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Confusing Times

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The Founders Journal



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Confusing Times

Tom Ascol

THESE ARE CONFUSED AND CONFUSING TIMES for American evangelicals. The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) could not bring itself to exclude from its membership two prominent open theists in its annual meeting last November. Though there are, no doubt, many considerations that motivated the majority to vote against their dismissal (not the least of which is the very brief and limited affirmation of faith that is required for ETS membership), the fact those who deny God's exhaustive foreknowledge may do so while maintaining an evangelical identity is troublesome at best.

In addition to this, other prominent voices from within the camp are casting doubt on justification by faith alone. Specifically, the imputed righteousness of Christ as the sole foundation for divine acceptance is being questioned by respected teachers in ways that at least sound like they are speaking with a Roman Catholic dialect.¹

Who can you trust anymore? Publishers that were once known for their allegiance to the orthodox and evangelical faith have adopted the motto of Fox News: "we report, you decide." Thus the almost simultaneous publication by Baker Book House in 2000 *God of the Possible* by Greg Boyd (a warm-hearted defense of open theism) and *Still Sovereign*, edited by Tom Schreiner and Bruce Ware (essays decidedly opposed to the openness view). A publisher's logo on the spine is no longer a safe guide to a book's general content.

Nor is a church's sign any guarantee of the biblical content of its ministry. "What do Baptists believe?" and "What are Baptist churches like?" are impossible questions to answer with any real significance. The reason is that there are as many differences to be found among Baptist churches as there are between them and other denominations. Sadly, even a church's open identification with the "conservative cause" in the Southern Baptist Convention does not necessarily mean that its ministry is intentionally biblical.

This sad state of affairs was made plain to me through recent experiences in a conservative church, a moderate church and a Baptist-Catholic funeral.

Conservative Worship

One Sunday shortly before Christmas I attended a large, respected church that is well-known for its strong affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture. The

service opened with a fifteen second prayer followed by eight minutes of a rapid-paced medley of Christmas carols. A quartet took the next six minutes with a rousing rendition of a song unfamiliar to me. After announcements and a “meet-and-greet” time, the congregation sang a brief chorus that was followed by a duet of a sentimental song about a couple that could not afford decent gifts but had a good Christmas anyway because the meaning of Christmas is in your heart (forget the incarnation, neither God nor Jesus Christ were even mentioned).

This was followed by another brief congregational chorus and then a soloist who, before singing, opened her Bible and read Revelation 22:17 (finally, Scripture!). The words of her song supported the gracious invitation of that verse.

When the applause for the singing died out the pastor, who is highly regarded as a biblical expositor, took the stage and invited us to open our Bibles to Matthew 10:40–42 as he was moving toward the center. After engaging in some humorous banter with the last soloist and another fifteen second prayer, he started talking about the text (though he did not take the time to read it publicly).

The explanation of verse 40 struck me as convoluted. Jesus said to His disciples, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” The congregation was told that this means that God has placed an innate knowledge of His existence within everyone. If a person accepts that knowledge then he will also accept Jesus Christ and if he accepts Christ then he will also accept those who preach the message of Christ.

Contrast that understanding with the simple explanation that John Broadus gives of this text: “To receive them [the disciples] will be receiving him who sent them, yea, the Father who sent him.”² Is not Jesus saying that whoever receives—accepts, embraces—gospel messengers as they are proclaiming salvation in Christ is receiving Christ through the message preached?

The pastor’s treatment of rewards in verses 41 and 42 was even more confusing. The reason, he said, that Jesus alerted the disciples that those who receive them will be rewarded is because he anticipated the guilt they would feel over the suffering that would come to the new believers. In order to encourage the disciples not to quit or feel badly over the persecution that comes to those who received their message, Jesus informs them of the certainty of rewards.

While I am willing to acknowledge that there is a legitimate point to be made about this (based on Mark 10:29–30, Romans 8:18 and similar verses), it is not the point of the text.

As I later reflected on this experience I found it sadly strange that in a church that is very outspoken in its commitment to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God, the Bible had such a minor place in worship. Apart from the one verse by the soloist and the three verses sporadically referred to by the pastor, Scripture was not read publicly. Yet, in 1 Timothy 4:13 Paul specifically commands Timothy to devote himself to this very practice—the public reading of Scripture (as the NASB, NIV and ESV make clear).

And though I was encouraged that the message did direct our attention to the actual text of Scripture, my enthusiasm was muted by the unwarranted specu-

lations about its meaning. If the point of the sermon is not derived from the text it purports to exposit, is it expositional preaching? Hardly.³

Moderate Worship

That experience was quite a contrast to the one I had in a well-known moderate Southern Baptist church the Sunday after Christmas. While on vacation with my family, we attended one of the flagship congregations of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. This was a first for me.

Instead of the roar of loud talking interspersed with rowdy laughter, those gathering for worship spoke in whispers—when they spoke at all—and a general quietness pervaded the large auditorium. When the pastor stepped up to the pulpit to open the service he said, “Welcome to the first Sunday of Christmastide.” When my six children simultaneously turned their heads toward me with an almost identical inquisitive look, I immediately became aware of a gap in my education. For all I knew from my Southeast Texas upbringing, Christmastide referred to the ebb and flow of the Gulf of Mexico on December 25!

A shrug of Dad’s shoulders toward the children had to suffice until Merriam-Webster could be consulted. I have since learned that Christmastide consists of those days from Christmas Eve until New Year’s Day, or, in some traditions, Epiphany (which, for those readers who grew up attending the same kind of schools and churches that I did, is a festival originating from the Middle Ages that commemorates either the visit of the Magi—if you follow Western tradition—or the baptism of Jesus—if you follow Eastern tradition). But I was without that knowledge as the worship service unfolded.

All of the worship leaders had a sense of humility and seriousness about them. One of them read the first fourteen verses of John’s Gospel and the organist led us in singing two familiar Christmas carols, though the second one had been gender-neutralized. It was rather difficult to sing with conviction that the “Angel of the Lord” who came down said to the shepherds, “Glad tidings of great joy I bring, to you and humankind.” But that is the way it was written in the worship folder. I must confess that I did not have a much easier time with the third song, entitled, “In the Bleak Mid-Winter.”

There were two prayers offered in the service—both very thoughtful, well-organized and read with proper inflection. A final prayer was inadvertently omitted when the pastor failed to recognize the reader who had stepped to the microphone, manuscript at the ready.

The sermon was loosely taken from John 1. It was well-crafted and, in fact, rather literary. It was filled with quotes (at least one from a universalist) and apt illustrations but painfully void of Scripture. To paraphrase a comment once made by John Leland, if the text had a virus the sermon would have been in no danger of catching it. The pastor’s inclusivist leanings appeared in his favorable description of sincere practitioners of other religions.

Mixed into his message were some very good points about living honestly, having integrity, caring for the poor and not being driven by worldly success. But there was no gospel. Nothing about the person or work of Jesus Christ for sinners; no mention of our need for a Savior to make us right with God. Despite this glaring omission, at the end of his message the pastor gave the obligatory altar call—albeit without any kind of pressure or even apparent conviction.

Our Anglican friends would laugh at the thought of a Southern Baptist congregation aspiring to be “high church” in any sense of that phrase, yet I came away with the impression that this is precisely the longing of that moderate church. Despite obvious efforts, the wedding of high liturgical form to latter day pop evangelical traditions simply did not work. For example (in addition to the altar call), rather than delete the “meet and greet” time from worship it was given the liturgical heading of “the passing of the peace.” A high sounding name doth not a liturgical element make.

Baptist–Catholic Funeral

The third example of the confusion that reigns in modern evangelicalism comes from the funeral of a friend’s relative. I, along with others, had witnessed to Paul during the final days of his terminal disease. He died scoffing at God, hardened against the gospel of salvation. Due to competing family wishes, the funeral was led by a Roman Catholic deacon and a conservative Southern Baptist pastor.

The Roman Catholic stood first and led the congregation in reading from a standard missal used for funerals. He did not know the deceased and so had to repeatedly refer to his notes to get the name right. Amidst many assurances that “brother Paul” was safe in the arms of Jesus, the congregation was led to read selections from the Prophets (Jeremiah), the Gospels (Matthew) and the Letters (1 Thessalonians). The deacon’s heart was not in it and he seemed relieved when his part was over. In fact, he simply left once the missals were collected.

He missed the “Baptist” part of the service. The first words out of the pastor’s mouth once he stood to address the congregation were, “I am just so excited to be here!” When no one (other than the widow) took him up on his invitation to share special memories of the deceased, he concluded that portion of the service with “Going once. Going twice. Gone!”

This was followed by a rambling twenty-minute autobiographical monologue that I think was supposed to be a personal testimony. It contained only 2 allusions to Scriptures (one of which was Hebrews 9:27, “It is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment”) and consisted mostly of light-hearted stories.

To his credit, the Baptist did not preach the deceased into heaven and he was obviously concerned that those present get to heaven. But there was no gospel. Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection were not set forth as the way of salvation. Rather, the point that was repeatedly emphasized at the end of every story was

this: God loves you and wants you to trust Him. The finale was a long, drawn-out tale about how Death (dressed like the Grim Reaper) visited the White House and went to the Rose Garden to take the President's son. The President quickly put his son on Air Force One and sent him to Kansas City, only to have his hopes dashed by Death's statement, "I can't talk now, Mr. President. I have an appointment to keep in Kansas City."

