ralph Davis, Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS, has provided yet another fine exposition of an Old Testament book (he has previously published expositions of Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel with the same publisher). Davis describes his work in this way: "As with my previous commentaries, I seek to grasp the theological nerve of the text and cast it in expository form, without being allergic to application" (7).

It is apparent that Davis is well informed in the scholarly discussion of First Kings, but his purpose is not to display his learning. Rather, based on a full awareness of the issues in the text, he seeks to expound the text properly incorporating some illustrations and application.

In this way Davis provides a model for preaching from First Kings--a task which often appears quite daunting. On the one hand he does not get bogged down in details failing to get to what God is saying in the text and what we are to do about it. On the other hand he shows that carefully reading of the text is necessary in order to actually grasp what God is saying rather than reading in whatever we want to find. I especially appreciate his sensitivity to structure and flow of thought as well as his careful connections across the covenants.

I think pastors will find this volume very helpful in the task of preaching (as I have). As always, one should read more than one commentary in sermon preparation. So pick a more technical one to get at some more details and then read this one for help in pulling it all together within a sound theological framework and a heart for God and His people.

Scholar's Library, Logos Bible Software, Series X. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2002. Retail: \$599.95.

Reviewed by [Bill Ascol](#)

What if, with a couple of computer keystrokes, you could search sixteen versions of the Bible in English, several Greek New Testament texts, the Hebrew Old Testament, and/or the Latin Vulgate for the occurrences and contextual uses of a key word or phrase in the Scriptures? What if you could instantly access the tense/voice/mood of any word in the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek New Testament? Or what if you could search some 230 sources, from commentaries to theologies, and Bible histories to pastoral ministry tools? Would you be helped in your Bible study if you could instantly have your choice of looking at a particular Scripture passage exegetically, according to commentaries, or through a word study approach? What if you could copy and paste Scripture verses (or whole chapters of the Bible for that matter) into your word processing document? Have you ever wondered how many

times a form of the word "covenant" is used in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (205 times in 102 articles), and how it is used? What about the occurrence and use of the word "grace" in Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (864 times in 303 articles) or Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* (557 times in 319 articles)?

Thanks to the good people at Logos Research Systems, all of this and much more is within your reach for pennies on the dollar when compared to the cost of purchasing the same titles in hard copy as those contained in *Scholar's Library*. What is more, the software is extremely easy to use--just enter a passage or topic and click "Go!" I have been a Logos user since they came out with version 1.0 many years ago. I still remember loading their bright orange floppy disk demo and being amazed at what could be accomplished with electronic Bible software. The intervening years have been marked by incredible improvement and expansion as far as the Logos Bible Software family of products is concerned. The Logos technicians have developed *the* premier search engine for Bible software and they have worked diligently over the years to bring some of the best titles imaginable into electronic format for use with their search engine. The newest version of this search engine is styled as "Libronix Digital Library System" and has truly taken the study of the Bible on the computer to a whole new dimension, unlocking a world of possibilities.

Scholar's Library is the "best of the best" in the Logos collections, bringing together a wide array of titles and tools designed to cover every discipline of pastoral and theological study as well as every area of pastoral ministry. Once the collection is installed, the user has access to a half dozen or more commentaries on every verse in the Bible, as well as language and exegetical tools for the study of Bible words and/or passages. Biblical background materials, including maps, are also just a few keystrokes away. Whether you need lexicons and theological dictionaries or resources to help with small groups, you will find a wealth of helpful information in *Scholar's Library*. This collection sells for \$599.95, but Logos is offering a special 25% off discount to *Founders Journal* readers. You can get *Scholar's Library* for just \$449.96! Order *Scholar's Library* at www.logos.com/scholars and enter the code FOUNDERS into your shopping cart, or call (800) 875-6467 and mention the same code.

You can see the software in action by viewing their demo at <http://www.logos.com/demo>. I have tried other Bible software programs, but I keep coming back to Logos because of its ease of use, comprehensive and growing list of titles, and great technical support. If you have a PC (sorry Mac users) and the desire to harvest a wealth of information in such a way that you can spend more time studying and less time searching, then you owe it to yourself to give it a try. With their 30-day money-back guarantee, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Recent Children's Materials from Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fern, Scotland.

