

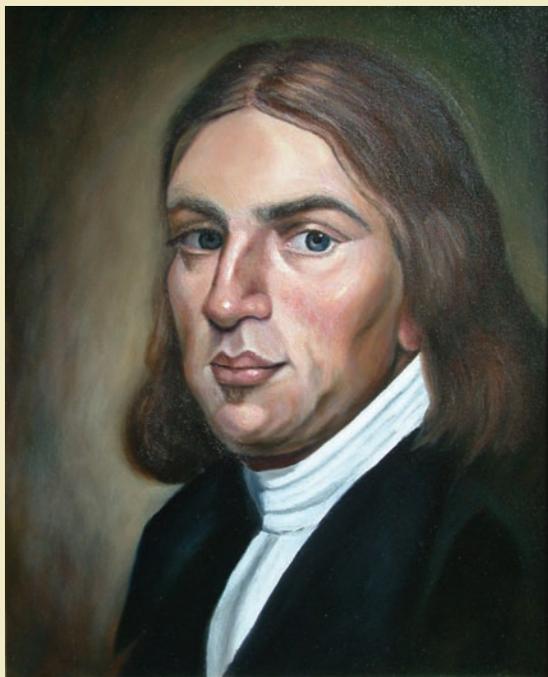
The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

Issue 57

Summer 2004



THE KIND OF MAN
GOD USES

CONTRIBUTORS:

Dr Tom J. Nettles is Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Dr William G. Moore is a Southern Baptist pastor in Clinton, South Carolina.

Ernest C. Reisinger was an author, pastor and founding board member of Founders Ministries (1919–2004).

The painting on the cover is of Samuel Pearce by Robert Nettles. This will be the cover picture for a new biography of Pearce by Michael Haykin. A circular letter composed by Pearce on the doctrines of grace is one of the items in this volume. The article written by Bill Moore closes with a challenging quote from Pearce.

The Founders Journal



Editor:

Thomas K Ascol, PhD

Contributing Editors:

Bill Ascol, MDiv

Timothy George, ThD

Fred A Malone, PhD

Joe Nesom, PhD

Tom Nettles, PhD

Phil Newton, DMin

Roger Nicole, ThD, PhD, DD

Don Whitney, DMin

Hal Wynn, BD

Graphic Design Editor:

Kenneth Puls, PhD

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

Subscription Price (one year): \$15.00 (\$20.00 outside the USA)

Please send notice of any change in address. Send all inquiries and correspondence to:

Founders Journal • P.O. Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL 33915

For those who have access to the InterNet or many commercial online computer services, you may send your correspondence to **editor@founders.org** via electronic mail. Or you may contact us by phone at (239) 772-1400 or fax at (239) 772-1140.

Also visit our web site at **<http://www.founders.org>** for an online version of *The Founders Journal*.

Editorial Introduction

Tom J. Nettles

Though churches may survive the disaster brought to them by an unqualified pastor, God has so ordered it that the health of His churches depends largely on the soundness of the pulpit ministry. Paul urged Timothy to follow closely his instructions on ministerial qualifications for the church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This issue of the *Founders Journal* investigates the question concerning the kind of man that God uses. We will allow the scriptural profile to emerge in the context of historical discussion.

It is providential that one of the articles planned for this summer issue comes from Ernie Reisinger. This is probably one of the last articles to come from his pen. That great champion of truth died on May 31, 2004. A later issue of the *Founders Journal* will explore his heritage and contribution, but till then one may grasp much of his heart and passion for truth, the glory of God, and the souls of sinners, by his discussion of the kind of man God uses in reformation. Ernie, ever the purveyor of the best thoughts of others, developed his thoughts in the context of a piece by Horatius Bonar.

Bill Moore, A Southern Baptist pastor in Clinton, South Carolina, and recent PhD graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes an article in which he distills more than two centuries of Baptist witness to the nature of Christian pastoral ministry. The reader will be struck with the parallels between his historical discussion and Ernie Reisinger’s article. These parallels should help seal the importance of the key observations prominent in both articles.

Among these common key observations is an important component that urges the importance of the doctrines of grace. That leads to the circular letter on that subject by Samuel Pearce. To William Carey, Pearce served as his most important and zealous kindred spirit on the issue of missions until his untimely death in 1799. The circle of friends that established the Particular Baptist Missionary Society recognized Pearce as the furthest advanced in spiritual maturity among all the Christian ministers they knew.

May the Lord grant us many, both of preachers and laymen, who see the pastoral office as a good thing, and strive with all their might to have their lives be a testimony to that intrinsic and holy goodness. ☞

The Kind of Man God Uses: Early Baptist Voices

William G. Moore

What is the kind of man God uses in the gospel ministry? Few issues should concern both pulpit and pew as much. That our church culture views the role of pastors as essential for growing churches is evidenced by the innumerable books, magazines, videos, and seminars promising to reveal the secrets of effective leadership. Must a man be an administrative expert to be used by God? Some seminaries in the U.S. now offer combination Master of Divinity/MBA degrees. Must a man have a certain physiological profile? Don't laugh—a Baptist church sent a request to a Southern Baptist seminary requesting candidates who had flat stomachs so that the new pastor could keep up with the church's youth! One Baptist evangelist promises other pastors that they will double the size of their church in two years or less if they purchase and follow his biblical principles of church growth found in his Leadership Training Institute video series.¹

To our church culture immersed in pragmatism, Baptists from the early seventeenth century through the mid-nineteenth century provide a much-needed perspective. Early Baptists were concerned with neither the superficial nor methodological. Believing that God gave success, they searched the Scriptures to determine the kind of man God uses.

Men Who Manifest Biblical Qualifications

Whether General Baptist or Particular, the written witness of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Baptists reveals a desire to exercise biblical fidelity in all aspects of the gospel ministry. While their views were not always in agreement even on some ecclesiological issues,² British Baptists consistently pointed to the Scriptures to support their position. Because they believed that a regenerate church membership was required by the Scriptures, they maintained that ministers possessed the responsibility of caring for the souls of those members. Consequently, ministers were to be men who were themselves of the highest personal character: men who both believed what the Bible revealed, lived what the Bible commanded and demonstrated biblical gifts.³

Conversion and Genuine Spirituality

Regeneration necessarily preceded any other qualification for the eldership. Isaac Backus, who became a leader among New England Baptists in the First Great Awakening, preaching at the ordination of Asa Hunt, reminded the con-

gregation that “it is God that makes able ministers.” Backus insisted that ministers themselves must be converted by God into “new creatures,” because such conversion “is so essential to the very nature of their work, and so plainly revealed in the scripture.” The reason for their being converted was that “a principal part of their work is to labour to *reconcile* sinners to God; and to imagine any one to be fit for that work, who is not truly reconciled himself, is one of the firstborn of absurdities.” Backus asked, “The nature of their work is *spiritual*, and how can carnal men perform it?”

Backus noted that “ministers are to comfort others by the comfort where-with *they themselves are comforted of God*, 2 Cor. 1. 4. They are to lead others in a way they are acquainted with, and ought to be able to say, *We speak that we know, and testify that we have seen.*” Backus further supported his contention by noting that a man cannot act in a truly selfless manner “until he is born from above This [conversion], and this only can and doth give them to act from more noble principles, than self-seeking and self-righteousness: It enables them to preach by *faith*, and in their conduct to look to things *unseen, which are eternal*, 2 Cor. 4.5, 6.13.18.” In addition, because of the difficulty of the minister’s work, “divine help” is needed. Backus asked, “But how can that be without union with him [Christ], even as the branch has with the vine?”⁴

Biblically Tried, Spirit-endowed

Because Baptists allowed only for each congregation to choose its own ministers, it was vital that congregations call biblically qualified candidates—men whose lives revealed a pattern of godliness as delineated in the Scriptures. Thomas Helwys, father of the General Baptists, wrote in *The English Declaration at Amsterdam*, including several citations of Scripture, that ministers must be “qualified according to the rules in Christ’s Testament” and that their election and approval is of “that Church or congregation whereoff they are members.” Fasting, prayer and laying on of hands accompanies their selection.⁵ Likewise, Particular Baptists, in their Confession of 1644, recognized that “every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons” as their ministers, “and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.”⁶

Early British Baptists consistently maintained the church’s duty to test and give official recognition to its ministers. Benjamin Keach, in his discussion of an orderly church, insisted that they be qualified “in some competent manner” according to the standards delineated in the Pastoral Epistles.⁷ Likewise, Nehemiah Cox, reflecting on the pastoral epistles, emphasized, “This is the Rule of Trial that all Churches are bound to have in their Eye, and diligently to attend to, in their Election of Elders.” Such a “trial” had weighty repercussions. When the scrutiny is executed biblically, “Christ approves their choice, and *the Holy Ghost makes their Overseers*; for both the Gifts, Grace, and Authority of a Gospel-Minister are from him; and no Man or society of Men under Heaven, can *de jure*, make him a Minister that Christ hath not qualified for such a Service.” Cox emphasized the necessity of biblical criteria, “for the validity of all Church Acts depends upon, and is determined by, their conformity to the Rule of Christ’s Holy Will and Testament.”⁸

General Baptist Thomas Grantham insists that the local church take great care in recognizing those who would be gospel ministers. He outlined a logical pattern: a man must be a baptized believer, he must attend the means of spiritual growth and attain some degree of spiritual maturity, he must give evidence of being gifted for the task, and he must be approved by the church to teach both within and without so that his gift may be tried. Those men who give evidence of a calling by God during this period of testing would therefore be chosen and ordained with due gravity for the gospel ministry.⁹

Men of Orthodox Doctrine Biblically Defended

Throughout their early history Baptists were castigated for having an improperly trained ministry.¹⁰ Their supposed lack of education often was a gross misperception on the part of their opponents. Though *self-schooled*, they often were *well-schooled* in Scripture knowledge and confessional theology. Training in the arts was not a priority of many Baptists; the understanding of doctrine was. Grantham spoke for many Baptists with his rejection of the emphases of the “approved” schools and his counter-argument that the formally educated often had insufficient knowledge of the right sort for gospel ministry.