The effect was not what the pastor hoped for, I am sure. None of the mostly unchurched gathering seemed scared or stirred by the story. With a final prayer, the service mercifully ended. I stayed in my seat for a while thinking of how odd the previous fifty minutes had been. I had witnessed a Roman Catholic read dozens of Scripture verses while blasphemously preaching an unrepentant man (and, ultimately everyone else) into heaven. The Baptist, on the other hand, avoided universalism but used only a couple of Bible references in a bumbling attempt to give a "gospel presentation" that said nothing about Jesus Christ.

The Need for Reformation

What if I had to choose between a liberal church that does not believe in the full authority of Scripture yet thinks highly enough of it to read it publicly in worship, and a fundamentalist church that loudly affirms Scripture's inerrancy but feels no compulsion to read it or be governed by it in worship? Or who would I want to officiate my funeral? A Roman Catholic who does not understand the gospel but who reads God's Word publicly, or a Baptist who at least recognizes that not everyone who dies goes to heaven but who cannot (or at least does not) simply explain the gospel he no doubt professes to believe?

Fortunately, most of us are not faced with such limited options. There are many evangelical churches that not only believe the Bible but actually give it a place of priority in their public ministries. And there is a growing number of pastors who are coming to recognize that affirmation of inerrancy is not enough, the Bible also calls us to have confidence in its sufficiency for ministry.

Despite these hopeful caveats the fact remains that churches all across our evangelical landscape are suffering from spiritual and theological amnesia. This is particularly true of Southern Baptists. What once was considered basic is now exotic if not explicitly archaic. To suggest that the Bible ought to be read publicly in worship and consulted to identify the constituent elements of worship is to be regarded as old-fashioned at best and irrelevant at worst.

Furthermore, the Bible's teachings on sin, judgment, hell, the person and work of Jesus Christ, faith and repentance were once considered essential elements in a presentation of the gospel. Now it is not uncommon to hear "evangelistic appeals" regularly made on the basis of divine benevolence, felt-needs or simply because nobody wants to miss out on heaven.

These are difficult, troubling times. Nevertheless, every difficulty that can be cited should be regarded not as an excuse to give up in frustration but as

further justification to keep working for reformation and revival in our day. The gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ must be recovered. Biblical evangelism must be rescued from the superficial, false-convert-multiplying imposters that have supplanted it. And the true nature of a local church (and pastoral ministry) must be rediscovered and reasserted.

The questions that we must continue to ask and seek to answer with explicitly biblical teachings are these: What is the gospel? What is a Christian (and how does one become one)? What is a church?⁴ It is no longer safe to assume that evangelicals—even conservative, inerrancy-affirming evangelicals—mean the same thing when we talk about these issues. Those who recognize the need for reformation and are committed to pressing for it must keep these questions in focus. They are clarifying questions and serious consideration of them can help resolve some of the confusion that reigns in our day.☞

Notes:

¹ For a brief, excellent treatment of this issue see John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002).

² *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, reprint ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, nd), 232.

³ Mark Dever has a very simple and memorable definition of expository preaching that is very helpful. "Expositional preaching is that preaching which takes for the point of a sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture." *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 26.

⁴ I have been greatly helped to think in these categories by Iain Murray in *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950–2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000).

News

Our Thanks to Bill Lollar

Our thanks to Bill Lollar for serving over the past ten years as the Graphic Design Editor of the *Founders Journal*. This summer Bill and his family will be moving to Wales where he will begin work as an evangelist and church planting missionary.

For more information on Bill's new ministry you can visit his website at <http://gracechurchplanting.com> or email: billlollar@gracechurchplanting.com

New Graphic Design Editor

Dr. Ken Puls is our new Graphic Design Editor for the *Founders Journal*. Ken serves Founders Ministries as Editorial Director of Founders Press and Director of the online Founders Study Center.

Founders Fellowship Breakfast

There will not be a Founders Fellowship Breakfast in Indianapolis, Indiana this year.

New Founders Press Title

Watch for the release in March 2004 of *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry* edited by Dr. Tom Ascol.

As Paul imparted his wisdom to Timothy through letters, this collection of writings from seasoned pastors contains over 480 years of combined ministry experience. Old and new pastors alike will treasure this compilation of heartfelt advice and nuggets of truth that will guide them through the challenges and joys of their calling in Christ. Contributors include Joel Beeke, Ligon Duncan, Fred Malone, Mark Dever, Tedd Tripp, Ray Ortlund, Jr., C. J. Mahaney, Roger Ellsworth, and others.

For more information see <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/fpress/timothy.html>

Founders Study Center

This spring we are offering four courses through the online Founders Study Center: *Maintaining Your Spiritual Health* (with audio lectures by Dr. Don Whitney), *Maintaining a Healthy Church* (with audio lectures by Dr. Mark Dever), *Theology of the Reformers* (with audio lecture by Dr. Timothy George) and *Preaching and Preachers* (with audio lectures by Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones). For more information, please visit our website at studyFOUNDERS.org

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2004 Saved by Faith YOUTH Challenge

The theme this year is *Dismantling the Matrix: A Course in Spiritual Warfare* with keynote speaker, Dr. Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, and Executive Director of Founders Ministries. The first conference will be held July 5–11 at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. The second conference will be held July 26–30 at the Laguna Beach Christian Retreat in Panama City Beach, Florida. The cost is \$260.00 per person (a deposit of \$80.00 per person is due with initial registration. For more information, contact Conference Registration Secretary, Karen Ascol:

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Transforming Your Church: Cultivating a Culture of Peace

Ken Sande

That's Unbelievable!

HHEY, WHAT KEPT YOU?" Chuck asked as Frank finally joined him for lunch. "The phone rang just as I was walking out the door," Frank replied as he sank into his seat, "and it was one of those calls I couldn't cut short."

Noticing the troubled look on his friend's face, Chuck asked if something was wrong.

"It's another divorce," Frank groaned, "the third one this year. This couple had been putting up a good front for months, so no one in our church knew about it until after papers had been filed. When we tried to reach out to them, the wife refused to talk with us. They're having a horrible custody battle, and the husband is frantic to stop the divorce, but there's just nothing more we can do."

After a pause Frank went on. "In fact, that's what seems to happen every time we have serious conflict. Once people get mad, they rarely work things out. And someone almost always ends up leaving the church. But I guess that's just how it is."

"Not necessarily," Chuck responded. "We used to see the same pattern in our church, but it's really turned around in the last few years."

"Really? What kinds of conflicts have you had to deal with?"

"Well," Chuck answered, "in the last year we've seen several troubled marriages, a couple of business disputes, child abuse, and your typical disagreements over music and youth ministry. To top it off, we switched denominations a few months ago."

"Really! You've got conflicts all over the place! Didn't you lose a lot of people?"

"No, actually very few. As far as I know, only four families left the church because of conflict in the last year, and that was because they didn't agree with the denomination change. We had to do a lot of counseling and mediation in the other situations, but most of the time people have reconciled and stayed with us."

Frank was stunned. "All that conflict, and you lost only four families? And you actually mediate disputes between members? That's unbelievable!"

"It's true," Chuck answered. "It's taken a lot of work, and we've failed at times, but with God's help we've seen some amazing reconciliations. Would you like to know how it's happened?"

"Of course! Who wouldn't?"

A Culture of Peace

Chuck and Frank are real people, and the descriptions of their churches are factual. A few years ago, the leaders in Chuck's church realized that God wants Christians to demonstrate the reconciling power of Jesus in the conflicts of real life. Therefore, they began a deliberate process of training the congregation to respond to conflict biblically. By God's grace, their efforts have produced a noticeable change in the way their church deals with conflict. As a result:

- The church sees peacemaking as a biblical imperative and regularly promotes it as an essential part of the Christian life and an opportunity to bring glory to God.
- The church is deliberately training both leaders and members to respond biblically to conflict in all areas of life.
- When members cannot resolve disputes privately, the church assists them through in-house trained reconcilers, even if the conflict involves financial, employment, or legal issues.
- The church works long and hard to restore broken relationships, especially when a marriage is at stake, and even when attorneys are involved.
- If a member refuses to listen to private correction, the church practices redemptive church accountability to encourage repentance and reconciliation.
- Members who have turned from sins as serious as business fraud, adultery, and sexual abuse have experienced such complete forgiveness that they remained in the church.
- Leaders and workers serve productively for long periods of time, and members rarely leave the church unless they move out of town.
- Members are encouraged to practice peacemaking so openly in their daily lives that others will notice, ask how they do it, and hear about Jesus.

This may sound like an imaginary congregation, but it is not. Although the church is far from perfect, it is steadily learning how to do these things with growing consistency. And it is not alone. By God's grace, many other local churches are seeing similar progress in developing a culture of peace. As they live out the love of God in the conflicts of daily life, they are preserving friendships, preventing divorce, reducing member turnover, and leading others to trust in Jesus.

Leading a Cultural Transformation

Chuck's pastor played a key role in developing a culture of peace. His preaching and personal example set the stage for change. At the same time, he wisely delegated most of the day-to-day educational and reconciliation work to elders and other gifted people in the congregation (details later in this article).