Reviewed by [Ray Van Neste](#)

Christian Focus Publications is, in my opinion, the leader in producing fine, reliable Bible literature for children. Thus, it may be useful to survey some items they have recently published.

Carine Mackenzie, author of the highly recommended Bible Wise and Bible Time series, has written *The Bible Explorer: God's Truth from Genesis to Revelation*. This book is essentially a Bible reference tool for children. The book works straight through the canon providing basic summaries of key sections. A two-page spread is devoted to each section, which surveys either a key story or event and, sometimes, an entire book. Each two-page spread then contains several types of information. In addition to a basic summary of the story, event or book there is a "Think Spot" (application), a memory verse and a "Fact File" (more detailed information or definition). Each piece of information is also coded by a certain icon so that one can trace a common theme straight through the Bible allowing

children to see how the Bible holds together. There are also useful maps and a timeline before each testament. The book is visually attractive and will be very useful for slightly older children.

Irene Howat has written a series of four books designed to introduce children (roughly ages 7-11) to post-biblical heroes of the faith. The titles are:

- *Ten Boys Who Changed the World*: George Mueller, Brother Andrew, Nicky Cruz, John Newton, Billy Graham, William Carey, David Livingstone, Adoniram Judson, Eric Liddell and Luis Palau
- *Ten Girls Who Changed the World*: Isobel Kuhn, Mary Slessor, Joni Eareckson, Corrie Ten Boom, Helen Keller, Jackie Pullinger, Amy Carmichael, Evelyn Brand and Catherine Booth.
- *Ten Boys Who Made a Difference*: Augustine, Knox, Luther, Calvin, Hus, Latimer, Zwingli, Tyndale, Chalmers and Lord Shaftesbury
- *Ten Girls Who Made a Difference*: Susannah Wesley, Monica of Hippo, Ann Judson, Edith Schaefer, Katherine Luther, Susie Spurgeon, Bethan Lloyd-Jones, Maria Taylor, Sabrina Wurmbrand and Ruth Bell Graham

Books introducing children to people such as these are certainly welcome. The books do not aim to give a thorough introduction to these people but point out their major accomplishment and seek to isolate a specific lesson. In order to start with the childhood of these influential people it appears the data at hand is used to create historical fiction.

For younger children, Penny Reeve, a missionary to Nepal, has written a four-volume *Find the Animal* series. Each book is 16 pages long with limited text focusing on amazing things about a certain animal. The animal is hidden in each picture with only certain parts visible. The child tries to guess what the animal is as each page is turned. The book concludes by stating that as amazing as this animal is, God is even greater. The book in the series which I have seen is *God Made Something Strong*. In this book, the animal is an elephant and the characteristics of strength and greatness are emphasized. The book is light and fun and helps describe the strength of God to a child by stating that while an elephant is certainly big and strong, God is even stronger!

Lastly, Catherine Mackenzie (daughter of Carine), has written a wonderful book entitled *My God is So Big*. The book plays off of the popular chorus by the same name and is entirely focused on the greatness of our God. In a day when the church suffers from a diminished view of God it is exhilarating to read a book to my children which exults in the "big-ness" of God! I hope this book finds wide circulation in homes, children's libraries and Sunday schools. May we raise up a new generation which exults in the glory of our God. Good books like these mentioned here will greatly aid us in the task.



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Confessions of a Nineteenth-Century Baptist

[Nathan Finn](#)

As I observe some of the happenings in contemporary Baptist life, I am reminded of a truth I have known for some time. Deep down, I am a nineteenth-century Baptist.

You may be wondering how it is possible for someone who was just nineteen only four years ago to be a nineteenth-century Baptist. Have I discovered a way to be transported back to an earlier time? In a sense, yes. As I began reading about Baptist history back in college, I came to the conclusion that in many respects I prefer the way Baptists "did it" back in the 1800s.