But all such as come not first, to repent of their sins, believe on the Lord Jesus, and so Baptized in his Name, for Remission of sins: But are only brought up in the Schools of humane Learning, to the attaining humane Arts, and variety of Languages, with many vain curiosities of speech: Seeking rather the gain of large revenues than the gain of souls to God, such we utterly deny, for that they have need rather to be taught themselves, then fit to teach others.¹¹

The examination of the candidate’s beliefs was of grave importance. In answer to the query “*But what are the marks of those true Ministers that wee may know them,*” Edward Drapes answered, “The onely true ground of a visible judging or discerning them, is by their doctrine: therefore *John* saith, *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits: Hereby know yee the spirit of God;* Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: that is to say, by trying the doctrines brought unto you, you shall be able to judge from whence the Preachers come.”¹²

Baptists were also warned not to allow a potential candidate’s spiritual enthusiasm or notable abilities lead them to ordain an unworthy man. Putting such a man into the ministry could do incalculable harm. T. Blundell of Northampton, writing an associational circular letter in 1796, explained that a man “under the influence of the former [enthusiasm] has supposed himself to be divinely inspired; and that every impression of a text of scripture upon his mind must be the true meaning of it, taught him by the Holy Spirit himself. Hence he neglects to consult the genuine meaning of scripture, and utters for God’s word his own wild and indigested conceits.” Unfortunately, too many congregations, Blundell lamented, were all too ready to be led by “such characters.”

A similarly “pernicious” situation was “the substitution of talents in the place of principle.” The reliance upon natural talent instead of searching holy writ,

Blundell observed, “is an evil of magnitude in the present age.” He explained, “The more talents any man possesseth, whose leading views are at variance with the oracles of God, the greater mischief he is likely to accomplish; and all who any way encourage such preaching assist in planting a battery against the City of God, and partake of the guilt of destroying souls.” Propagating such views was no mere difference of interpretation among godly men: “The dark soul of a publick teacher has even been the chosen habitation of the father of lies; because from thence he can propagate error with the least suspicion, and consequently to the greatest advantage.”¹³

Baptists in America also viewed a man’s piety and doctrinal soundness as the chief criteria for qualification. Neither a man’s station in life nor his educational attainments were matters of preeminent concern. The *Summary of Church-Discipline* of the Charleston Baptist Association asserted that, because ministers “have the charge of souls and are leaders in the house of God, churches cannot be too careful in chusing men to the ministerial function.” Consequently, “they ought to be men fearing God, being born again of the Spirit, sound in the faith, and of blameless lives and conversations, as is becoming to the gospel of Christ, having fervent desires to glorify God, and save souls (*John* 3. 10; 2 *Tim.* 1. 13; 1 *Tim.* 3. 2; *Rom.* 9. 3. chap. 10. 1).”¹⁴

Francis Wayland, president of Brown University from 1827–1855, examined 1 Timothy 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9 and maintained, “It would seem . . . that any disciple of Christ, of blameless character, meek, forbearing, temperate, sober, just, holy, thoroughly attached to the doctrines of the gospel, having a natural gift for teaching, and having had some experience in the Christian life—not a novice—has the qualifications for the ministry which the New Testament requires.”¹⁵ By using the phrase “any disciple of Christ” Wayland did not diminish the note of divine call and preparation, but dismissed any merely human standards of qualification.

Ministers Faithful to Biblical Duties

Baptists throughout this period viewed the ministry as a work, a labor to which a man diligently gave himself. Consequently, the kind of man God uses would be a man who faithfully carried out the duties delineated in Scripture. Baptists believed that the practices of ministry modeled and delineated in Scripture were sufficient to occupy the time and energy of a God-called man. He need invent no contrivances of his own.

Consistent in Labor

The apostles considered that their calling required thorough application of time and energy to certain tasks. They must bypass other necessary things and leave them to those that did not have the spiritual demands of the ministry placed on them (Acts 6: 1ff). Following this pattern, Baptists believed that the ministry involved zealous labor. Few would have disagreed with this mid-eighteenth century explanation by John Gill:

The ministry of the word is a work; it is called “the work of the ministry”, Ephesians 4:13[;] it is a ministering work, a service, and not a dominion; such who are employed in it have not the dominion, neither over the faith nor over the practice of men, no further than enjoined by the word of God: the ministry is a service, as the word imports, and not a “sinecure”; there is business to be done, and a great deal of it; enough to employ all the time and talents of ministers, and no room nor leisure to indulge to sleepiness, to laziness, and slothfulness: and it is a laborious work; the ministers of the gospel are not to be loiterers, but labourers in Christ’s vineyard; they labour in the word and doctrine, which requires much reading of the scriptures, frequent prayer, and constant meditation and “study”, in preparing for their work, which is a great “weariness to the flesh”; and much “zeal”, fervour, and affection in the performance of it, which is attended with much fatigue, and an expense of the physical spirits; to which the apostle may have some respect, 2 Corinthians 12:15 and the ministers of the gospel are not only fellow labourers with one another, but with the Lord himself in his church; the manuring, cultivation, planting, and watering his vineyard, and the building up of his people in a church state, are laborious services; so that if the Lord did not go forth working with them, it would be to no purpose; “Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth”, which are both parts of the gospel ministry, but “God that giveth the increase”, success to their ministrations; “And except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it”, 1 Corinthians 3:7,9.¹⁶

The ministry was not for men looking for an easy occupation. The ministry was a wearying work, and one about which one could not be assured of outward success. Indeed, as Gill noted, it was “God that giveth the increase.”

Benjamin Beddome also noted “the precariousness and uncertainty of success,” and yet such uncertainty was not to diminish the intensity of the labor. Beddome wrote, “‘We have toiled all the night,’ say the disciples, ‘and caught nothing;’ and thus may ministers do, nay, many nights and days; but one happy draught, at last, will be a sufficient recompense for all their labour.” Beddome noted that “sometimes the gospel makes astonishing progress,” but such a harvest is not usual. “In general, ministers fish as with an angling rod, and it is but now and then that they win a soul to Christ.” He maintained that “the most faithful and zealous, the most skilful and industrious, are not always the most useful.” Continuing the fishing analogy, he illustrated, “The net or hook sometimes breaks, and the fish which seemed to be caught makes its escape; and thus it is in fishing for souls.” He applied the illustration to contemporary ministry: “Convictions are lost, and impressions wear off, hopeful prospects vanish, and those who seemed to have escaped the pollutions that are in the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, return like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”¹⁷ Ministers were required to exercise faithfulness: God would take care of the outward success.

Soul Care for the Sheep of God

Succinctly put, the duty of ministers to their congregations was to watch after the souls of their members. Helwys wrote that elders “by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their soules, Act. 20.28.”¹⁸ The London Confession of 1644 stated that “the Ministers aforesaid, lawfully called by the Church, where they are to minister, ought to continue in their calling, according to Gods Ordinance, and carefully to feed the flock of Christ committed to them, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”¹⁹ The Second London Confession is only minimally more specific, utilizing the words of Acts 6:4: “The work of Pastors being constantly to attend the service of *Christ*, in his Churches, in the Ministry of the Word, and Prayer, with watching for their Souls, as they that must give an account to him.”²⁰

Hanserd Knollys observed that “the Office of a *Pastor, Bishop, and Presbyter*, or *Elder* in the Church of God, is to take the Charge, Oversight, and Care of those Souls which the Lord Jesus Christ hath committed to them.” He is to “feed the flock of God, to watch for their Souls, to Rule, Guide and Govern them.” He does not do this on the basis of personal authority or an officious spirit but “*by virtue of their Commission, and Authority received from Christ, Mat. 28.18, 19, 20. & Titus 2.15.*”²¹

American Baptists also viewed the ministry as a weighty responsibility with eternal implications. Ministers, after all, provided care for persons’ souls. In his charge to Asa Hunt, Isaac Backus remarked, “I doubt not but *the charge of souls* has sometimes appeared to you an insupportable weight; it is indeed too heavy for men or angels to go through of themselves.”²² The Philadelphia Confession provided this summary of the work of pastors: “The Work of Pastors being constantly to attend the Service of Christ, in his Churches, in the Ministry of the Word, and Prayer, with Watching for their Souls, as they that must give an Account to him.”²³ The eternal implications of pastoral care for souls could not be over-emphasized.

Preach and Pray the Word

Viewing the care of souls as the over-arching responsibility of pastors, Baptists saw preaching as the foremost duty of the gospel ministry. In listing the duties “of the work of a Pastor, Bishop or Overseer,” Benjamin Keach maintained that “the work of a pastor is to preach the word of christ [*sic*], or to feed the flock, and to administer all the ordinances of the gospel which belong to his sacred office, and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to shew himself approved unto God, ‘a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.’” Such a task could not be left in the hands of the inept: “He is a steward of the mysteries of God, therefore ought to be a man of good understanding and experience, being sound in the faith, and one that is acquainted with the mysteries of the gospel: Because he is ‘to feed the people with knowledge and understanding.’” Such a work required the minister to “be faithful and skilful to declare the mind of God, and diligent therein, also to ‘preach in season and out of season;’ God having committed unto him the ministry of reconciliation, a most choice and sacred trust.” Showing the primacy of this work, Keach asked rhetorically,

“What interest hath God greater in the world which he hath committed unto men than this?”²⁴

Nehemiah Cox also held to the primacy of preaching, combining the task with pastoral praying. Maintaining that the duty of the elder is “to stand in some respects, and to act in some things, as a *middle Person* betwixt God and the People,” Cox held that the preacher is to give himself to prayer—“the Mouth of the People unto God”—and to preaching—“the Mouth of God to the People.” Cox enjoined preachers to “1. Let your Care be, to deal with the Souls and Confessions of Men, as knowing that it is the Salvation of Souls which you are to labour after, a Care of Souls that is committed to you, and an account of them that you must make to God,” “2. That being accomplished, Be Sure that you speak *as the Oracles of God*, and deliver that doctrine to the People which is drawn from the pure Fountain of God’s Word,” and “3. Remember that the Duty of your Place is, *Not to preach your selves but Christ Jesus the Lord*; His Glory must be the Mark aimed at by all your Labours, and his Grace the principal Subject of all your Discourses; It is not a Philosophic Harangue that will save the Souls of Men, but the *preaching of Christ Crucified*.”²⁵

Drapes provided four principles for “the manner” in which preaching must be done. First, no room could be given for the wavering, changing opinion of men. Preaching must be done with a sense of the infallibility and certainty of the message. A preacher cannot equivocate with “*Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus*: they must preach the words of God, the words of truth.” No room was given for the opinion of man—only that which communicates the Word of God is true. Second, preaching must be “in the name of God: They must not goe forth in their own authority, but in Christs: Therefore are they called Ambassadors of Christ.” No preacher preaches on his own accord. He is sent by God with the good news of Christ. Third, the preaching is to be performed “plainly; *Not in the enticing words of mans wisdom, but in demonstration of spirit and power*; in words easy to be understood.” Fourth, “it [the Bible] must be preached fully; The word of the Gospell must be declared fully, not onely for conversion, but for building up in the things of God; whoever believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; teaching them to observe all the commands of Christ.”²⁶