By God's grace, this pastor has received a significant return on his investment. In addition to seeing his people blessed with stronger relationships, he has

benefited by being removed from the daily “complaint loop” and spending less time as a lightning rod for others’ grievances.

These benefits came about after he and other leaders in the church took an honest look at the church’s “peacemaking culture,” or combination of attitudes, traditions, habits, and abilities for resolving conflict. What they saw troubled them. They realized that their church culture was not conducive to peacemaking. So they asked God to help them change.

God led them to make peacemaking a specific part of their overall discipleship strategy. The pastor and elders had primary responsibility for leading this change, but they were able to share much of the daily work with gifted people in the congregation. Together they transformed their church’s culture and steadily raised its level of peacemaking productivity.

This process was like nurturing a stunted tree and bringing it to a point of abundant fruitfulness. It involved five levels of growth and productivity:

- Level 1 – A Culture of Disbelief (Missing Fruit)
- Level 2 – A Culture of Faith (Blossoms Appear)
- Level 3 – A Culture of Transformation (Pruning and Cultivating)
- Level 4 – A Culture of Peace (Harvest Time)
- Level 5 – A Culture of Multiplication (Reproducing)

The purpose of this article is to describe this cultural transformation, and to show how, by God’s grace, you can reproduce it in your church. As you pursue this growth, please realize that churches do not always fit neatly into one specific level; as they change, they will often straddle some of these lines. The important thing is not your church’s level today, but which direction you are heading.

The Level 1 Church – A Culture of Disbelief

A church has a culture of disbelief when its people lack practical training in resolving conflict and doubt that the church can do much to help them resolve their differences. This church is like a tree that is missing some of its sweetest fruit.

Many people would say Chuck’s church sounds too good to be true. In fact, they would identify more closely with Frank’s church. It has many fruitful ministries and leaders who truly care about their people, but when it comes to peacemaking, the leaders believe there is only so much they can do to help members deal with conflict. When reading about Chuck’s church, their reaction would be, “That’s great, but it’s just not realistic in today’s world.” This attitude is evidence of a culture of disbelief with regard to resolving conflict. There are many understandable reasons for this attitude.

- Most church leaders are already overworked, and they cannot imagine finding time to get more involved in members’ disputes.
- They often lack training in conflict resolution and fear their involvement in a conflict might actually make matters worse.

- It is difficult for them to envision having the time or qualified people to mediate real-life problems that might otherwise become legal disputes.
- There is often a concern about offending someone and triggering a lawsuit against the church.
- Having never seen church accountability used redemptively to promote peace and reconciliation, they doubt that it would be helpful or even accepted in today's culture.
- Thriving churches face an additional hindrance to peacemaking. Having a big vision for what a church should be, they give themselves enthusiastically to many fruitful ministries and are blessed with steadily growing numbers. It is often difficult for such churches to see why they should divert time and energy from productive ministries and devote it to the time-consuming and seemingly fruitless work of helping people resolve conflict.

Given these concerns, it is understandable why many churches do not give much attention to peacemaking. This lack of attention has consequences, however. It usually robs a local church of the sweet fruit of peacemaking and creates a culture marked by the following patterns:

- The church does not have a clear vision or specific plan for making peacemaking an effective ministry of the church.
- Little effort is made to provide leaders and members with practical training in personal conflict resolution.
- If members have unresolved conflicts with other believers, they rarely seek assistance within the church, especially if the dispute involves employment, business, or legal issues.
- If members give up on a broken relationship and do not want to discuss reconciliation any further, church leaders usually decline to press the matter, even if it is a couple moving towards divorce.
- The church does not consistently practice biblical church accountability, and probably hasn't for many years.
- If it becomes widely known that a member has committed a serious sin such as embezzlement, adultery, or child abuse, he is more likely to leave the church than to seek restoration.
- There is a high burnout rate for leaders and workers, and a steady turn-over of members.
- Members of the church are not equipped or expected to respond to conflict in such a uniquely Christian way that the door is opened for witnessing about Jesus.

These patterns are so common in modern churches that few people even notice them. When a broken relationship results, people naturally grieve. But they seldom believe that there was anything more the church could have done to produce different fruit.

What we also fail to notice is how much these patterns reflect the culture of the world around us. Instead of providing a radically different model for how people can look to God and help one another preserve relationships, we allow the

world's self-reliant and individualistic values to seep into the church, reducing us to the world's fruitless level of resolving conflict.

What about your church? What kind of culture does it have when it comes to resolving conflict? What kind of fruit is it producing when relationships are threatened? To answer these questions, take another look at the bulleted lists above. Which list comes closest to describing your church—the list for a culture of peace or for a culture of disbelief? Please think about this and note your answer before reading on.

Missing Fruit, Missing Witness

It is difficult for most Christians to imagine how a church could intervene effectively in serious disputes. It is also hard to believe that most conflicts can end in reconciliation, and that deeply conflicted marriages don't have to end in divorce. But isn't this exactly the fruit that Jesus wants a local church to produce?

The night before he died, our Lord set forth a key ingredient in our witness for Him. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). "I pray that all of them may be one, Father.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent Me and have loved them even as you have loved Me" (17:20-23).¹

Thriving ministries and good preaching can attract people to a church, but the Bible teaches that the most powerful testimony Christians can offer for the reality of Jesus Christ is loving one another. Many churches think they are demonstrating the love Jesus calls for if their members are smiling and friendly on Sunday morning. But you can find the same unchallenging and superficial love in countless social gatherings where people are pleasant and agreeable. As Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them" (Luke 6:32).

The love that distinguishes us as being the children of God is the love that Jesus describes in Luke 6:27-28: "But I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28). This is the kind of love that Jesus showed on the cross. And it is the kind of love He commands and enables us to show in midst of conflict to those who oppose or mistreat us.

This is why peacemaking is an essential mark of a Christian and a church.

And this mark has power. It is supposed to shine so brightly that people cannot help but see it. When Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9), He was not promising us a heavenly title. Instead, He was teaching that when we draw on His grace to resolve difficult conflicts and restore broken relationships, those who are watching us will recognize that we are the children of God. This recognition opens the door to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12).

But the opposite is also true. If we do not love others in the midst of conflict, forgive those who have hurt us, and restore broken relationships, our Christian witness is profoundly damaged. As 1 John 4:20 warns, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." When the world

looks at our churches and sees the fruit of unresolved conflict—quarrels, broken families, estranged members, and church splits—it makes all Christians look like hypocrites.

Thus a culture of disbelief has a double cost. When church leaders do not teach biblical peacemaking or get involved in members' conflicts, families fall apart, friendships and jobs are lost, and the church sees a steady turnover in members. At the same time, when unsaved people see our failure to reconcile with one another, they dismiss Christians as hypocrites and liars when we try to speak to them about reconciling with God.

To put it simply, when the fruit of peacemaking is missing in a local church, that church will also miss many opportunities to give witness to the reconciling love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Missing Fruit, Smaller Harvest

As I mentioned earlier, thriving churches often ignore their weakness in peacemaking by focusing on their growing numbers and the success of their other ministries. What they do not see is how much more genuine growth and lasting fruit they would experience if they strengthened their ability to resolve conflict.

No matter how fruitful a church's other ministries are, if it does not have a culture of peace, every ministry is weakened to some degree. As people work together, they will inevitably have differences. If they have not been taught peacemaking, even minor differences can grow to major proportions. Members may hesitate to clear up misunderstandings, to overlook minor offenses, or to stop gossip. They may not seek reconciliation with someone they have offended, or gently confront others, or negotiate issues in a way that satisfies the interests of all those involved. Worst of all, they may fail to practice genuine forgiveness and miss experiencing the reconciling power of Jesus.

Without these peacemaking activities, relationships within families and church ministries will inevitably suffer. Unresolved differences will take a toll on members' enthusiasm, commitment, creativity, giving, and productivity. As a result, their witness and circle of influence will be reduced, and many people whom they might have served will be neglected. And even if many new members are coming in through the front door, church growth will still be sapped by a steady exodus of unreconciled people out the back door.

No matter how strong a church's ministries are, a culture of disbelief will weaken them and prevent them from being as fruitful as they could be. Conversely, when a local church develops a culture of peace, everything is strengthened. The church's families and ministries are protected from debilitating conflict and given the opportunity to achieve their maximum impact in the kingdom of God. The fruit of peacemaking enhances the entire harvest.

The Level 2 Church – A Culture of Faith

A church has a culture of faith when its people begin to understand God's peace-making commands and promises and believe that His ways will work in today's culture. This church is like a tree blossoming in the spring.

Once a church realizes it has a culture of disbelief, it can begin to replace it with a culture of faith. This change can begin only when we understand the root cause of a culture of disbelief. As we saw earlier, there are many understandable reasons why churches hesitate to get involved in conflict. But behind most of them are two basic factors: a failure to understand what the Bible teaches about peacemaking, and a lack of faith that biblical principles will actually work in today's culture. As Jesus taught, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). To put it simply, a culture of disbelief is usually the result of ignorance and unbelief.

This is an unpleasant diagnosis. But if we simply deny it, our churches will not change. On the other hand, if we admit our lack of understanding and our unbelief to God, He is ready to forgive us. More than that, He is eager to lead us into all truth and increase our faith so that we can become His agents of change in our congregations. There are five ways that we can cooperate with God as He strengthens our faith.