Now, I am very willing to concede that not everything in Baptist life was perfect before the turn of the twentieth century. Most contemporary Baptists have moved away from the Landmarkism that was so popular after the Civil War. The majority of us also differ with the hyper-Calvinists of the frontier who refused to witness to unbelievers. And of course we now recognize the error of most Baptists in the South who tried to defend the institution of slavery with the Scriptures.

In light of these "blemishes" on the nineteenth-century Baptist record, why would any twenty-first-century seminary student feel more at home in the nineteenth century? There are several reasons.

One reason is theology. In a day when many self-appointed "mainstream" Baptists are playing fast and loose with the authority of Scripture, I think back to a simpler time when Baptist people could say they believed the Bible was the Word of God without adding a qualifying "but..." As those of us from the Deep South like to say, "either it is, or it ain't."

Another reason is evangelism and missions. In a day when some Baptists are capitulating to the unbiblical (and dangerous) notion that non-Christians can inherit eternal life, I think back to a time when Baptists were serious about taking the gospel to all those who were outside of Christ. Baptists planted churches on the American frontier and sent missionaries such as Lottie Moon to faraway lands to proclaim the good news.

A third reason is our Baptist distinctives. In a day when some Baptists believe that the priesthood of the believer means that there should be no authority in the church of Christ, I think back to the days when Baptist people realized that while every Christian is called to service in Christ, to deny genuine spiritual authority would lead to spiritual stagnation, ecclesiastical pandemonium and eventually heresy and apostasy. You don't have to look far to find a "Baptist" congregation or fellowship that will allow virtually anything to go in the name of "Christian freedom" or "soul competency."

Thankfully, the above problems are no longer widespread in the churches and seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention (though pockets continue to persist in many Baptist colleges). The conservative resurgence begun in 1979 worked to reverse many of the problems in Southern Baptist faith and practice. However, there is still much to be done. As faithful as we seek to be to the teachings of Scripture, in many areas we still fall short of the wisdom of our Baptist forefathers. I would like to offer a few suggestions of how we can renew the Southern Baptist Convention by returning to the practices of days gone by.

First, contemporary Baptist congregations should work toward having a regenerate membership. One of the reasons our Baptist ancestors fought for the doctrine of believers' baptism was their conviction that a church's membership should only be made up of individuals who were genuinely converted. We must remember that ultimately church growth is not about the number of baptisms per year, but the number of lives that have radically been changed by the power of the gospel. In a denomination of almost sixteen million members, of which only five million or so attend a local church regularly, this is a most important practice to recover. Most of our congregations have a multitude of "members" who in reality are nothing more than names on a role. What many of these absentee members need is not another invitation from the Sunday School outreach director to come back to church. You can rest assured they will do that if there is a controversial vote to take at an upcoming business meeting! What they need is to be converted.

Second, contemporary Baptist congregations should recover the lost practice of corrective church discipline. Far too many churches have individuals in leadership positions who are willfully and regularly participating in activities contrary to the teachings of Scripture. Such people not only tarnish the image of their local church, but also bring reproach on the whole body of Christ. These individuals should be made to submit to the discipline of their church, including rebuke, correction and possibly the revocation of membership. This will seem harsh to many people, but we must keep two things in mind. First, our Lord and Savior Himself outlined a process of church discipline for us to follow in Matthew 18. Jesus approved of the practice of disciplining wayward church members. Secondly, church discipline exists not to condemn, but to correct. When church discipline is practiced in love on a genuine believer, often that individual will repent of their sinful act(s). Reconciliation occurs, and the church is the stronger for it.

Third, contemporary Baptist pastors should remember the primacy of preaching. Anyone can "preach" colorful anecdotes and self-help sound bites with a Scripture verse or two mixed in, but these discourses (I hesitate to call them sermons) only serve to tickle the ears of the unconverted. We have all heard people complain that some sermons make them feel depressed or uncomfortable. These folks say they want to feel good about themselves when they leave church. They want sermons that are positive and upbeat, presumably leaving out such "depressing" topics as sin, repentance and eternal punishment. Baptist people don't need those types of sermons. What we need are men in our Baptist pulpits who will preach the whole counsel of God, realizing that sometimes people will indeed be offended. Such is the nature of the gospel.