American Baptists likewise maintained the primacy of preaching in the care of souls. The Charleston Baptist Association’s *Summary of Church-Discipline* described the eternal implications for such work: “Persons thus commissioned, are to attend to their work with all possible engagedness, as it becomes those who have the charge of souls.” Consequently, this preaching of the Word required great diligence: “They must give themselves up to study, prayer and meditation, 1 *Tim.* 4. 14, 15, 16. that they may be workmen who need not to be ashamed, 2 *Tim.* 2. 15. They must be instant in season and out of season, preaching the pure doctrines of the gospel, 2 *Tim.* 1. 13. chap. 4. 2.” Pastors were to preach with godly motives, not for carnal gain: “They are to feed the Lord’s flock with spiritual bread, *Acts* 20. 28. to preach with the view of bringing souls to Christ, and not for the sake of honor or *filthy lucre*.” Pastors were to acknowledge that theirs was not the role of a demagogue but a shepherd caring for and protecting the flock: “They are not to lord it over God’s heritage, but to be patient and tenderhearted, 2 *Tim.* 2. 25. They are to watch over the flock, to comfort the feeble-minded, 1 *Thess.* 5. 14. to sound the alarm to the wicked and obstinate, *Ezek.* 3. 17, 18. and

to set their faces like flint against prophaneness, and every vice.”²⁷

Noted nineteenth-century pastor T. G. Jones unequivocally declared, “The great duty of the pastor is to *preach the Gospel*. Jones noted that this preaching was unrestricted to place, time, circumstance, or audience:

It must be preached publicly and privately—in season and out of season—preached from the pulpit to ‘the great congregation’—preached from house to house, and by the wayside—preached in the hovels of the poor, in the halls of wealth and fashion, and gaiety and sin—preached in the abodes of health, and at the bedside of the sick and dying—preached in word and in deed.

Of course, such preaching required the pastor himself not only know the truth but also live the truth. Jones explained, “It is taken for granted that *the pastor is himself in possession of the truth*—and that it is not only in his head, and on his tongue, but in his heart, enshrined on the highest and holiest altars—otherwise he will be a ‘blind leader of the blind.’”²⁸

Popular preaching designed to appeal to the unregenerate or the spiritually immature did more harm than good. One mid-nineteenth century Kentucky Baptist wrote, “We have at times heard the opinion expressed that the people would no longer endure doctrinal preaching; that the prevailing taste required sermons of a practical character, fitted to move the feelings and fire the soul with ardent desires.” The writer maintained that a lack of doctrinal preaching leads to spiritual starvation, while “a faithful, affectionate, and intelligent exhibition of the cardinal truths of the Bible is essential both to the edification of believers and the conversion of sinners . . . Doctrinal preaching has never been popular. Never yet has the unbelieving heart shown any relish for the doctrines of grace.”²⁹

Oliver Hart, almost a century earlier, clearly employed the doctrines of grace as food for the sheep and essential truth for the lost. Richard Furman described the preaching of Oliver Hart in terms that marked Baptists throughout this period. “In his religious principles,” Furman noted, “he was a fixed Calvinist, and a consistent, liberal Baptist. The doctrines of *free, efficacious grace*, were precious to him; Christ Jesus, and him crucified, in the perfection of his righteousness, the merit of his death, the prevalence of his intercession, and the efficacy of his grace, was the foundation of his hope, the source of his joy, and the delightful theme of his preaching.” Furman observed that Hart’s “sermons were peculiarly serious, containing a happy assemblage of doctrinal and practical truths, set in an engaging light, and enforced with convincing arguments.” Hart was particularly concerned that his hearers understood the teachings of Scripture, utilizing extensive preparation to make certain of his own understanding of those teachings. Furman explained, “For the discussion of doctrinal truths, he was especially eminent, to which also he was prepared by an intimate acquaintance with the sacred scriptures, and an extensive reading of the most valuable, both ancient and modern authors.” Hart’s preaching was not particularly entertaining, but it was clear: “His eloquence, at least in the middle stages of life, was not of the most popular kind, but perspicuous, manly and flowing, such as afforded pleasure to persons of true taste, and edification to the serious hearers.”³⁰

I Know My Sheep and They Know Me

Preaching, of course, was not the only duty of ministers in watching over the souls of their members. Individual nurture and loving discipline promoted the eternal interests of the church. Only those who were with their members could know the spiritual condition of their flock. Benjamin Keach wrote, “A pastor is to visit his flock, to know their state, and to watch over them, to support the weak, and to strengthen the feeble-minded, and succour the tempted, and to reprove them that are unruly.”³¹

Some pastors, however, refused to perform pastoral visitation and often encouraged candidates for ordination not to do it and for churches not to expect it. Francis Wayland gave their argument:

If he [the minister] does not visit them, they must take it for granted that he is on his knees, studying the word of God, and holding communion with his Saviour on their behalf. He is so much engaged in this holy work that they must not disturb him even by calling upon him. I have heard it triumphantly asked, How can they expect their minister to compose sermons like Massillon’s, if he do [*sic*] not consume his whole time in solitary study?

Such reasoning received more than a hint of sarcasm from Wayland’s pen: “All this is solemnly said, by grave and reverend divines, as if there were really any danger that the candidate would ever preach like Massillon, and as if the people would not know whether their minister had time enough for general reading and social visiting, though he had none to employ in testifying from house to house repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”³²

This pastoral visitation, as Wayland intimated, was no mere social call. Indeed, it was seen as a type of preaching, in this case “from house to house” instead of from a pulpit. Inquiries were to be made concerning “the subject of personal religion.” If possible, each member of family was to be visited individually, but when this was not possible, the “duty of repentance and faith in Christ” was to be presented before them all. Not only could the impenitent be converted as a result of such visitation, but believers could be encouraged and strengthened. The bereaved could be comforted, the tempted could be warned and strengthened, and the young Christians could be disciplined. Pastoral visitation, however, was not restricted to the homes. Men could be found at their places of business and a few words could be shared with them there.³³

Discipline necessarily complemented pastoral soul care. Nehemiah Cox wrote, “the due exercise of *Discipline* in the Church, and the right ordering of all things pertaining to the Government thereof.” Watching over souls required the pastor to remember that “he is the *Overseer* of God’s House, and is to *rule* therein, not in a despotical or lordly way, but by the Testament of Christ, as becomes a *Minister*, and as one set over the *Lord’s Heritage* who are a voluntary People, and to be governed not with force and rigor, but with their own consent.”³⁴ Grantham similarly explained, “The Government of Christ of the Church of God, is committed to the Bishops and Elders, they are therefore to exhort, reprove, rebuke with all authority, to bind and loose in conjunction with

the Church of God, as those that sin against God are found to be penitent or obdurate respectively, *John* 20.23. 1 *Cor.* 5.3, 4, 5.”³⁵ An elder who refused to be engaged in necessary discipline would have been considered unworthy of leading the church of God.³⁶

Ministers were to approach their duties with a single-minded focus. Nehemiah Cox provided these sobering words for elders: “Consider, That it is the Care and Charge of Souls that is committed to you; not the Temporal Concerns of this Life, but the Affairs of Eternal Life are the Business of your Stewardship: Now one Soul is of more worth than all the World, because immortal, and made for an Eternal State.” Matters such as increasing personal wealth, growing in societal status, or attaining civic reformation were not matters of concern for the pastor of a church of Christ. The pastor must be consumed with the state of the souls under his care. Cox recognized the gravity of such a responsibility: “The influence that the Ministry of the Word hath into the future state of Men, made *Paul* say, as in an extasie, *Who is sufficient for these Things!*”

The magnitude of such a responsibility should make men quake at the prospect of taking the office of elder. Cox meditated upon the value of those souls: “They are the souls of Men that God thought it worth the giving of his own Son to redeem, and Christ thought not much to shed his precious Blood for; the Church is a Society of Men which God hath purchased to himself by his own blood, and now committed to your Care, and appointed you to watch for their Souls.” Cox concluded with this warning: “Therefore take heed to your selves, and to your Flock; for if any of them perish in an evil way thro’ your neglect of Duty towards them, They die in their sins, but God will require their Blood at your hand.”³⁷

Being used of the Lord, however, did not always mean visible success in terms of conversions, baptisms, and attendance. For instance, Horatio Gates Jones noted the baptism record of the Lower Dublin, or Pennepek, church of Philadelphia: “The increase in membership by baptism was at first very gradual. Prior to the year 1800, the highest number baptized in one year, judging from the records, was six. From 1798 to 1804—a period of six years—there were no baptisms, but the services of the sanctuary were faithfully kept up under the pastoral care of Dr. Samuel Jones.” Lean years still called for faithful ministry. Before Samuel Jones died, though, he saw visible fruit. Horatio Jones explained: “In the latter year, a glorious work of grace manifested itself and a revival commenced, continuing until the venerable man of God was removed from the Church militant to the Church triumphant. In 1804, twenty-two were baptized; in 1805, twenty-four; in 1806, ten; in 1807, seventeen; in 1808, twenty-five; and in 1812, seventeen.” Jones commented, “This precious ingathering of souls seemed a fitting close to the faithful and laborious pastorate of over half a century.”³⁸

Conclusion

Encouraging church members not only to submit to the biblical teaching of their pastor but also with gratitude to realize that his duty was not to placate his hearers but to propagate truth, Samuel Pearce wrote what should be the cry of each church member:

Give me the preacher who opens the folds of my heart; who accuses me, convicts me, and condemns me before God; who loves my soul too well to suffer me to go on in sin, unreprieved, through fear of giving me offence; who draws the line with accuracy, between the delusions of fancy, and the impressions of grace; who pursues me from one hiding place to another, until I am driven from every refuge of lies; who gives me no rest until he sees me, with unfeigned penitence, trembling at the feet of Jesus; and then, and not till then, soothes my anguish, wipes away my tears, and comforts me with the cordials of grace. Give me the preacher 'who constantly affirms that they who have believed, be careful to maintain good works;' who insists, that a life of peace and communion with God, is utterly abhorrent to the practice of iniquity; and faithfully reminds me, that 'if I sin, that grace may abound, my damnation is just.' Give me the preacher who pants not for my safety only, but also for my increase in grace; who cautions me, 'reproves me, rebukes me, exhorts me with all longsuffering and doctrine;' who charges me 'to give all diligence to add to my faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.' Brethren, if Christ have given you such a man as this, receive him as an angel from heaven; and prize such a pastor as one of the most valuable gifts that can be imparted to the church.³⁹

Such a man, a man of personal godliness holding to biblical doctrine while faithfully fulfilling his scriptural duties, would be the kind of man God uses. ☺

Notes:

¹ David Wood, [On-line]; accessed 18 May 2004; available from <http://www.dwministries.org/training-institutes.htm>; Internet.