Prayer is the first step to nurturing a budding faith: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Go to God in faith and confess your unbelief, and thank Him for the forgiveness He has given us through Christ. Ask Him to guide your study of His Word so that you can understand all that He teaches about peacemaking. Pray that He will replace your unbelief with faith. And then ask Him to give you strength to do whatever He commands, even if it requires making major changes in the way your church responds to conflict.

The second way to build faith is to rejoice in God's grace as revealed in the gospel of Christ, which is the driving motivation for peacemaking. "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This incredible news reveals our radical sinfulness: nothing could save us except the death of God's only Son. But it also reveals the depths of God's radical mercy: He gave His Son to die for us! As we reflect on and rejoice in the gospel of Christ, two things happen. Our pride and defensiveness is stripped away, and we can humble ourselves and admit that we struggle with sinful conflicts that we cannot resolve on our own. At the same time, the gospel shows us how important reconciliation is to God, and it inspires us to do everything we can to see that the love and forgiveness of Christ is reflected in the way we make peace in our families and churches.

The third way to strengthen faith is to dig into God's Word and learn more about how He wants us to bring the love and forgiveness of Jesus to bear on everyday conflicts. You can start by studying Bible passages that describe eight characteristics of a church that has a culture of peace:

- Vision: The church is eager to bring glory to God by demonstrating the reconciling love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and therefore sees peacemaking as an essential part of the Christian life (see Luke 6:27-36; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:12-14).
- Training: The church knows that peacemaking does not come naturally, so it deliberately trains both its leaders and members to respond to conflict biblically in all areas of life (see Galatians 5:19-21; Luke 6:40; Ephesians 4:24-26; 1 Timothy 4:15-16; Titus 2:1-10).

- Assistance: When members cannot resolve disputes privately, the church assists them through in-house trained reconcilers, even when conflicts involve financial, employment, or legal issues (see Matthew 18:16; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Colossians 3:16).
- Perseverance: Just as God pursues us, the church works long and hard to restore broken relationships, especially when a marriage is at stake, and even when attorneys are involved (see Matthew 18:12-16; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:1-3; Matthew 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-11).
- Accountability: If members refuse to listen to private correction, church leaders get directly involved to hold members accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness. (see Proverbs 3:11-12; Matthew 18:12-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; James 5:19-20).
- Restoration: Wanting to imitate God's amazing mercy and grace, the church gladly forgives and fully restores members who have genuinely repented of serious and embarrassing sins (see Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:32; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).
- Stability: Because relationships are valued and protected, leaders serve fruitfully year after year and members see the church as their long-term home (1 Timothy 4:15; Hebrews 10:25).
- Witness: Members are equipped and encouraged to practice peacemaking so openly in their daily lives that others will notice, ask why they do it, and hear about the love of Christ (Matthew 5:9; John 13:34-35, 17:20-23; 1 Peter 2:12, 3:15-16).

Even though it is clear that Scripture commands these activities, it is plain that most of these characteristics are contrary to our culture and uncommon in our churches. Therefore, it is still difficult to believe that we could actually live them out in daily life. To overcome this unbelief and build hope for change, read what God promises to do for those who are determined to obey his will:

“The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.... For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.... and nothing is impossible with God.... Therefore, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (2 Chronicles 16:9; Philippians 2:13; Luke 1:37; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Read these promises through several times, and then ask yourself, “Do I believe that God has the power and willingness to enable our church to obey what He commands?” If so, renounce unbelief and move ahead in faith!

The fourth way to build faith is to find mutual encouragement with other people in your church. Begin by giving this article to other members or leaders in your church. Approach people who are widely respected and likely to be open to these concepts. Build a core group of three or more people who are willing

to seriously study these Scriptures and pray about these issues, and then work together to build faith and promote needed growth, as discussed in the next section.

Finally, build faith by contacting people outside your church and learning how God has enabled their churches to resolve difficult conflicts and build a culture of peace. Start by looking for churches in your area that have a reputation for peacemaking, and ask them how they do it. If you cannot find any, contact Peacemaker® Ministries, and we will recommend a church in your area or denomination. You can also visit our web site (www.HisPeace.org) and read the “True Stories” section. For further examples of successful peacemaking in challenging conflicts, read *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Baker Books).

As you pursue these five faith-building activities, you and others can gain a better understanding of God’s marvelous vision for the church. He wants us to be so effective in imitating Jesus as we build and preserve relationships that the rest of the world will take notice and be drawn toward Him. What an exciting vision!

God not only wants this kind of church—He expects it. He is already at work to make it so, and He promises to give you the wisdom and strength needed to seek this change in your church. Having faith in His promises, you can put off unbelief and see your faith blossom. As this faith spreads and grows in your congregation, you can move a step closer to the harvest of peacemaking.

The Level 3 Church – A Culture of Transformation

A church has a culture of transformation when its people want to put off worldly ways of resolving conflict and take steps to learn how to respond to conflict biblically. This church is like a tree that is being pruned and cultivated for greater productivity.

Peacemaking is an attitude expressed through action. The heart of this attitude is the joy and thankfulness that come from fully understanding the gospel of Christ (Philippians 4:4). Jesus died on the cross in our place to release us from the penalty and ongoing slavery of sin. He gave his life to buy our forgiveness, earn our freedom, and bring us back to God. Now He wants us to pass this priceless gift of reconciliation on to others in the form of personal peacemaking:

“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:12-13; see also Ephesians 4:1-3; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

These attitudes and actions do not come naturally to people. In fact, our instincts usually take us in the opposite direction! Therefore, in order to build a culture of peace, a church must do both pruning and cultivating. It must help its people to put off worldly ways for resolving conflict and to put on peacemaking attitudes

and actions that mirror our reconciliation with God.

Pruning and cultivating takes a lot of work. The good news is that this work does not have to be done by an elite few, but can be shared by gifted people throughout a local church. Senior pastors in particular do not have time to resolve everybody's conflicts. Therefore, they should follow the advice that Moses received when he became weary from serving as the sole judge for Israel:

“The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.... You must teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people.... Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied” (Exodus 18:18-23).

Like Moses, a senior pastor is responsible before God to make sure that his people have the teaching and assistance they need to respond to conflict biblically. Since a pastor must play a primary educational role from the pulpit and may occasionally have to assist with difficult conflicts, he would be wise to develop a solid understanding of the basic principles of biblical conflict resolution.² At the same time, a pastor can and should entrust most of the educational and reconciliation activities to capable leaders and members of the congregation.

In many situations, God will give a vision for peacemaking first to members of a church, and then work through them to bring this vision to the leaders. As leaders and members work together to weave peacemaking into their overall discipleship efforts, their church can develop those eight characteristics of a culture of peace: vision, training, assistance, perseverance, accountability, restoration, stability, and witness. This cultivation usually involves the following activities. (This is only a summary; more detailed information for each activity is available on Peacemaker Ministries' web site.)

First, gain support from church leadership. Although God often works through lay members of a church to initiate interest in peacemaking, cultural transformation will take place only when church leaders officially support and lead this effort. The most important “tipping point” for seeing major progress is when the senior pastor sees peacemaking not as a helpful side-ministry, but as something that is vital to the well-being and fruitfulness of the church.

Second, form a core support group (Church Reconciler Team). This team will be responsible for guiding educational and reconciliation activities within a local church. Church leaders should spearhead the team, but it may also include spiritually mature lay members who have gifts for peacemaking.

Third, educate the entire congregation in peacemaking. God's peacemaking principles are like yeast. The more thoroughly they are worked into a congregation, the more good they can do. This requires an ongoing effort to teach peacemaking to every person in the church. The best ways to do this is to educate in two stages. Begin by presenting a preaching series that elevates the congregation's

interest in and commitment to peacemaking. Then encourage every person in the church to participate in a Sunday school class or small group Bible study where they can learn specific peacemaking principles and discuss how the principles apply to conflicts in their own lives. (Educational resources are available through Peacemaker Ministries.)

Fourth, train gifted people within your congregation to become reconcilers. Reconcilers are gifted church members or leaders who have been trained to help others deal with conflict. This help may be provided through conflict coaching (advising one person how to respond to conflict biblically) or mediation (meeting with both parties to facilitate discussion and agreement). Well-trained church reconcilers can help members respond biblically to a wide variety of personal, family, employment, business, and even legal disputes.

Fifth, upgrade your church's organizational documents to support peacemaking and reduce legal liability. Churches are being sued at an alarming rate for conflict-related activities. Legal actions against churches include negligence, defamation, breach of confidentiality, invasion of privacy, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Judgments can be extremely costly, with church leaders sometimes being held personally responsible for the award. Upgrading church bylaws and adopting special policies for counseling, confidentiality, conflict resolution, and church accountability can substantially reduce exposure to legal liability.

Some churches can make substantial progress in each of these areas in two years. Others will take four or five years to overcome deeply engrained attitudes and traditions. Yet even small initial efforts can produce noticeable fruit. A few people going through a Sunday school class on peacemaking can have a ripple effect on their own families and friends. As they use the basic principles in their daily lives and share what they are learning with others in conflict, relationships can be improved and a growing interest in peacemaking can be nurtured. These benefits will multiply as cultivation continues.³

The Level 4 Church – A Culture of Peace

A church has a culture of peace when its people are eager and able to resolve conflict and reconcile relationships in a way that clearly reflects the love and power of Jesus Christ. This church is like a tree producing a rich harvest.