Finally, contemporary Baptists should develop a love for doctrine. In a world of gimmicks and novelties, we should cling to that which is unchanging--the Word of God. Someone once remarked that now that the Southern Baptists have agreed the Bible is inerrant, they should read it. Well said indeed. May we love the wonderful doctrines of God in the same way as men like Richard Furman, P. H. Mell, J. L. Dagg, W. B. Johnson, J. P. Boyce, Basil Manly Jr. and John Broadus did in the 19th century.

Like these men, may we unashamedly trust in the full authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of our great God, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the final and successful preaching of the gospel to all the peoples of the earth, and the glorious second coming of Christ. May we allow these doctrines to reform our churches and renew our people.

I am indeed a nineteenth-century Baptist. I continue to hope and pray that the Southern Baptist Convention as a denomination will recover its nineteenth-century roots. This second "conservative resurgence" could only serve to strengthen our people, our churches and our convention.



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Letters

Dear Fellow Saints,

Please pray for me. I am a SBC pastor who holds to the Doctrines of Grace and supports the Founder's movement and am under intense pressure. Although my church's doctrinal statement in the constitution and bylaws is the Abstract of Principles, I was presented the following at a deacon's meeting last Sunday by the deacon chairman:

"Only Baptist beliefs should be taught in Baptist churches for purposes of discipleship. One who has taught contrary to Baptist beliefs should repent, apologize to the congregation from the pulpit and in writing, and promise to stop such teaching. Strange doctrines and beliefs should be presented only for information and should be clearly identified to avoid confusing new Christians or alienating older Christians. These comments are directed specifically to the teaching called "predestination" including the claim that man does not have free will. Further, attempting to trivialize a Baptist belief by labeling it only "tradition" shows unbecoming disregard for the same."

I have been in the church for five and a half years. Most of the people are doctrinally ignorant. I have a small core who holds to the Doctrines of Grace, most of whom have joined because of my beliefs.

The recent controversy stems from a series I began on Sunday evenings introducing the doctrine of election. I have preached sermons on God's glory as the purpose of all things, God's absolute sovereignty, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility and how they are both parallel truths in Scripture and not contradictory. I have further done a series of sermons highlighting man's total depravity. In so doing, I have quoted the definition of election from the Abstract of Principles, which is part of the church's constitution and bylaws.

My discussion with the deacons Sunday was mostly futile. One of seven stood in support, three remained neutral and three attacked. I met privately with the deacon chairman on Tuesday and further justified my position biblically as I did Sunday afternoon. He insists on twisting the Scripture I present and building his whole theology around John 3.16.

I covet your prayers and any advice you have.

Your Brother in Christ,
via email

Editor's Response:

I am very sorry to hear of your difficulties. You are not alone in being attacked because of your efforts to preach God's truth in sincerity. There is not much that I can offer you via email, but I would be glad to speak to you by phone if you would like. ...

Guard your heart against bitterness. Remember that however hard all of this is on you it is much more difficult on your wife. Be strong and encouraging for her sake. Don't deny your theology by your attitude or actions. God must open their eyes. Be "as wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove." Remember that the Lord has you right where He

wants you this minute and so seek to be as faithful as you can be in your normal responsibilities. Out-rejoice your critics. Out-love them. Remember that Jesus was mistreated and abused and misunderstood. Pray for and expect the Lord to give you grace to respond redemptively to hostilities at the time that they come.

Well, as I said, it is hard to communicate things that might be of help to you via email. Do keep me up to date and I will pray.

In Christ,
Tom Ascol

Dr. Ascol:

I have just finished this article, and would like to ask what place the Scripture which says that It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all would come to the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus has in Calvinist thought?

Thank you,
R. H., via email

Editor's Response:

Thanks for your note and question. It is an important one. The two verses that inform your question are:

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" 2 Peter 3:9.

...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" 1 Timothy 2:4.