² For instance, General Baptists believed in a pastoral office that superceded the elders of local churches—the office of messenger. See J. F. V. Nicholson, "The Office of 'Messenger' amongst British Baptists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The Baptist Quarterly* 17 (1957–58): 206–25.

³ Baptists were conscious not to allow the abuses which they viewed as all too prevalent in the national church. In addition to the unscriptural offices of the Church of England, the ungodliness of the established church's ministers provoked great consternation among Baptists, particularly the profanation of the Lord's Day promoted by a *Booke of Sports*. See Roger Hayden, ed., *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640–1687* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1974), 82.

⁴ Isaac Backus, *Evangelical Ministers described, and distinguished from Legalists. A Sermon, The Substance of which was delivered October 30. 1771, at the Ordination of Mr. Asa Hunt, To the Pastoral Charge of the Third Baptist-Church in Middleborough* (Boston: Philip Freeman, 1772), 7–11.

⁵ Thomas Helwys, *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland*, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed., ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 122.

⁶ *The Confession of Faith, Of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists*, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed., ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 166.

- ⁷ Benjamin Keach, *Glory of a True Church, And its Discipline display'd* (London: John Robinson, 1668), 6.
- ⁸ Nehemiah Cox, *A Sermon Preached at the Ordinatoin [sic] of an Elder and Deacons in a Baptized Congregation In London* (London: Tho. Fabian, 1681), 21.
- ⁹ Thomas Grantham, "Christianismus Primitivus": or, *The Ancient Christian Religion* (London: Francis Smith, 1678), 64.
- ¹⁰ See Gordon Kingsley, "Opposition to Early Baptists," *Baptist History and Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1969): 23–24.
- ¹¹ Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book 2: 64.
- ¹² Edward Drapes, *Gospel-Glory proclaimed before the Sonnes of Men, In the Visible and Invisible Worship of God* (London: n.p., 1649), 93. White writes: "Edward Drapes was one of the first Calvinistic Baptists to attempt to expound their ecclesiology in any detailed way in his *Gospel-Glory proclaimed before the Sonnes of Men*." B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. ed. (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 145.
- ¹³ T. S. H. Elwyn, "Particular Baptists of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association as Reflected in the Circular Letters 1765–1820," *The Baptist Quarterly* 36 (1996): 374.
- ¹⁴ Baptist Association of Charleston, *A Summary of Church-Discipline. Shewing the Qualifications and Duties, of the Officers and Members, of a Gospel-Church*, 2nd ed. (Charleston, SC: Markland, McIver, & Co., 1794), 8.
- ¹⁵ Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, & Co., 1857), 50.
- ¹⁶ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity; or a System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures [CD-ROM]* (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999), 1844.
- ¹⁷ Benjamin Beddome, *Sermons Printed from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev. Benjamin Beddome, A.M. of Bouton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire* (London: William Ball, 1885), 305. Similarly, in a charge delivered in 1796 at the ordination of W. Belsher in Worcester, John Ryland maintained, "We cannot ensure the fruit of our labors, but he can do it infallibly; and he will accept, and reward, those whom he makes faithful, whether their success equal their expectations, or not." John Ryland and S. Pearce, *The Duty of Ministers to be nursing Fathers to the Church; and the Duty of Churches to regard Ministers as the Gift of Christ* (n.p., 1797), 33.
- ¹⁸ Helwys, *Declaration of Faith*, 121.
- ¹⁹ *The Confession of Faith, Of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists*, 166.
- ²⁰ *Confession of Faith Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country, in Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. W. J. McGlothlin (1677; reprint, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 266.
- ²¹ Hanserd Knollys, *The World that Now is; and the World that is to Come: Or the First and Second Coming of Jesus Christ* (London: Tho. Snowden, 1681), 56–57. For the consistency of their view of the nature of gospel ministry see T. S. H. Elwyn, "Particular Baptists of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association as Reflected in the Circular Letters 1765–1820," *The Baptist Quarterly* 37 (1997): 9.
- ²² Backus, *Evangelical Ministers described*, 28–29 (emphasis added).
- ²³ James L. Clark, ". . . To Set Them in Order;" *Some Influences of the Philadelphia Baptist Association Upon Baptists of American to 1814* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 242.
- ²⁴ Benjamin Keach, *Glory of a True Church*, 6.
- ²⁵ Nehemiah Cox, *A Sermon Preached at the Ordinatoin [sic]*, 22–26.
- ²⁶ Drapes, *Gospel-Glory proclaimed before the Sonnes of Men*, 97–98.

²⁷ Baptist Association of Charleston, *Summary of Church-Discipline*, 10.

²⁸ Tiberius Gracchus Jones, *Duties of a Pastor to His Church* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society; Richmond, VA: Virginia Baptist S. S. and Publication Society, 1853), 10–11.

²⁹ “Doctrinal Preaching,” *Western Recorder*, 15 November 1854, 2.

³⁰ Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ’s Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A. M.* (Charleston, SC: J. McIver, 1796), 24.

³¹ Benjamin Keach, *Glory of a True Church*, 6.

³² Francis Wayland, *Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), 140. See also Baptist Association of Charleston, *Summary of Church-Discipline*, 10, and T. G. Jones, *Duties of a Pastor to His Church*, 60–61.

³³ Wayland, *Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel*, 145–48.

³⁴ Nehemiah Cox, *A Sermon Preached at the Ordinatoin [sic]*, 27.

³⁵ Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book 2: 123.

³⁶ For an examination of a discipline case of candidate for ministry, see G. Reid Doster, “Discipline and Ordination at Berkhamsted General Baptist Church, 1712–1718,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977–78): 138.

³⁷ Nehemiah Cox, *A Sermon Preached at the Ordinatoin [sic]*, 31–32.

³⁸ Clark, “. . . To Set Them in Order,” 387.

³⁹ Ryland and Pearce, *The Duty of Ministers and the Duty of Churches*, 56.

News

NEW Regional Founders Conference

The first Florida Regional Founders Conference will be held September 16–18, 2004 at Southside Baptist Church in Live Oak, Florida. The theme will be “God-Centered Missions and Evangelism.” Speakers include Andy Aikens, founding Pastor of Grace Community Church in St. Cloud, FL, Dr. Tom Ascol, Executive Director of Founders Ministries and Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, FL, Dr. Steven J. Lawson, Senior Pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, AL, Bill Lollar, an evangelist and church planting missionary to South Wales, and Dr. Tom Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

To register or find more information, call (386) 362-5239

For information online see: www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc_fl/

Founders Study Center

The Founders Study Center will be offering four courses for the Fall 2004 semester. Our new courses will be *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition* (with audio lectures by Dr. Timothy George) and *Introduction to the Puritans* (with audio lectures by Dr. J. I. Packer, Dr. Mark Dever and others). We will also offer *Preaching and Preachers* (with audio lectures by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones) and *Maintaining Your Spiritual Health* (with audio lectures by Dr. Don Whitney). For more information, please visit our website at study.founders.org

Call for Mentors

The Founders Study Center is in need of experienced, like-minded and willing pastors to serve as mentors for our students. In order to serve as a mentor, you must have at least 10 years of pastoral experience, be in agreement with the purpose and mission of Founders Ministries and be willing to invest time and energy in men who are serving in or pursuing the gospel ministry.

If you are interested in learning more about the Founders Study Center or serving the Study Center as one of our mentors, please contact Dr. Kenneth Puls, the Study Center Director at studycenter@founders.org or call 239-772-1400.

“Every gospel worker should strive to infuse the spirit of work into others. The wisest and most useful pastor is not he who accomplishes most by his individual exertions, but rather he who can gather the largest number of true helpers, being himself the nucleus around which their labors may crystallize into a compact and effective whole.”

—John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*

Mentor Training

On Wednesday, July 14, 2004, during the Southern Baptist Founders Conference in Birmingham, Alabama, the Founders Study Center will host a Mentor Training Seminar. Speakers and topics will be “*The Value of Mentoring*” (Dr. Tom Ascol, Executive Director of Founders Ministries and Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida) and “*The Practice of Mentoring*” (Dr. Fred Malone, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Clinton, Louisiana). The lectures from this seminar will be recorded and made available to our mentors online in August 2004 as part of a new Mentor Training course.

Mid-South Regional Founders Conference

The Mid-South Regional Founders Conference will be held October 7–9, 2004 at South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The theme will be “The Glory of Christ.” Speakers include Dr. Tom Ascol, Executive Director of Founders Ministries and Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, FL, Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, Dr. Kendell Easley, Chairman of the Department of New Testament and Greek, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, TN and James Grant, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Rossville, TN.

To register or find more information, call (901) 758-1213

For information online see: www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc_ms/

Reprint from Founders Press

Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs, the hymnal of the Southern Baptist Founders Conference, is once again in print. This collection, edited by Joe Nesom, contains 63 God-honoring hymns.

For more information see www.founders.org/fpress/psalms.html

The Kind of Man God Uses In Reformation

Ernest C. Reisinger

Seeing Revival Through the Eyes of Others

Few, if any, in our generation have seen true extensive reformation, a theologically-driven, conscience-heightening, heart-expanding, church-altering, culture-challenging movement of God's Spirit. We can read about these merciful intrusions and investigate the lives of the ones used to bring in floods of light from eternity. Others who lived through or experienced the immediate impact of these blessings have left to us fresh impressions of the instrumentality used in such times. Horatius Bonar has left a succinct analysis that might be helpful in causing us to yearn to see, or be, such instruments in our day. Bonar calls us to consider the kind of men God has used in reformation. What weapons did they employ? What were their methods? We can be sure that if there is no reformation in the pulpit there will be no reformation in the pews. We ask, on the human side, whence comes their success? There are always men involved. There will be no life in a church where there is no life in the pulpit.

Distinguishing Traits of Revival Men

They are in Dead Earnest

First, Bonar observes, "They were in earnest about the great work of the ministry on which they had entered." There is always a dead seriousness about God's Word and God's Work. They sensed the greatness of the weight as "stewards of the mysteries of God." Churches that come alive always possess the gift of men who lived, labored and preached like men who were in earnest about eternity, and eternity-bound souls—men who were grave, that is, serious men who had their eyes lifted to heaven. Everything they did and said was marked by earnestness; yet, as Bonar reminds us, their "fervour was not that of excitement." They were genuine and earnest men who knew that "necessity was laid upon them." They felt the urgency and weight of the cause of the gospel that was entrusted to them. They threw their "whole soul into the conflict." "They dared not take their ease or fold their arms; they dared not be indifferent to the issue when professing to lead on the hosts of the living God against the armies of the prince of darkness." In an age of conflict, some might seek to rest secure as reaping the spoils of political power from a doctrinally-driven denominational battle. If victory does not involve genuine humility and true spiritual earnestness, it is a Pyrrhic victory, worth less than nothing, yea even costly of spiritual life.