Those who have cultivated diligently will harvest abundantly. This is especially true when it comes to peacemaking, for God promises, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:18). As we will see, this harvest involves a wide variety of fruit.

When a local church develops a culture of peace, it can overcome every one of the concerns that had previously locked it into a culture of disbelief. By delegating much of the educational and reconciliation work to others, church leaders' time and energy is reserved for other ministry. As gifted individuals are trained as reconcilers, members are able to look to the church for assistance in resolving all kinds of conflicts.

When people see church accountability being taught and practiced in a merciful and constructive manner, they usually come to respect it as a vital shep-

herding ministry of the church. By upgrading its bylaws and policies, a church can substantially reduce its exposure to legal liability. And other ministries of the church are more likely to achieve their full potential when members improve their ability to resolve differences and find more productive ways to work together.

These developments open the way for additional fruit. When a church teaches its people to live out the gospel in the conflicts of daily life, people are more willing to admit their shortcomings and ask for help before a crisis occurs. Families are better equipped to handle disputes, which makes divorce less likely. Members are encouraged to go to each other to discuss problems instead of letting them fester. The church is protected from division and splits, and offended members are less likely to leave. As a result, church growth is improved.

Pastors and other church leaders can experience many benefits as well. When leaders fulfill their shepherding responsibilities more fully, respect and appreciation for their work grows. As they are taken out of the day-to-day “complaint loop,” they can spend less time dealing with disgruntled members and more time on forward-moving ministry. When members learn to stop gossiping, leaders are subjected to less criticism. As conflict declines in a church, stress on leaders’ families is often reduced. And when respectful discussion and reconciliation are the norm in a church, pastors and other staff are less likely to burn out or be forced out of their jobs.

Of course, no church sees all of these benefits at once or all the time. Our sin continually works against a culture of peace. Even Paul and Barnabas had a falling out! (See Acts 15:39.) So we should not be surprised when members forget what they have learned, leaders are inconsistent, and our efforts seem to have been wasted. Even though we stumble, we need not fall, for the Lord upholds us with His hand (Psalm 37:24). As he helps us back to our feet, we can learn from our mistakes and forgive one another. We will continue to grow. When we do, God can use both our mistakes and our forgiveness to encourage others.

One of the greatest benefits of resolving conflicts biblically is that outreach and evangelism are enhanced. Conflict is inevitable in a fallen world; Christian and unbeliever alike struggle with disputes and broken relationships. So when the unsaved see Christians admitting their failures and forgiving and reconciling with one another, even after intense disputes, they cannot help but take notice. The more our relationships reflect the amazing love and mercy of God, the more people will want to know about the power that is working in us to maintain peace and unity. What a marvelous way to increase the harvest!

The Level 5 Church – A Culture of Multiplication

A church has a culture of multiplication when its people delight in expanding God’s kingdom by showing other people and churches how they too can be peace-makers. This church is like a tree that is spreading its seed and reproducing.

With many blessings comes great responsibility. God has given the church a unique and precious talent: the power and ability to bring peace, unity, and reconciliation to a broken and conflicted world. Sadly, many churches have been afraid to use this talent; like the unfaithful servant, they have hidden and neglected it for years. If they do not repent, they will be ashamed when Jesus calls them to

give an accounting someday (see Matt. 25:24-27; Ezek. 34:1-16).

How much better it will be if your church can say what the faithful servant said: “Master ... you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more” (Matt. 25:20). What a joy it would be to hear the answer, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness” (v. 21).

How can your church produce the maximum harvest with the peacemaking talents God has given you? Start by weaving peacemaking thoroughly into the fabric of your congregation, as discussed in the previous section. But if you stop there, you may still be hiding part of your talents. Ask God to help you build a culture of peace that is so fruitful that it overflows into your community, other churches, and your denomination. The following are ways that many churches are already doing this:

First, equip and encourage members to carry peacemaking into everyday life. As church members interact with their family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers, they will naturally have opportunities for peacemaking. When they themselves are involved in a conflict, they can ask God for grace to respond with humility. If they see others in conflict, they can ask God for wisdom on how to offer advice or encourage agreement. As word spreads about their ability to resolve conflict effectively, others may seek them out for advice, which can open the way for witnessing and inviting others to church. And when a church gains a reputation for resolving “small” problems, it will have greater credibility when it speaks to “large” issues that impact an entire community.

Second, teach peacemaking to children. Most parents would welcome any program that could teach their children to resolve conflict. Churches can respond to this need by using *The Young Peacemaker* curriculum in Sunday school or vacation Bible school classes that are advertised to people outside the church.³ As children and their parents benefit from this training, many of them may be drawn to the church and to the Lord.

Third, send peacemakers with mission teams. Churches can strengthen their missions efforts and promote peacemaking overseas by including trained peacemakers on their short-term mission teams. These peacemakers can protect teams from destructive internal conflict by teaching members conflict resolution skills and by serving as reconcilers if conflicts occur on the field. Peacemakers can also teach these principles to pastors in other countries. Those pastors will teach and model peacemaking in their own congregations, and the benefits will continue to spread.

Fourth, develop a church-based reconciliation ministry. Once your church reconcilers have gained experience by working within your congregation, they can expand their ministry by making their services available to people outside your church. This kind of practical ministry provides an excellent way to demonstrate the power of the gospel to unchurched or unsaved people who are in conflict. It could draw them to the Lord as it helps them to make peace.

Fifth, share your experience with other churches in your community or denomination. As God blesses your church with a culture of peace, you can multiply that blessing by sharing what you have learned with other churches. For example, your church can host a Peacemaker Seminar for your community or train your reconcilers to assist neighboring churches when they cannot resolve

internal conflicts. You can also share your church's testimony by working with your denominational leaders as they seek to promote biblical peacemaking in your district.

Sixth, plant new churches that have peacemaking as part of their original "DNA." As God enables your church to support church planters and give birth to new congregations, you can pass on the spiritual characteristic of peacemaking. This precious gift will increase the new church's ability to survive natural growing pains and thrive as a family of believers who are visibly committed to living out the love of Christ in the natural conflicts of real life.

It Can Start Today with You

Even if a church is stuck in a culture of disbelief today and sees little peacemaking fruit, by God's grace it can eventually overflow with a culture of peace that benefits its entire community and brings praise to God. What a wonderful way to fulfill Jesus' command in Matthew 5:14-16:

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

All it takes is one person who hears the call of God and responds, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8) Perhaps for your church that person is you. Please pray about it and reflect on the Scriptures in this booklet. Ask God to give you a longing to see a culture of peace in your church that reflects the love and power of his Son. If He gives you that longing, hard work awaits you, but great blessing is also in store, for Jesus' promise is absolutely dependable: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God."³

Notes:

¹ When Jesus speaks of "unity," He is not expecting us to agree on everything. He is calling us to love one another through our disagreements, whether that requires accepting a debatable difference, overlooking a minor offense, confessing a wrong, gently confronting others, or even submitting to church mediation or accountability. Our love for Jesus compels us to do everything in our power to preserve our relationships (Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:1-3).

² *The Peacemaker* and *Guiding People through Conflict* provide a thorough foundation for personal peacemaking, conflict coaching, and mediation.

³ This material teaches the biblical principles from *The Peacemaker* with lively stories and pictures geared for ages 8-12.

For comprehensive resources and guidelines that will help your church implement these changes, visit the Peacemaker Ministries web site at www.HisPeace.org (go to the Culture of Peace page and click on "Detailed Implementation Plan") or contact Peacemaker Ministries at PO Box 81130, Billings, MT 59108 (406/256-1583).

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The Good Fight of Faith

Dr. J. Gresham Machen

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).¹

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS A GREAT FIGHTER. His fighting was partly against external enemies—against hardships of all kinds. Five times he was scourged by the Jews, three times by the Romans; he suffered shipwreck four times; and was in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. And finally he came to the logical end of such a life, by the headsman's axe. It was hardly a peaceful life, but was rather a life of wild adventure. Lindbergh, I suppose, got a thrill when he hopped off to Paris, and people are in search of thrills today; but if you wanted a really unbroken succession of thrills, I think you could hardly do better than try knocking around the Roman Empire of the first century with the Apostle Paul, engaged in the unpopular business of turning the world upside down.

But these physical hardships were not the chief battle in which Paul was engaged. Far more trying was the battle that he fought against the enemies in his own camp. Everywhere his rear was threatened by an all-engulfing paganism or by a perverted Judaism that has missed the real purpose of the Old Testament law. Read the Epistles with care, and you see Paul always in conflict. At one time he fights paganism in life, the notion that all kinds of conduct are lawful to the Christian man, a philosophy that makes Christian liberty a mere aid to pagan license. At another time, he fights paganism in thought, the sublimation of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body into the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

At still another time, he fights the effort of human pride to substitute man's merit as the means of salvation for Divine grace; he fights the subtle propaganda of the Judaizers with its misleading appeal to the Word of God. Everywhere we see the great apostle in conflict for the preservation of the church. It is as though a mighty flood were seeking to engulf the church's life; dam the break at one point in the levee, and another break appears somewhere else. Everywhere paganism was seeping through; not for one moment did Paul have peace; always he was called upon to fight.