As you can imagine, these and other such verses have been the subject of much study and reflection by those of Reformed persuasion and detailed expositions can be found from a variety of teachers (John Gill, John Piper, John Owen, D.A. Carson, et al).

I will try to give a quick summary of my own understanding of the verses above and the issues they raise. First of all, in 2 Peter, the apostle is explaining how we should respond to those who ridicule us because Jesus has not yet returned and because it seems like everything is just rocking along as it always has with no hint of His return in sight. Verse 3:9 is written in that context--the Lord has not forgotten His promise to send Christ back, He is not slack; it will happen. The reason it has not happened yet is that He is longsuffering. To whom is He longsuffering? "Toward us [or possibly, you]." He is not willing that any [any of who? "us" or possibly "you"--in other words, His people as Peter identifies them in 1 Peter 1:1-2 and 2 Peter 1:1]. The argument is this: God will not send Jesus back until all of "us" [read His people] are rescued. Only after they are will Christ return. If this is not the meaning and if Peter means every person without exception, then his argument fails: Christ will not return until every person without exception is rescued, which we know will never happen.

In 1 Timothy, I think a case can and should be made that "all men" refers to all kinds of people, based on the

varieties of people that Paul has just mentioned should be the objects of our prayers. I know the response that says, "all means all and that is all that all means," but such a view cannot be maintained at every place that the Scripture uses "all" (see for example, Mark 1:5, 32; 7:3, etc.).

Some people (Spurgeon, for example) see 1 Timothy as expressing God's revealed will which cannot be used then to ignore the existence of His decreed will. I am helped to think about the reality of these 2 ways of willing in God by considering the cross of Jesus. Was it God's will that Jesus be crucified? It depends on how you are thinking about that question. It most certainly was not His revealed will--it was murder and a miscarriage of justice and those responsible were guilty of going against God's clearly stated, revealed will (as it is summarized in the 10 Commandments). However, Jesus is said to be the "lamb slain from before the foundation of the world" and Isaiah 53 graphically prophesies His execution 700 years before it happened. So, yes, Jesus' death was God's will in the sense of it was His eternal purpose that it should happen. That was the very reason for which He was born.

So Peter summarizes these two ways of willing in Acts 2:23, when he says of Jesus, "Him, being delivered by the *determined purpose and foreknowledge of God* [in keeping with God's secret, decreed will], you have taken by lawless hands [in violation of God's revealed will], have crucified, and put to death;" Acts 2:23. See also the disciples' prayer in Acts 4:27-28.

Recognizing this makes the wisdom of Deuteronomy 29:29 shine all the brighter in my mind: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" Deuteronomy 29:29.

Hope this helps a little.

Blessings,
Tom Ascol



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New Founders Study Guide Commentary

1 Corinthians is a book that has tremendous practical counsel for twenty-first century churches. The problems that the Apostle Paul addressed to the first-century church in Corinth are still with us today, and the inspired remedies are just as authoritative and effective now as when they were first given.

This brief exposition of 1 Corinthians by Dr. Curtis Vaughan and the late Dr. Thomas Lea is designed to assist pastors and church members to better understand the flow of Paul's thought, the chief themes of the book and the meanings of key words and phrases. Originally published in 1983 by Zondervan Press, Founders Press is pleased to make it available to the current generation of church leaders.

The retail cost of the book is \$8.99. For a limited time, the book will be offered at the special introductory price of \$5.99 (plus shipping and handling)! Visit our website (www.founders.org) to order!

New congregation in Montreal, Quebec calls pastor

...glise réformée baptiste de Montréal (Reform Baptist Church, Montreal), a two-year-old congregation, recently called Daniel Durand as pastor. The church, begun by Dr. Raymond Perron of the Reformed Baptist Mission Services, is affiliated with the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists. Perron began the church long-distance, commuting 150 miles each weekend from Quebec City to Montreal. He will continue to assist Pastor Durand as this small congregation grows. The church is seeking other Southern Baptist sponsors/partners to help them minister in this most resistant culture. Dr. Perron can be contacted at raymondp@ccapcable.com.



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