They are Determined to Succeed

The second thing that Bonar mentions as an element of true reformation is that its instruments are “bent upon success.” When a man enters Christ’s army, he must be bent on success; otherwise, he is a traitor to Christ and to His cause. I said, success, not statistics; there is a difference. There may be spiritual success with or without great statistics. If we would see our churches come alive, and stay alive, we must be warriors who have set our hearts on victory and fight with believing anticipation of victory under the guidance of our great Captain. Shepherds, Bonar observes, cannot sit “idle on the mountain side in the sunshine or the breeze, heedless of their straying, perishing, bleating flock.” There must rather be a watching, guiding, guarding and feeding of the sheep committed to our care.

They were Men of Biblical Faith

Third, reformation in the church comes under the ministry of “men of faith.” There must be plowing and sowing of the right kind of seed (the gospel of the grace of God), plowing and sowing in hope. The word of truth must be on their lips. There must be some going forth weeping, bearing precious seed, knowing that in due season there will be reaping if we faint not, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain, knowing that we will return, bringing our sheaves with us. There must be some pleading with God for men and some pleading with men for God. Fix your eyes on God’s promises and plead with the psalmist; “Remember thy word unto thy servant, whereunto thou hast caused me to hope” (Psalm 119:49). Reformation leaders “had confidence,” Bonar insists, “in the Saviour whose commission they bore.” They had confidence in the “Holy Spirit’s almighty power and grace.” So we must operate by faith in His power to take the wax of this world from the ears of poor, deaf sinners—faith in His power to open the eyes that are blinded by the dust of this world—faith in the power of the Word of God, that is, in the message, the gospel, knowing it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). The gospel is “...the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). If we would see a church come alive we must be going forth with faith in the power of the gospel.

They were Men of Consistent Labor

Fourth, “They were men of labour.” The ministry is infested with preachers who encumber the ground. There must be some bearing of the “burden and the heat of the day.” There must be some “unwearied toil of body and soul” (time, strength, substance). This is what the New Testament and church history reveals. Bonar reminds us that the great apostle himself was “in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger, and thirst, in fasting often, in cold, and nakedness.” No time for “levity, sloth, or pleasure.” There must be a laboring for eternity. There are a lot of fruitless preachers who do not labor for eternity. Reformation men must have their backs to the world and their eyes on the goal. They must not entangle themselves with the affairs of this world, that they may please Him who has called them to be laborers in His vineyard.

They were Men of Patience

Fifth, “They were men of patience.” Since this virtue assumes so much about the nature of gospel labor and Christian affection, I will spend a bit of time here; be patient. They had a willingness to “labor long without seeing all the fruit that they desired.” Sow, sow, sow—day after day. Teach, teach, teach—week after week. To emulate them, we cannot be soon weary in well doing. We must keep that passage in mind that says, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7–8, NKJV). “Many a good plan has been aborted by impatience,” Bonar surmises; “many a day of toil has been thrown away by impatience.” Men cannot force reformation, or force a church to life. Yes, there must be “intense longing for success,” but much patience must be joined to that intense longing.

How many times does Christian history illustrate the truth of this observation? William Carey labored seven years before he baptized his first convert. Adoniram Judson toiled in Burma seven years before he harvested one soul. Morrison sowed seven years in China before he baptized one Chinese. Moffet declared he waited seven years to see the first evident moving of the Spirit in Africa. Henry Richards spent seven long years in the Congo before he saw his first convert. What were they all doing for seven years? They were laying foundations, sowing heavenly seeds thinking of future generations. They were patiently laying a foundation.

We live in a church age where the foundations have been removed. God is interested in foundations and future generations. God began by laying a foundation. The psalmist said, “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth” (Psalm 102:25). God said, through the evangelical prophet, “My hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth...” (Isaiah 48:13). When Solomon built the temple—where did he begin? The Bible answers that question. Solomon began where every true builder begins—laying a foundation. “And the King commanded and they brought great stones and hewed stones TO LAY THE FOUNDATION...” (1 Kings 5:17). How long did it take? “In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the Lord laid...” (1 Kings 6:37). Four years! It takes patience to lay foundations! It was also a costly foundation. “And the foundation was of costly stones even great stones...” (1 Kings 7:10). Notice, it says costly, and even a cursory glance at any reformation you will see that it costs to lay a foundation.

Most churches do not have enough doctrinal foundation for sound biblical evangelism. We live and labor in what I call pre-evangelistic days. True worship and true witness will be a certain and sure result of reformation. But laying a foundation is very, very costly. And concerning the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian captivity, Ezra shows it was costly in that it was through much tribulation and suffering that the foundation was laid and the temple built to the glory of the Lord. Yet they were enabled to sing and praise God for it! “And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the

fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy” (Ezra 3:11–12).

We live in a day of cheap, quick, slick and frothy foundations, and our churches are reaping the sad, pitiful, painful, pathetic results. Carnal men do not want to be in the foundation business. They are not concerned for future generations. The only men who are interested in a true foundation are those who have their eyes fixed on eternity. It is costly. It is painful. It is laborious. It is not showy. Who wants to see concrete poured in a footing? Hard, dirty work. I know, I was in construction for over twenty-five years.

The great apostle was a Master-Builder of churches. Where did he begin? “...as a wise Master-Builder I have laid the foundation...” A foundation on truth. And if you want to know how he did it, read the Book of Acts. It has the answer: prayer, preaching, teaching, tears. Missing in our generation are prayer and tears, the substantial outworking of genuine spiritual patience. Let us look at just one example as to how the great apostle did it. “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews” (Acts 20:19). “Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). If there were more tears there would be less splits and more souls won. Paul wrote with tears. “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Corinthians 2:4). Hear him writing to the church at Philippi. “For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18).

We have so many facilities. We have comfort, equipment, literature and church machinery; communications for promoting the gospel is at an all time high. If machinery and mechanics were a true measure, the church has never been better. But where are the Bible tears shed in laying foundations. Where are the Christ-like tears? Where are the tears of St. Paul? Where are men who are laying foundations with tears? Oh, may God deliver us from being like the church at Laodicea that said of herself: “I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing.” But Jesus said of her, that she was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. No substance. No foundation, just frothy, carnal superstructure.

Joel, the Old Testament prophet, who prophesied of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost (Joel 2), in the same chapter said, “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning... Rend your heart and not your garments, Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity.” Let us try this kind of tears.

What am I talking about? Something that is produced in the soul rather than from physical pain. Tears that indicate distress of spirit, agony of a broken heart. I am talking about a disposition of heart, not necessarily drops of water rolling down your cheeks. The first time the word tears is found in the English Bible is 2 Kings 20:5. It is the occasion of God telling Hezekiah that he would die very soon. This drove him to prayer and tears. The king became so desperate that the attention of God was turned not only to his prayers, but to his tears. “I

have seen thy tears” (2 Kings 20:5). If the law of first mention means anything here it may indicate that God does not come to our rescue until He sees our tears—that distress of spirit, that agony of a broken heart. Paul’s teaching was watered with tears. Jeremiah knew something about tears. “A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel; for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, you backsliding children, and I will hear your backslidings” (Jeremiah 3:21–22, NKJV). “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jeremiah 9:1, NKJV). “Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run with tears, and our eyelids gush with water” (Jeremiah 9:18, NKJV). “But if you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive” (Jeremiah 13:17, NKJV).

Jesus wept over a lost city. He, more than any, incarnates the patience that is costly of personal tears. In Luke 19:41–42 we see the Redeemer’s tears. “And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, ‘If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.’” What do we see in this passage? We see the Redeemer’s deep interest in the state of man. We see the Savior’s compassion to the chief of sinners.

Reformation of a church requires patience both in foundation-work and demolition-work. That involves prayer, preaching, teaching and tears. These four things together, the hallmarks of patience, eventually turn to reformation.

They were Men of Strong Doctrine

Sixth, clear and convicting doctrine about man’s sin and God’s prerogatives of mercy characterize times of reformation. Many professing Christians will take offense. You will also see some dust from the exodus. It is painful to see people leave the church, but some will leave. In genuine reformation of a church three things will always happen; some will leave, some will want to get rid of the preacher, and thank God, some will get right with God. There will be results—not always saving results. In John 6 Jesus preached the crowd away—there were results!

Study Paul’s epistles and you will find he laid a doctrinal foundation. I believe we are in a reformation period of history where many will be called upon by God to do some Pauline evangelism and lay some Pauline foundations. In many cases the foundations that he as a wise master-builder set have been removed [1 Corinthians 3:10]. Many large churches have meager doctrinal foundations. If a church is to be reformed and come alive with persevering pursuit of the glory of God, there must be a doctrinal foundation of a full exposition of the person and work of the Lord Jesus and the character of His gracious salvation. This principle is easily discerned in Paul’s letters to the Romans, the Galatians and the Ephesians.

How justly we rejoice in the conservative resurgence in the SBC. A conservative reassertion of biblical inspiration, however, forms only a threshold for a room that has to be furnished fully. Biblical inerrancy is fundamental, but is

only one part of the doctrinal foundation; we must continue to recover Bible doctrine—Baptist doctrine—the doctrines of our Southern Baptist fathers. This gives peculiar relevance to Bonar’s wording of this observation that “They were men whose doctrines were of the most decided kind, both as respects law and gospel.” He spoke of a “breadth and power about their preaching—a glow and energy about their words and thoughts” that demonstrates they were “men of might.” Captured by truth and by the urgency of biblical issues, “their trumpet gave no feeble nor uncertain sound, either to saint or sinner, either to the church or the world.” In loving God and reaching for souls, “They lifted up their voices, and spared not. There was no flinching, no flattering, or prophesying of smooth things.”

These words come as encouragement to the wise and courageous and with deepest gratitude for the doctrinal progress already made. Nor does this reminder imply that only an ignominious few are pursuing this goal. I know, and find joy in the knowledge, that the following admonitions already ring true in the ministry procedure and goals of many. I only remind us all of a serious stewardship bequeathed to us. These doctrines were true in the days of J. P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, Basil Manly, W. B. Johnson (the first president of the Convention), R. B. C. Howell (second president), Richard Fuller (third president), John L. Dagg (the first Southern Baptist writing theologian) and B. H. Carroll. These men stood on a doctrinal foundation. The Bible has not changed. The God of the Bible has not changed. If their doctrine was true in their day, it is, therefore, still true today because neither God nor the Bible has changed. Again, we rejoice in the conservative victories but I want to assure you that even if conservatives had a complete takeover—if we do not get on the biblical, doctrinal foundation of our Fathers, in 30 years we will be right back where we were three decades ago.