Fortunately, he was a true fighter; and by God's grace he not only fought, but he won. At first sight indeed he might have seemed to have lost. The lofty doctrine of Divine grace, the center and core of the Gospel that Paul preached, did not always dominate the mind and heart of the subsequent church. The Christianity of the Apostolic Fathers, of the Apologists, of Irenaeus, is very different from

the Christianity of Paul. The church meant to be faithful to the apostle; but the pure doctrine of the Cross runs counter to the natural man, and not always, even in the church, was it fully understood. Read the Epistle to the Romans first, and then read Irenaeus, and you are conscious of a mighty decline. No longer does the Gospel stand out sharp and clear; there is a large admixture of human error; and it might seem as though Christian freedom, after all, were to be entangled in the meshes of a new law.

The human instruments which God uses in great triumphs of faith are no pacifists, but great fighters like Paul himself. Little affinity for the great apostle has the whole tribe of considerers of consequences, the whole tribe of the compromisers ancient and modern. The real companions of Paul are the great heroes of the faith. But who are those heroes? Are they not true fighters, one and all? Tertullian fought a mighty battle against Marcion; Athanasius fought against the Arians; Augustine fought against Pelagius; and as for Luther, he fought a brave battle against kings and princes and popes for the liberty of the people of God. Luther was a great fighter; and we love him for it. So was Calvin; so were John Knox and all the rest. It is impossible to be a true soldier of Jesus Christ and not fight.

God grant that you—students in the seminary—may be fighters, too! Probably you have your battles even now; you have to contend against sins gross or sins refined; you have to contend against the sin of slothfulness and inertia; you have, many of you, I know very well, a mighty battle on your hands against doubt and despair. Do not think it strange if you fall thus into divers temptations. The Christian life is a warfare after all. John Bunyan rightly set it forth under the allegory of a Holy War; and when he set it forth, in his greater book [The Pilgrim's Progress], under the figure of a pilgrimage, the pilgrimage too, was full of battles.

There are indeed, places of refreshment on the Christian way; the House Beautiful was provided by the King at the top of the Hill Difficulty, for the entertainment of pilgrims, and from the Delectable Mountains could sometimes be discerned the shining towers of the City of God. But just after the descent from the House Beautiful, there was the battle with Apollyon and the Valley of Humiliation, and later came the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Yes, the Christian faces a mighty conflict in this world. Pray God that in that conflict you may be true men; good soldiers of Jesus Christ, not willing to compromise with your great enemy, not easily cast down, and seeking ever the renewing of your strength in the Word and ordinances and prayer!

If you decide to stand for Christ, you will not have an easy life in the ministry. Of course, you may try to evade the conflict. All men will speak well of you if, after preaching no matter how unpopular a Gospel on Sunday, you will only vote against that Gospel in the councils of the church the next day; you will graciously be permitted to believe in supernatural Christianity all you please if you will only act as though you did not believe in it, if you will only make common of the church. A man may believe what he pleases, provided he does not believe anything strongly enough to risk his life on it and fight for it. "Tolerance" is the great word. Men even ask for prayer such a prayer as that? What a terrible prayer it is, how full of disloyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ!

There is a sense, of course, in which tolerance is a virtue. If by it you mean tolerance on the part of the state, the forbearance of majorities toward minorities,

the resolute rejection of any measures of physical compulsion in propagating either what is true or what is false, then of course, the Christian ought to favor tolerance with all his might and main, and ought to lament the widespread growth of intolerance in America today. Or if you mean by tolerance forbearance toward personal attacks upon yourself, or courtesy and patience and fairness in dealing with all errors of whatever kind, then again tolerance is a virtue. But to pray for tolerance apart from such qualifications, in particular to pray for tolerance without careful definition of that of which you are to be tolerant, is just to pray for the breakdown of the Christian religion; for the Christian religion is intolerant to the core.

There lies the whole offense of the Cross—and also the whole power of it. Always the Gospel would have been received with favor by the world IF it had been presented merely as one way of salvation; the offense came because it was presented as the only way, and because it made relentless war upon all other ways. God save us, then, from this “tolerance” of which we hear so much. God deliver us from the sin of making common cause with those who deny or ignore the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ! God save us from the deadly guilt of consenting to the presence as our representatives in the church of those who lead Christ’s little ones astray; God make us, whatever else we are, just faithful messengers, who present, without fear or favor, not our word, but the Word of God.

But if you are such messengers, you will have the opposition, not only of the world, but increasingly, I fear, of the Church. I cannot tell you that your sacrifice will be light. No doubt it would be noble to care nothing whatever about the judgment of our fellow men. But to such nobility I confess that I for my part have not quite attained, and I cannot expect you to have attained to it. I confess that academic preferments, easy access to great libraries, the society of cultured people, and in general the thousand advantages that come from being regarded as respectable people in a respectable world - I confess that these things seem to me to be in themselves good and desirable things. Yet the servant of Jesus Christ, to an increasing extent, is being obliged to give them up. Certainly, in making that sacrifice we do not complain; for we have something with which all that we have lost is not worthy to be compared. Still, it can hardly be said that any unworthy motives of self-interest can lead us to adopt a course which brings us nothing but reproach.

Where, then, shall we find a sufficient motive for such a course as that; where shall we find courage to stand against the whole current of the age; where shall we find courage for this fight of faith? I do not think that we shall obtain courage by any mere lust of conflict. In some battles that means may perhaps suffice. Soldiers in bayonet practice were sometimes, and for all I know still are, taught to give a shout when they thrust their bayonets at imaginary enemies; I heard them doing it even long after the armistice in France. That serves, I suppose, to overcome the natural inhibition of civilized man to develop the proper spirit of conflict. Perhaps it may be necessary in some kinds of war. But it will hardly serve in this Christian conflict. In this conflict I do not think we can be good fighters simply by being resolved to fight. For this battle is a battle of love; and nothing ruins a man’s service in it so much as a spirit of hate.

No, if we want to learn the secret of this warfare, we shall have to look deeper; and we can hardly do better than turn again to that great fighter, the Apostle

Paul. What was the secret of his power in the mighty conflict; how did he learn to fight?

The answer is paradoxical; but it is very simple. Paul was a great fighter because he was at peace. He who said, "Fight the good fight of faith," spoke also of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"; and in that peace the sinews of his war were found. He fought against the enemies that were without because he was at peace within; there was an inner sanctuary in his life that no enemy could disturb. There, my friends, is the great central truth. You cannot fight successfully with beasts, as Paul did at Ephesus; you cannot fight successfully against evil men, or against the devil and his spiritual powers of wickedness in high places, unless when you fight against those enemies there is One with Whom you are at peace.

But if you are at peace with that One, then you can care little what men may do. You can say with the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men"; you can say with Luther, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen"; you can say with Elisha, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them"; you can say with Paul, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" Without that peace of God in your hearts, you will strike little terror into the enemies of the Gospel of Christ. You may amass mighty resources for the conflict; you may be great masters of ecclesiastical strategy; you may be very clever, and very zealous too; but I fear that it will be of little avail. There may be a tremendous din; but when the din is over, the Lord's enemies will be in possession of the field. No, there is no other way to be a really good fighter. You cannot fight God's battle against God's enemies unless you are at peace with Him.

But how shall you be at peace with Him? Many ways have been tried. How pathetic is the age-long effort of sinful man to become right with God; sacrifice, lacerations, almsgiving, morality, penance, confession! But alas, it is all of no avail. Still there is that same awful gulf. It may be temporarily concealed; spiritual exercises may conceal it for a time; penance or the confession of sin unto men may give a temporary and apparent relief. But the real trouble remains; the burden is still on the back; Mount Sinai is still ready to shoot forth flames; the soul is still not at peace with God. How then shall peace be obtained?

My friends, it cannot be attained by anything in us. Oh, that that truth could be written in the hearts of every one of you! Oh, that it could be written in letters of flame for all the world to read! Peace with God cannot be attained by good works, neither can it be attained by confession of sin, neither can it be attained by any psychological results of an act of faith. We can never be at peace with God unless God first be at peace with us. But how can God be at peace with us? Can He be at peace with us by ignoring the guilt of sin? by descending from His throne? by throwing the universe into chaos? by making wrong to be the same as right? by making a dead letter of His holy law? "The soul that sinneth it shall die," by treating His eternal laws as though they were the changeable laws of man?

Oh, what an abyss were the universe if that were done, what a mad anarchy, what a wild demon-riot! Where could there be peace if God were thus at war with Himself; where could there be a foundation if God's laws were not sure? Oh, no, my friends, peace cannot be attained for man by the great modern method of dragging God down to man's level; peace cannot be attained by denying that right is right and wrong is wrong; peace can nowhere be attained if the awful justice of God stand not forever sure.