Question! What good is an infallible Bible if its doctrinal content is ignored, or disregarded? Yes, and often perverted. It is not just a book with a black cover—what does it say? What does it mean and how does it apply to life and death? It is the content of the Bible—what does it say about God? About His law? His Son? About man and his condition? What does it say about God’s infallible, immutable plan of redemption? Read Dr. Nettles’ book *By His Grace and For His Glory*, for an honest history of Baptist life and Baptist doctrine. (Someone asked me what I thought about it. I said, well I bought 2000 copies—that should answer your question.)

The superficial man will think only of the big show. He is not too concerned how it comes about. He is only concerned with the super-structure. His concern is: Does it work? Not, Is it true? And back of that, often hidden and muffled, but none the less sinister, is not so much the concern for results as concern for the result of results, that is, the results that accrue to the man.

God is concerned about *foundations* and *future generations*. To underscore the importance of future generations let me direct your attention to the psalms: “We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generations to come might know them, even, the children which would be born; who should arise and declare them to their children” (Psalm 78:4–6).

“One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4). This will be a test for many men right now. It will cost! It cost the apostles and early Christians. It cost the Reformers and Puritans. It cost some who had to separate from apostasy. It is costing some of you right now!

They were Men of Boldness and Determination

That cost makes peculiarly appropriate a seventh essential in reforming a church according to Bonar’s observation: “They were men of boldness and determination.” “Timidity shuts many a door of usefulness and loses many a precious opportunity,” he reminds us; “It wins no friends, while it strengthens every enemy.” Perhaps there never was an age where wickedness assumed a bolder front and attitude. Christian boldness and courage, therefore, is more required in reforming a church. Men must be “strong and of good courage” (Acts 4:13, 29, 31). Whitefield, when the Vicar closed the church door, preached in the church yard. “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9) They must be “steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). This has been one of the greatest secrets of ministerial success.

They were Men of Prayer

Eighth, another essential according to Bonar, “They were men of prayer.” Many labor much—study much—but they do not pray. We often hear requests to “Pray for the work.” Oh, my friend, I am convinced *prayer IS the work!* We all agree what we need is the work of the Spirit. Well, how does that come about? Jesus tells us: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13). This is the answer. The best prayers are pleading for the promises of God. Well, Luke 11:13 is a promise.

They were Men of Spiritual Sobriety

Finally, Bonar notices that they were men of solemn deportment and deep spirituality of soul. Where churches have been reformed these are prevailing traits. The man God uses must fight against laziness, looseness, levity and lethargy. “No frivolity, no flippancy, no gaiety, no worldly conviviality or companionships neutralised their public preaching,” Bonar noted, “or marred the work they were seeking to accomplish.”

How is a church reformed—revived? How do churches come alive? Always with human instruments who are dead serious about the work of God and the Word of God. Men who are bent on success. Men who plow and sow in faith, hope and love. Men who labor and bear the burden and the heat of the day. Men who have much patience—who wait for the precious fruit of the earth and have long patience. Men who lay solid foundations for future generations with an eye fixed on eternity. Men with some Holy Ghost boldness and determination. Men of prayer. Prayer is work—fervent prayer. Men of solemn deportment—no frivolity, no gaiety, sober minded men.

Putting it together Now

Do you want to know what it looks like in the making? You will see a faithful minister of Christ, surrounded by a small band of praying ones, leading in the battle against the power of darkness. You will see no pomp, no display, no carnal attractions. You will see not a platform artist, a master gimmick maker, or a manipulator of crowds. These things sure make a show but they will not bring a church alive. Oh, for some men with a deep yearning for God and for souls. John Knox, in his old age, was helped into the pulpit by friends, but when he arose to preach, the Spirit of God's love burned in his heart in such a fashion that an attendant said, "So mighty was he in his yearning that I thought he would break the pulpit in bits."

Doctrinal issues already have been mentioned, but at this point, a seeker of reformation must COUNT THE COST OF TRUE REFORMATION. It is the duty of all true men to labor and pray for reformation, and the privilege to hope for and expect reformation. It falls peculiarly to the lot of the God-called preacher, however, to bear the coldness, rejection and hostility engendered often through the public proclamation of truth to a carnal and unappreciative auditory. Some evidence shows that reformation has already begun. It is going on right now, but not on beds of ease in front of applauding audiences. If men in every reformation were abused, misunderstood, misrepresented, reviled, persecuted, ostracized and excommunicated from organized religion, suffered mental and physical agony, and many times death, how can we expect to see reformation without cost (Luke, chapters 9 and 14)?

What will it cost young pastors? Admittedly, sometimes a price is paid for unwise, unloving, arrogant, destructive attitudes and decisions. But even where love, patience and deference prevail, truth is its own hammer and has a shattering effect on the rock of human egocentricity. Speaking the truth in love, therefore, often comes at a high price.

What has experience proved along this line?

1. One must be willing to forfeit denominational popularity and public approval. The work of reformation is not the way to climb the denominational ladder. Sometimes sacrificial reformers may emerge as denominational leaders as some elements of reformation become widely embraced. But such status cannot be the immediate goal of a reformer.
2. They will, at times, be in that awful task of tearing down some false super-structure that has been built without a doctrinal foundation. This super-structure was built by cheap, shallow, man-centered evangelism. Not only is the biblical teaching on grace victimized in these practices, but the Baptist distinctive of regenerate church membership suffers.
3. Consequently, in a work of reformation, its promoters may have to suffer at the hands of a large, unregenerate church membership, and especially, from unregenerate and religiously ignorant deacons and leaders.

Continued on page 25

The Kind of Man God Uses: Samuel Pearce (1766–1799)

Tom J. Nettles

The beloved friend of Andrew Fuller and William Carey, Samuel Pearce (1766–1799), personified the living relation between doctrinal purity and passion for God’s glory in evangelism.¹ Pearce participated with boundless energy and sacrifice in the Missionary society work and served as editor of the *Periodical Accounts*. Not only did he promote the mission cause in England with all his might, he urged William Rogers of the Philadelphia Association to begin a Baptist foreign mission society in America that would involve the energies of the entire denomination. Cathcart’s *Encyclopedia* calls him “one of the warmest advocates of foreign missions that dwelt on earth since the Son of Mary came from his heavenly home on a foreign mission to this lost world.” He has been compared to Robert Murray M’Cheyne and David Brainerd for combination of fervent piety and zeal.

In a funeral sermon preached for Pearce, Fuller asserted that Pearce was a “singular instance of the holy and happy efficacy of divine grace, whose imperfections were as few, and whose excellencies as many as I have ever witnessed in a mortal man.” Comparing him to king Josiah, Fuller noted that Pearce came to Christ at a tender age, like Josiah was tender-hearted, and, again like Josiah, had a “lovely uniformity of character.” Then, in a memorable passage outlining the balance of his character, Fuller said, “For my own part, I never knew a man in whom were united greater portion of the contemplative and the active; holy zeal, and genuine candor; spirituality, and rationality; talents which attracted almost universal applause, and the most unaffected modesty; fortitude that would encounter any difficulty that stood in the way of duty, and gentleness that would not break a bruised reed; faithfulness in bearing testimony against evil, and compassion to the soul of the evil-doer; deep seriousness, and habitual cheerfulness; finally, a constant aim to promote the highest degree of piety in himself and others, and, at the same time, a readiness to hope the best of the lowest.”²

Also he harbored and nurtured a deep desire to go to the heathen himself and studied the Bengalee language in preparation for that purpose. A combination of constant prayer, self-examination, and rational consideration informed his desires. When he began to learn that the Missionary Society felt hesitant about sending him he reflected, “I do think, however, if they knew how earnestly I pant for the work, it would be impossible for them to withhold their ready acquiescence”³

In a circular letter Pearce wrote in 1794, he pointed particularly to the truth that God uses ordained means to accomplish his sovereign decreed will.⁴ “There is not one doctrine in the gospel but what is ‘according to godliness,’” Pearce wrote, and quickly added, “nor one promise of future happiness unconnected

with present holiness.” In the same way, if the Bible teaches us “the doctrine of God’s everlasting love and his sovereign choice of his people,” it also teaches us that they “are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ...through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” Our redeemer’s “efficacious sacrifice” certainly removes the iniquity of his people and just as certainly purifies “unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”⁵

Given the certainty of the decree as executed through the means, Pearce implores his hearers that they “let not shame, or the fear of displeasing men, withhold you from an attempt to lead sinners to Christ.” They are not ashamed of their master, why should Christians be ashamed of theirs? You know little? But you know Christ and Him crucified. You have little time? Fill it then all the more with service to God. What will you regret in a dying hour? Your lack of expending yourself for eternal purposes. “Finally,” Pearce seemingly rises to a crescendo, “think what pleasure it will give you at the judgment day to meet and spend eternity with some to whose salvation you have been instrumental; such a circumstance would add fresh energy to your joy, and lustre to your crown.”⁶

Fuller identified the driving principle of Pearce’s life as “Holy Love.”⁷ The following circular letter written by Pearce demonstrates the power the doctrines of grace had establishing this holy love in his heart and enflaming his soul for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. ☺

Notes:

¹ Fuller wrote a memoir of Pearce at his death. Andrew Fuller, “Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce, M.A.” in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845) 3:367–446.

² Joseph Belcher, ed., *The Last Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1856), 321–22.

³ Fuller, “Memoirs” in *The Complete Works*, 3:391.

⁴ Samuel Pearce, “Circular Letter, 1794,” in *The History of the Midland Association of Baptist Churches*, 115–121.

⁵ Pearce, 116.

⁶ Pearce, 120.

⁷ Fuller, “Memoirs,” in *The Complete Works*, 3:429.

Continued from page 23

4. They may also have to suffer the pain of being misunderstood by the church leaders, fellow ministers, and more painful still, sometimes by their own loved ones (wives who do not understand their husband’s position).
5. This often leads to financial sacrifice, especially in some cases where carnal and ignorant church leaders use money as a threat to drive preachers from the pulpit.

But along with these and other costs there comes the joy of a conscience void of offence before God and man. What is that worth? ☺

CIRCULAR LETTER OF 1795

ON THE

DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY FREE GRACE ALONE

WRITTEN BY REV. SAMUEL PEARCE, A. M.,

PASTOR OF CANNON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, BIRMINGHAM,
ENGLAND.

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED IN THE MINUTES OF THE N. Y.
BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, THIS YEAR, 1856.

The Elders and Messengers of the several BAPTIST CHURCHES, met in Association at Bewdley, Worcestershire, England, May 26th and 27th, 1795.

To the Churches they represent:—

DEAR BRETHREN:—With gratitude to the great Master of assemblies for another pleasing interview with each other, we unite in expressing our most affectionate wishes that you also may be comforted, with the same consolations wherewith we ourselves have been comforted of God. On this side heaven, indeed, we must not expect our pleasures to be wholly undisturbed; yet, possessed of that faith which *overcometh* the world, we would exclaim with the holy apostle, “Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ;” and teacheth us, “to glory in tribulations also.”

Some causes of grief have been suggested in the various Epistles from the Churches. Among these, in some places, the *want of success* in bringing souls to Christ; in others, *The little zeal and diligence* which appear in professors; the death of some, and the unbecoming conduct of others, have been lamented:—But, brethren, these are trials from which no age of christianity, not even the *apostolic*, has been exempted. Let not these things discourage us. He that laid the foundation of his church, will build her up; he will not desert the work of his own hands, and though Zion may complain, “*The Lord hath forsaken me!*” it will not be long before he will prove to her joy, that she is “engraven on the palms of his hands, and that her walls are continually before him.” It shall yet be said, “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” Amidst our causes of complaint, we are not without some indications of the divine favour:—some of our Churches have enjoyed very comfortable additions; most are in peace; and some, who were last year destitute of pastors, are now agreeably supplied. Nor is it one of the least causes of our joy, that our various

congregations still avow their attachment to the *Faith once delivered to the Saints*.

The point of difference between us and many other professing christians, lies in the Doctrine of SALVATION ENTIRELY BY GRACE; for whilst some assert that *good works* are the cause of justification;—some that good works are united with the merits of Christ, and so *both* contribute to our justification;—and others, that good works neither in whole nor in part justify, but the *act* of faith; WE renounce *everything* in point of our acceptance with God, but His FREE GRACE ALONE, which justifies the ungodly; still treading in the steps of our venerable forefathers, the compilers of the Baptist Confession of Faith, who thus express themselves, respecting the Doctrine of Justification. “Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, for Christ’s sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ’s obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith”—which “is the alone instrument of justification.”

IN *this point* do all the other lines of our confession meet; for if it be admitted that Justification is an act of FREE GRACE in God, without any respect to the merit or demerit of the person justified, then the doctrines of JEHOVAH’S *sovereign love* in choosing to himself a people from before the foundation of the world—his sending his Son to expiate *their* guilt—his effectual operations upon *their* hearts, and his perfecting the work he has begun in them, until those whom he justifies he also glorifies, will be embraced as necessary parts of the glorious scheme of our salvation.

At this doctrine, therefore, hath the chief force of opposition been directed, and various are the modes in which it has been attacked: sometimes by appeals to our passions—then to our reason—and at other times to the Scriptures. We hope, brethren, you are too well read in your Bibles to be at a loss for weapons of defence against these assaults, since whatever the passions or opinions of men may plead, those holy oracles assure us, that we are *justified* FREELY *by the grace* of GOD, and that he hath mercy on whom he will; Rom. iii.24. ix. 15, 16. But there is another mode of attack, as frequently and vigorously pursued as either of the former. It is asserted that our doctrine “involves in it conclusions inconsistent with religion, both natural and revealed—that it gives an unjust and offensive idea of God—that it relaxes the obligations of men to faith and holiness—that it withholds consolation from penitent sinners, and saps the foundations of true morality in the world.”

These are serious charges, and if they can be substantiated, we shall do well to exchange our creed for a better; but let us examine with what propriety such consequences are charged on our profession.

First, Because we maintain the free salvation of God’s elect, we are accused of holding the doctrine of the “*absolute reprobation* of all the rest of mankind, so as to involve in it this horrible consequence, That God creates innumerable souls to be inevitably damned, without the least compassion for them.”

That to *choose some*, implies to *leave others*, must be granted; and if nothing more were meant by the charge of free election involving in it the doctrine of Reprobation, we should not object to the statement:—but is there no difference between leaving men to the *just fruit of their sins*, and creating them for inevitable damnation *irrespective of their characters*? We cheerfully avow our abhorrence of a

doctrine which asserts, that an infinitely good GOD, created a number of immortal beings capable of such strong sensations of misery as man, merely to gratify himself in filling them with the fullness of torment for ever: such a sanguinary Deity we could never love; nor would faith in such a being promote that disposition to gentleness, tenderness, and affection for all mankind, which are everywhere represented in the gospel as the genuine fruits of a spiritual acquaintance with the true character of GOD: on the contrary, such views of the Almighty would rather cherish the spirit of a *bloody Mahomet* than a *bleeding Jesus*.

But we conceive that our *detestation of such a creed* is no ways inconsistent with our *cordial assent* to the doctrine of the *sovereignty of divine mercy*; for, as the execution of a malefactor is not to be attributed to the cruelty of a prince, because royal clemency is a displayed towards another transgressor—so neither do the sovereign acts of God's mercy, in any respect, necessitate *him* to be the author of misery, any farther than as the author of that holy law which men have broken, and the maintaining of its rights.

In saving, he acts like a *merciful Sovereign*—in condemning, as a *righteous Judge*, bound to support the honour of his moral government. He was no more under obligation to save *all*, than he was to save *any*; and if salvation itself be an *act of grace*, surely the *author of salvation* is at full liberty without any impeachment of his goodness, to display that grace “according to the pleasure of his own will;” for is it not admitted, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God?” Is it any act of injustice in Jehovah to punish sin? Would he not have been just in condemning *all*, because “*all have sinned?*” How, then, can God's decree make that *arbitrary*, which, without such a decree, is not more that *JUST*? If actual condemnation of the sinner be righteous, the purpose of GOD to execute his righteous severity towards impenitent sinners, cannot be lawfully arraigned.

In terms, therefore, the most decided, we disavow the charge of holding a doctrine which, by necessary consequence, involves an arbitrary reprobation of any man, irrespective of his crimes; and are most fully persuaded that nothing can be more ungrateful or more unjust, than to represent that as a cause of *misery* which is the *alone source* of all the *mercy* ever showed to man, or comfort enjoyed by him, in this world or in the next.

Secondly, The doctrine of sovereign distinguishing grace, is represented as injurious to “the rich goodness, great mercy, and compassion of GOD to the sons of men; and the *contrary doctrine*,” it is said, “tends more highly to the promotion of God's glory; because, the more there are benefited, the greater is the glory of the benefactor.”

But brethren, let it be considered, that *no other doctrine*, save that of *distinguishing grace*, secures the eternal benefit of a *single individual* of our race; for such is the deep depravity of the human heart, that all the outward means of grace are of themselves totally ineffectual to man's everlasting salvation; insomuch, that after Christ himself had employed the best of external means with the *Jews*, he complains, “Ye *will not* come to me that ye might have life;” and upon this ground he asserts, “No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him.” Whence it follows, that had not GOD sovereignly chosen some, and resolved on their salvation, the death of Christ, and the ministration of the gospel, with all its appendages, would have been in vain; so that the sovereign purpose, and effectual operations of Jehovah, so far from *diminishing* his grace,

tend highly to *exalt* it, since it is abundantly evident that there is *more* “grace goodness, and compassion,” manifested in *securing* the salvation of *some*, than in making *ineffectual provision* for the salvation of *all*.

Thirdly, If the doctrine of distinguishing grace be true, we are told, “then the Jews could not be reasonably accused for not coming to Christ, or not believing in him; much less could it be imputed to them as their great crime, that they would not come to him, or believe in him.”

Now that our Lord did accuse the Jews for not coming to him and believing in him, and that justly, we do not deny; but is there any thing in the doctrine of salvation by grace, which lessens the authority of the gospel, or the obligations of men to embrace it? What more doth the gospel require of men, than TO BELIEVE WHAT IS TRUE—TO LOVE WHAT IS GOOD—TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT—AND TO BE SORRY FOR WHAT IS WRONG? And is it possible for any acts of divine mercy to make these obligations cease? If Christianity be properly *attested*, ought it not to be *believed*? If God is *good*, ought he not to be *loved*? If the commandments of Christ are *right*, should they not be *obeyed*? And if he discovers to us our *faults*, ought we not to *repent* of them?—All these in fact are natural duties arising from our necessary relation to the great God, as our creator and moral Governor, and it can never be demonstrated, that God’s special designs of grace to some, annihilate the obligations of all the rest, any more than an earthly prince’s discovering extraordinary regard to some of his subjects, releases all his other subjects from their allegiance to him, and subjection to the laws.

The obligations of men to *believe* the gospel, arise from its being a *divine revelation* worthy of God, and sufficiently *attested*; and their obligations to *obey* the divine precepts, are founded on their *equity*, and their being enjoined by the *authority* of the moral governor of the world; so that unless it can be proved that GOD has no legal claim to the respect and obedience of any besides those whom he resolves to save, and whose hearts he effectually inclines to keep his law, this objection has no force; and if it be admitted, it leaves every man who is not eventually saved, at full liberty, without blame, to treat the blessed GOD of truth as a *liar* and *tyrant*! So that our doctrine by no means diminishes the guilt of man in rejecting the gospel, but allows us most cordially to unite with a celebrated writer of our own denomination, Dr. Gill, is asserting that “a man not coming to Christ, when revealed in the external ministry of the gospel, as God’s way of salvation, is criminal and blameworthy, since the disability and perverseness of his will are *not owing to any decree in God*, but to the corruption and vitiosity of his nature through sin; and, therefore, since his vitiosity of nature is blameworthy (for God made man upright), that which follows upon it, and is the effect of it, must be so too.”

Fourthly, The doctrine of the sovereignty of divine mercy, is charged with being “unfriendly to christian activity, weakening the motives to diligence in religion, and thereby promoting the disuse of the means of grace.”

We hope, brethren, that none of you, by *your conduct*, have put this objection into the mouths of your adversaries: if YOU have, the reproach be on you, not on the *truth* you profess. Do we not acknowledge the *means* as much a part of the divine plan as the *end*? And will not the same objections lie against the *providential* government of God, as are urged against the doctrine of sovereign salvation?

Let us inquire—Do you believe in a Providence? Is that Providence universal? And does it not secure the accomplishment of its immense designs?—All this you allow—yet doth your confidence in a Providence annihilate your industry? Are you husbandmen, and do you expect to reap where you have not sown?—Are you merchants, and do you expect to raise an edifice without labor? Is not the time of your life appointed, but do you, on this account, neglect the use of medicine in sickness, and food when in health? *You* attend to these as means *necessary* to the *end*; no less necessary do *we* consider the use of *religious means* in order to *salvation*: and from the very same motives, and on the self-same principles on which you act in relation to the concerns of this life, do we conduct ourselves under the influence of our faith in the Plans of Grace, knowing that “*what* a man soweth *that* shall he also reap;” and, “for all these things God will be sought unto by the house of Israel, to do it for them.”