How then can we sinners stand before that Throne? How can there be peace for us in the presence of the justice of God? How can He be just and yet justify the ungodly? There is one answer to these questions. It is not our answer. Our wisdom could never have discovered it. It is God's Answer. It is found in the story of the Cross. We deserved eternal death because of sin; the eternal Son of God, because He loved us, and because He was sent by the Father Who loved us too, died in our stead, for our sins, upon the Cross. That message is despised today; upon it the visible church as well as the world pours out the vials of its scorn, or else does it even less honor by paying it lip-service and then passing it by. Men dismiss it as a "theory of the atonement," and fall back upon the customary commonplaces about a principle of self-sacrifice, or the culmination of a universal law, or a revelation of the love of God, or the hallowing of suffering, or the similarity between Christ's death and the death of soldiers who perished in the great war.

In the presence of such blindness, our words often seem vain. We may tell men something of what we think about the Cross of Christ, but it is harder to tell them what we feel. We pour forth our tears of gratitude and love; we open to the multitude the depths of our souls; we celebrate a mystery so tender, so holy, that we might think it would soften even a heart of stone. But all to no purpose. The Cross remains foolishness to the world, men turn coldly away, and our preaching seems but vain. And then comes the wonder of wonders! The hour comes for some poor soul, even through the simplest and poorest preaching; the message is honored, not the messenger; there comes a flash of light into the soul, and all is as clear as day. "He loved me and gave Himself for me," says the sinner at last, as he contemplates the Saviour upon the Cross. The burden of sin falls from the back, and a soul enters into the peace of God.

Have you yourselves that peace, my friends? If you have, you will not be deceived by the propaganda of any disloyal church. If you have the peace of God in your hearts, you will never shrink from controversy; you will never be afraid to contend earnestly for the Faith. Talk of peace in the present deadly peril of the Church, and you show, unless you be strangely ignorant of the conditions that exist, that you have little inkling of the true peace of God. Those who have been at the foot of the Cross will not be afraid to go forth under the banner of the Cross to a holy war of love.

Where are you going to stand in the great battle which now rages in the church? Are you going to curry favor with the world by standing aloof; are you going to be "conservative liberals" or "liberal conservatives" or "Christians who do not believe in controversy," or anything else so self-contradictory and absurd? Are you going to be Christians, but not Christians overmuch? Are you going to stand coldly aloof when God's people fight against ecclesiastical tyranny at home and abroad? Are you going to excuse yourselves by pointing out personal defects in those who contend for the Faith today? Are you going to be disloyal to Christ in external testimony until you can make all well within your own soul? Be assured, you will never accomplish your purpose if you adopt such a program as that. Witness bravely to the Truth that you already understand, and more will be given you; but make common cause with those who deny or ignore the Gospel of Christ, and the enemy will forever run riot in your life.

There are many hopes that I cherish for you men, with whom I am united by such ties of affection. I hope that you may be gifted preachers; I hope that you may have happy lives; I hope that you may have adequate support for yourselves and for your families; I hope that you may have good churches. But I hope something for you far more than all that. I hope above all that, wherever you are and however your preaching may be received, you may be true witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ; I hope that there may never be any doubt where you stand, but that always you may stand squarely for Jesus Christ, as He is offered to us, not in the experiences of men, but in the blessed written Word of God.

Many have been swept from their moorings by the current of the age; a church grown worldly often tyrannizes over those who look for guidance to God's Word alone. But this is not the first discouraging time in the history of the church; other times were just as dark, and yet always God has watched over His people, and the darkest hour has sometimes preceded the dawn. So even now God has not left Himself without a witness. In many lands there are those who have faced the great issue of the day and have decided it aright, who have preserved true independence of mind in the presence of the world; in many lands there are groups of Christian people who in the face of ecclesiastical tyranny have not been afraid to stand for Jesus Christ. God grant that you may give comfort to them as you go forth from this seminary; God grant that you may rejoice their hearts by giving them your hand and your voice. To do so you will need courage. Far easier is it to curry favor with the world by abusing those whom the world abuses, by speaking against controversy, by taking a balcony view of the struggle in which God's servants are engaged.

But God save you from such a neutrality as that! It has a certain worldly appearance of urbanity and charity. But how cruel it is to burdened souls; how heartless it is to those little ones who are looking to the Church for some clear message from God! God save you from being so heartless and so unloving and so cold! God grant, instead, that in all humility but also in all boldness, in reliance upon God, you may fight the good fight of faith. Peace is indeed yours, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. But that peace is given you, not that you may be onlookers or neutrals in love's battle, but that you may be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. ☩

Notes:

¹This is the last sermon preached by Dr. J. Gresham Machen at Princeton. This sermon is taken from David Otis Fuller, Editor, *Valiant for the Truth: A Treasury of Evangelical Writings* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1961), 448–455.

Post-Reformation Dogmatics A Review Article

Roger Nicole

Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*. 4 volumes. Grand Rapids, MI: 2003. ISBN 0-8010-2618-0. 2163 pages. \$150.00 (individual volumes at \$44.99).

An event! The appearance of this set is an event in scholarship and in publication. The individual volumes treat respectively:

- I. Prolegomena to Theology
- II. Holy Scripture
- III. The Divine Essence and Attributes
- IV. The Trinity of God

There is one Index for subjects and names at the end of each volume and a Bibliography of 125 pages at the end of volume 4. The very extensive footnotes, 8249 of them, appear where they belong: at the foot of respective pages. The table of contents of each volume provides an extensive outline for the whole work. The four volumes are uniformly bound in a very solid hardback way, which opens readily on the table and allows for easy Xeroxing of individual pages.

The first scholar to undertake such a project was Alexander Schweizer of Zurich who in 1844 and 1847 published a two-volume work with 124 paragraphs, *Die Glaubenslehre der evangelisch – reformirten Kirche*. He was a competent scholar and produced quotations from 35 different theological Reformed writers from Zwingli to Schleiermacher covering the whole range of dogmatics in some 1255 pages. The value of this work is severely limited by Schweizer's major purpose to manifest a basic unity in Reformed theology from Zwingli to Schleiermacher under Schleiermacher's definition of religion as expressing "a feeling of absolute dependence." He devotes only some 200 pages to the first four loci covered by Dr. Muller.

Because of the limitations in Schweizer's works, Heinrich Heppé published in 1861 a more objective study *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch – reformirten Kirche*. This volume of 520 pages and 18 chapters includes in each chapter a summary prepared by Heppé and a number of quotations from some of the 57 authors he consulted, exemplifying the position held in his summary. Heppé did not quote D. Chamier, J.F. Stapfer, J.C. Beck, nor Schleiermacher, whom Schweizer had included. As an ardent supporter of a merger of protestant churches in Germany, Heppé tried to show that Reformed theology had been more influenced by P. Melancthon than by Zwingli and Calvin. He particularly emphasized the work of C. Pezel and V. Strigel as exhibiting this orientation.

The work was republished in 1935 with a valuable survey by Ernest Bizer concerning the sources of Heppé's quotations. An attempt to exhibit the unity

of Reformed and Lutheran views had slanted the outlook: while the quotations were appropriate, the summaries expressed what Heppe thought Reformed theology should be rather than what it had been in fact. By cutting the summaries in rather short installments immediately followed by relevant quotations, the English edition has made Heppe's intent less prominent and the work more difficult to use.

Richard Muller's work rises high above these two predecessors in several ways.

1. The scope of his sources has been very greatly increased. He quotes all the authors used by Schweizer except D. Chamier, H a Diest, and Schleiermacher, the latter being irrelevant to post-Reformation dogmatics. He quotes all 57 authors listed by H. Heppe except H a Diest, who can hardly be viewed as an important source. In addition to both Schweizer and Heppe he has included such important representatives of Reformed orthodoxy as N. Arnold, N. a Brakel, M. Bucer, A. Chandieu, B. de Moor, A. Essenius, F. Gomerus, F. Hommius, J. Hoornbeck, F. Junius, J. a Lasco, L. Leblanc, J. Maccovius, P. Poiret, P. Ramus, A. Rivet, J. Scharp, F. Spanheim Sr., P. Viret, C. Wittich and others who may not have written systematic theologies. He also included the Arminians (J. Arminius, S. Curcellaeus, S. Episcopius, H. Grotius, P. Limborch) and their opponents (P. Du Moulin, and others), and the Salmurians (M. Amyraut, L. Cappel, J. Daillé, J. La Place) and their opponents (P. DuMoulin, S. Maresius, A. Rivet, F. Spanheim Sr.). One can hardly imagine an adequate survey that bypasses all of these except Maresius!

Furthermore Dr. Muller has abundant references to Anglo-Saxon authors, thoroughly bypassed by both Schweizer and Heppe. Now J. Arrowsmith, W. Bates, R. Baxter, T. Boston, G. Bull, J. Cameron, T. Cartwright, S. Charnock, S. Clarke, J. Davenant, D. Dickson, J. Downname, J. Edwards, J. Flavel, T. Gale, T. Gataker, J. Gill, G. Gillespie, T. Goodwin, E. Hopkins, J. Howe, J. Jackson, T. Jackson, J. Jewel, B. Keach, E. Leigh, J. Lightfoot, J. Mede, S. Nye, J. Owen, W. Perkins, T. Ridgley, F. Roberts, R. Rollock, S. Rutherford, W. Sherlock, R. South, E. Stillingfleet, J. Tillotson, W. Twisse, J. Ussher, W. Whitaker, and countless others participate as representatives of the Post Reformation Dogmatics.