Fifthly, The doctrine of distinguishing grace is charged with “giving encouragement to careless sinners to presume groundlessly on GOD’S favor; and discouraging those who are willing to forsake sin from so doing, or cause them to despair of mercy.” But how can that doctrine encourage the *careless sinner*, which in terms the most decided declares the *destruction of sin* to be the ultimate object of GOD’S designs? Is not the salvation to which we are chosen, represented by us as “*through sanctification of the Spirit?*” and are not God’s elect predestinated to *conformity* to the character of the SON OF GOD, who was holy, harmless, undefiled? And surely, to believe firmly that it is the design of GOD, that his people “should be holy and without blame before him in love,” can have no tendency to “encourage careless sinners to presume on his favor.”

That some hypocrites have abused the doctrine of grace, we admit; but what good thing exists which hath not been abused by wicked men? Thousands, from the forbearance of God, take encouragement fully to set their hearts in them to do evil; *Eccl. viii. 2.* But doth their sin diminish the divine compassion? Do gluttony and drunkenness prove food to be poison? Or tyranny and despotism disprove the necessity or excellence of good government? Because there are some who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, must the crime be imputed to the profession? Or shall those who are friendly to the doctrine of grace, be charged with sinning that grace may abound? God forbid!

And what is there in this doctrine discouraging to a *true penitent*? Men that are careless about their salvation cannot be called penitents; not can *they* be discouraged from pursuing an object which they have no sincere desire to obtain: and as to those who are seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, with their whole heart and with their whole soul, they are actually in possession of the fruits and evidences of GOD’S distinguishing grace; and can it *discourage* them to know that their holy desires and spiritual activity are beginnings of a saving work of God upon their hearts, and that he always perfects what he begins? Is *this discouraging*? No, brethren, you and thousands more have derived encouragement and comfort from such views as these, which have “filled you with joy and peace in believing;” and put a new song into your mouths, even praise to the God of your salvation.

Finally, It is urged that the doctrine of distinguishing grace is “injurious to personal religion, as it destroys all hope of obtaining salvation by our own performances.”

To this we reply, first, This doctrine doth not constitute our performances worse in themselves, or less beneficial in their effects, but only takes for granted a certain truth, viz: THAT OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS IS INSUFFICIENT FOR OUR SALVATION: and therefore, unless it be injurious for a man to know the truth of himself respecting the depravity of his heart, this doctrine can never injure him.

2dly. If personal religion can be no other ways promoted than by consideration of its *meritorious influence*, then we allow that our doctrine destroys it; but so far are we from imagining that REAL RELIGION, such as the law requires and God approves, can be advanced by the hope of a *deserved recompense*, that we judge nothing can more effectually subvert it.

Real religion consists in SUPREME LOVE TO GOD AND DISINTERESTED LOVE TO MAN. This is “not only the source and principle, but the very sum and substance, nay the *perfection of holiness*,” but service long and painful may be yielded for the *hope of reward*, without any affection to the work, or esteem for the employer, and therefore, without any real religion.

The tendency of any doctrine to promote *personal piety* is the same as its tendency to promote *supreme love to GOD*; and as all esteem rises from some real or supposed excellency in its object, whatever exhibits the great Jehovah in *the true loveliness of HIS CHARACTER*, must undoubtedly be calculated to improve our love for him. Now let it be considered with candor whether the doctrine we maintain doth not so represent the great Jehovah, as most effectually to engage the admiration and esteem of every *holy being* in the universe.

The doctrine of distinguishing grace, when simplified, is summed up in three propositions

1. All men have rebelled against God, and so rendered themselves obnoxious to his everlasting wrath.

2. It is the pleasure of GOD, for the sake of Jesus Christ to extend a gracious pardon to a great number of his rebellious creatures, and receive them into his favor as though they had never sinned.

3. GOD doth not extend his purpose of salvation to all, but whilst he saves some, leaves others exposed to the awful consequences of their crimes, and the righteous awards of his most holy law.

This is a fair statement of the doctrine: Let JEHOVAH then be viewed in his true character, “*The JUDGE of the Whole Earth*,” Psal. xciv. 2, and what measures could the Supreme Governor have pursued more becoming his name as the *God of mercy*, and his character as the *universal Judge*?

JUSTICE, though an *awful*, is nevertheless a becoming and essential part of a judicial character, and therefore it is beautiful and lovely. Could we feel any esteem for the official character of a human minister of Justice, who made a point of pardoning *every criminal*, let his crimes be as complicated or aggravated as they might? What licentiousness would he thereby introduce! What an encourager would he be of vice, and what an enemy to society! Of what advantage would be his tribunal, and of what avail his office? *Here* we are persuaded that justice is essential to the *loveliness* of a legislator’s character; and under whatever regulations his designs of mercy may be in his own breast; it is by threatening sin in general with punishment, and by actually punishing a great number of transgressors, he best maintains the respectability of his office, and preserves order in that society of whose morals he is the guardian; for men will be most effectually

deterred from evil by their knowing him to be a determined enemy to vice, and seeing that none have any *security* but in their *innocence*: whereas, if justice were never administered, every man would do what was right in his own eyes, and the world would be filled with blasphemy, rebellion, and every evil work.

Yet as the legislator acts for the *good of society*, wherever he perceives that clemency may be shown without endangering the public good, it will be an addition to his loveliness to display it; especially if after a series of experiments it appears to the whole community that such acts of grace under the regulations of legislative wisdom have been to their advantage. They will then cheerfully leave the exercise of mercy to the discretion of their judge, and from experience persuaded that it will never be manifested to their injury, they will feel satisfaction and pleasure in every renewed instance of grace; and the disposition which the legislator shows to the exercise of clemency, whenever it is consistent with the honor of his government and the good of the community, will perfect their sentiments of his official beauty and loveliness.

Such, then, is the *legislative beauty* of JEHOVAH: He vindicates the honor of his government, by permitting the law to take its course, and thus shines in the glory of holiness; yet mingling mercy with equity, and forgiveness with justice," according to the counsel of his own will;" every holy mind on a survey of his judicial character must exclaim, "He is the chief of ten thousand; he is altogether lovely." Hence, the doctrines we avow, when rightly understood, are calculated to create and cherish, that mixture of VENERATION AND DELIGHT, in our contemplation of the *blessed*, wherein the essence of divine love and *all true religion* consist.

To this objection it may be answered, 3dly. Personal religion can never be injured by a right view of GOD'S *design*, in his gracious discriminations; because *personal religion* was the very thing for which he set apart his people, even "that they should be a *peculiar* people, *zealous* of good works." Taught then by our Bibles, that God chose us *that we should be* HOLY, we can no longer consider ourselves as possessed of the *evidences of election*, than whilst we enjoy in a measure the END of it; and hence we have a motive continually arising from the doctrine itself, to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" being convinced, that neither our believing the doctrine, nor expecting to be saved by it, are proofs of our security, any further than attended with inward and personal religion.

Thus brethren, have we endeavored to assist you in maintaining "the faith once delivered to the saints." We have only a few exhortations to annex in relation to this subject.

1. Whilst we wish you to be furnished with weapons of defence in case of an attack, we exhort you not to seek occasions of controversy with your fellow christians. The *religion of the heart* generally declines as a controversial disposition prevails: it greatly injures the spirituality of the mind, and its effects everywhere demonstrate, that those who indulge it are leaving the wheat for the chaff. To have christians *all of one mind* is certainly, in some respects, highly desirable; but we must unite with the great Dr. OWEN in expecting that, should so delightful a period be ever known on this side heaven, the unanimity of christians in *senti-ment* will be the fruit of a *previous spirit of LOVE*; and therefore, with affectionate ardor, we would urge upon you the excellent exhortations which were given by our venerable predecessors, the pastors of more than one hundred Baptist

churches above a century ago. Having expressed their anxiety that whilst they defended the truth, they might carry themselves *modestly* and *humbly* towards those who differed from them, they add, "And O that, other contentions being laid asleep, the only care and contention of all upon whom the name of the blessed Redeemer is called, might for the future be to walk humbly with our GOD, and in the exercise of all love and meekness towards each other, to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, each one endeavoring to have his conversation such as becometh the gospel, and also suitable to his place and capacity, *vigorously promoting IN OTHERS THE PRACTICE OF TRUE RELIGION* and undefiled in the sight of GOD our Father: And that in this backsliding day, we might not spend our breath in fruitless complaints of the evils of others, but may *every one begin at home* to reform in the first place our own hearts and ways, and then to quicken all that we may have influence upon to the same work; that if the will of God were so, none might deceive themselves by resting in, and trusting to, a form of godliness, without the power of it, and *inward experience* of the efficacy of those truths that are professed by them."—*Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1688.

2. If you are called upon to defend the truth, see that it be done with meekness and prudence; if the former be wanting you will disgrace *yourself*—if the latter, *the cause you espouse*. "The professed friends of truth," says the eminent Dr. Witherspoon, "often injure the truth: they speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such incautious expressions as do indeed justify the objection, 'Shall we sin that grace may abound?' And in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous legalist, seem to state themselves as *enemies* in *every respect* to the LAW OF GOD, which is 'holy, just, and good.'"

Remember, brethren, that it is IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO INJURE HIS OWN GOVERNMENT, and set aside his own authority over his creatures; and therefore such modes of defending the truth as have any tendency to diminish the claims of Jehovah, or the obligations of men, *must be unwarranted and indefensible*.

3. Pray that your spirituality of mind, heavenly conversation, and holiness of conduct, may demonstrate to a gainsaying world, that *the grace of God*, which bringeth salvation, teacheth you *habitually* and *decidedly* to deny ungodliness and evil works, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the present evil world; so shall you shine as lights on the earth, and by your good words will glory redound to you Father who is in heaven. To his paternal arms and heart we now commend you, resting in the fellowship of the gospel.

Your affectionate brethren in the Lord.

Signed on behalf of the Association.

BENJAMIN MASON, *Moderator*.

Contents

Editorial Introduction	1
<i>Tom J. Nettles</i>	
The Kind of Man God Uses: Early Baptist Voices	2
<i>William G. Moore</i>	
News	14
The Kind of Man God Uses in Reformation	16
<i>Ernest C. Reisinger</i>	
The Kind of Man God Uses: Samuel Pearce (1766–1799)	24
<i>Tom J. Nettles</i>	
Circular Letter of 1795	26
<i>Samuel Pearce</i>	