In addition to all this, Dr. Muller has given close attention to exegetical works as manifesting the doctrinal development. When the possible exception of D. Chameir, who was primarily a polemic theologian, it is difficult to see who might be added to this impressive list. The absence of G. Fared and J. Knox is no doubt due to the fact that they were more significant as ecclesiastic leaders than as theological authors.

2. It must be noted that, in view of the much larger range of authors examined and quoted, the inquiry has been greatly deepened. The four volumes issued cover only four chapters of earlier works, as noted at the beginning of this review.

This would indicate that a work of parallel amplitude concerning other *loci* of systematic theology might be desired. Whether Dr. Muller would undertake any of this is not yet indicated. Surely he would be uniquely qualified to do some of this in view of his unparalleled acquaintance with

the relevant literature.

As it is he has provided at the end of volume 4 a chapter of some 40 pages dealing with the character of Reformed Orthodoxy and its relationship to Pre-Reformation theology, the seminal reformers themselves and some developments after 1725.

What we have here is enough to bulldoze into the dump the view often heralded since Heppé and throughout the 20th century that a great chasm exists between Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and those who exercised major leadership in Post-Reformation theology after 1564. Notably it has been urged that by a gigantic effort the seminal Reformers had set aside the methodology and excrescencies of the Middle Ages scholasticism, and that unfortunately in the leadership of Beza and Melancthon scholasticism was reintroduced in the Reformation, to the great damage of the faith.

Dr. Muller in this magnificent investigation has given a strong evidence that there was no chasm between Calvin and Beza, contrary to M. Amyraut, H. Heppé, O. Ritschl, H. E. Weber, B. Armstrong, R.T. Kendall, J. Rogers, and many others. The chasm occurred mainly in the 18th century when an exaggerated confidence was placed in the natural human faculties of mind, conscience or feeling and a failure to sense the gravity of the entail of human corruption precipitated a departure from the revealed truth of Scripture.

As I have often attempted to point out, this outlook implied a very severe lack of perception in J. Calvin who had invited T. Beza to Geneva, encouraged him as the first principal of the newly founded Academy and given his blessing to his becoming Calvin's successor as the *pastor primarius* of the Geneva church. It would also show a serious lack in the many Reformed theologians who flourished between 1564 and 1700, and who claimed to be in the line of succession of Calvin. Now the *coup de grâce* has been definitively administered to this strange theory.

3. Since Dr. Muller wrote about a century and a half after Schweizer and Heppé, he has naturally given consideration to a very large input of secondary sources that have appeared since 1861. His bibliography in this respect extends to 67 pages and manifests his thorough acquaintance with the whole area of his study. He lists no less than 35 publications that he himself had produced before this one.
4. Dr. Muller, one might fear, being a church history specialist, might be satisfied to outline currents in their generality rather than in the research of the details of some controversies that might be thought to be minor. The contrary is true and we find that he discerned clearly the details of contested views, and that he could follow his sources in the intricacies of their contentions and quarrels. This is manifest, for instance, in the very extensive discussion of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, which manifests how erroneous was Rogers and McKim's claim that the strict doctrine of Biblical inerrancy was a creation of the Princeton Theological Seminary in the 19th century. It is manifest in the extensive discussion in volume III (pp. 392-432) of God's knowledge and foreknowledge. In volume IV we have an elaborate presentation of the vicissitudes of a Trinitarian controversy in England between 1680 and 1700. One could multiply the examples of this detailed care apparent in all four volumes.

Volumes 1 and 2 appear as a second edition of two works published respectively in 1987 and 1993. Volume I on the *Prolegomena* has 98 pages more than the earlier edition, is hard bound rather than a paperback, is printed rather than typed, and has 62% more footnotes, lodged at the foot of relevant pages rather than at the end of the volume. Thus the owners of the first edition will get a substantial benefit in securing this text. Volume II, on the Holy Scripture, also hardbound rather than a paperback, has approximately the same number of pages, and shows an increase of 16% over the 1870 footnotes of the 1st edition. The references in the later volumes are always in terms of this 2nd edition, and it is surely desirable to have this set in its finished form.

As one who has known, loved and used Francis Turretin for nearly seventy years, I am immensely pleased with the appearance of this formidable vindication of those who followed Zwingli and Calvin in the Reformed camp. Not Presbyterians and Reformed churches alone benefited from their labors, but the Anglican bodies, the Congregationalists and the Baptists were deeply affected, and the Lutherans, the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholics, although often in a dissenting approach, were also in some respects influenced by this massive movement, now happily represented in its original orientation rather than caricatured, as was, alas, too frequent in the 20th century! We can say that the less people knew of Reformed Dogmatics from 1520 to 1725, the more vigorous their criticism, and those who apparently knew nothing and had read nothing of their works, were the most abusive!

The work is superbly printed and admirably bound in a way that insured its usefulness for years to come. Inevitably some typographical errors have crept in occasionally. The author would surely be grateful for those who might provide him with a list of such as were discovered.

As I said at the start: this is an event in scholarship and in publication. Deep gratitude is due to Dr. R. A. Muller and to the Baker Book House. ☺

Book Review

N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. 192 pages.

Reviewed by Brian G. Hedges

This was one of the most compelling and frightening books I have read in a long time. Compelling, because N. T. Wright winsomely presents the gospel in cosmic proportions, freshly fleshing out the implications of Jesus' lordship over all things and all men. Frightening, because in his discussion of justification he empties "the righteousness of God" of its historic meaning and completely recasts the doctrine of justification in light of Second Temple Judaism.

Very helpful is Wright's devastating criticism of A. N. Wilson's accusation that Paul, rather than Jesus, was the founder of Christianity. Wright beautifully demonstrates that Paul spoke from the theological platform of Judaism, a world-

view that he never cast off, but rather recast with Jesus Christ in the center. It was from this platform that Paul confronted the pagan world of his day. What God has done through Jesus Christ is both the fulfillment of God's covenant to Israel and the great Apocalyptic event, the inauguration of the Age to Come, where God through Christ will take His rightful place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Surely Wright is correct in his critique that the gospel itself is not a system of how to gain personal salvation but rather the announcement that God has invested Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, with all authority in heaven and earth and men should therefore give total allegiance to King Jesus. I agree with Wright that while personal and individual salvation is important and one of the effects of the gospel proclamation, it should not be lifted out of the context of community and privatized as a spiritual commodity. Too often Evangelicals treat the part (justification) as if it were the whole (salvation in all its cosmic fullness) and end up missing the forest for the tree. I am comfortable with moving the explanation point away from one part of the *ordo salutis* back to the good news itself with all of its radical implications for life in the here and now. If only he would have only moved the explanation point and not changed part of the sentence!

What bothers me about this book is Wright's scoffing (maybe too strong a word?) at imputation and his recasting of historic Reformed theology. The most distressing few sentences in the book to me are these:

If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom ... To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how the language works (98).

Yet, Romans 3:22 speaks of "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for [the preposition is either *eis* (unto) or *epi* (upon) or both, depending on the manuscript—each of the terms convey the idea of righteousness being presented to or provided for or laid upon] all who believe" and Romans 4:6 describes "the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness [note: righteousness itself, not just faith as righteousness] apart from works." (For an excellent exegetical defense of the doctrine of imputation, see John Piper's book *Counted Righteous in Christ*, Crossway Books, 2002). In Wright's theology, God's saving righteousness is simply his faithfulness to the covenant promises made to Abraham, not a divine provision of the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to believers by imputation. While covenant faithfulness is surely inherent within God's righteousness (when seen as an attribute), "the righteousness of God" is more than that. It is also the gift of a righteous status before God resulting from the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. If he had only affirmed this, Wright would not be so wrong. ☹

More News

Lynn E. May Study Grants

The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives is now accepting applications for the Lynn E. May, Jr. Study Grants for 2004-2005. The application deadline is April 1, 2004. The grants are awarded to assist researchers who use the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives with travel and research expenses. The study grants honor Dr. Lynn E. May, Jr., Executive Director of the Historical Commission, SBC, 1971-1995. The maximum award is \$750. The grant funds will be available after May 1, 2004. Interested applicants can write, call, or email a request for guidelines and an application form. Applicants may submit their application electronically by accessing the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives web site.

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Letters

Dear Dr. Ascol,

Back in late October 2003, Shalom Christian Media (a literature ministry of Shalom Church, a Reformed Baptist church in Singapore) managed to gather together some materials to send to local Baptist pastors and seminaries. The genesis of the idea came from a reading of Geoff Thomas' biography on Ernest Reisinger. In it we saw how God used pastor Reisinger to spread His truth of sovereign grace to Baptists, both in the pulpit and seminaries. Over in Singapore we also long to see the local Baptist brethren here come and share the same truth that our Baptist forefathers have fervently embraced and loved so much.

As a result, the following items were assembled and sent to about 50 Baptist pastors and a few Baptist seminaries: copies of the July 2003 issue of *Preaching and Preachers* (a journal from South Africa edited by Pastor Martin Holdt), copies of *Reformation Today* (a magazine edited by Erroll Hulse), copies of the *Founders Journal*, copies of the *Sword and Trowel Magazine*, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic* by Walter Chantry and *What's Wrong with Preaching Today* (by Al Martin).

May our Lord use this little effort to implant His truths in the local pastors. Please pray that a re-capturing of that great reformation spirit may come about in the pulpit and in the lives of His people.

Shalom,
Francis

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