

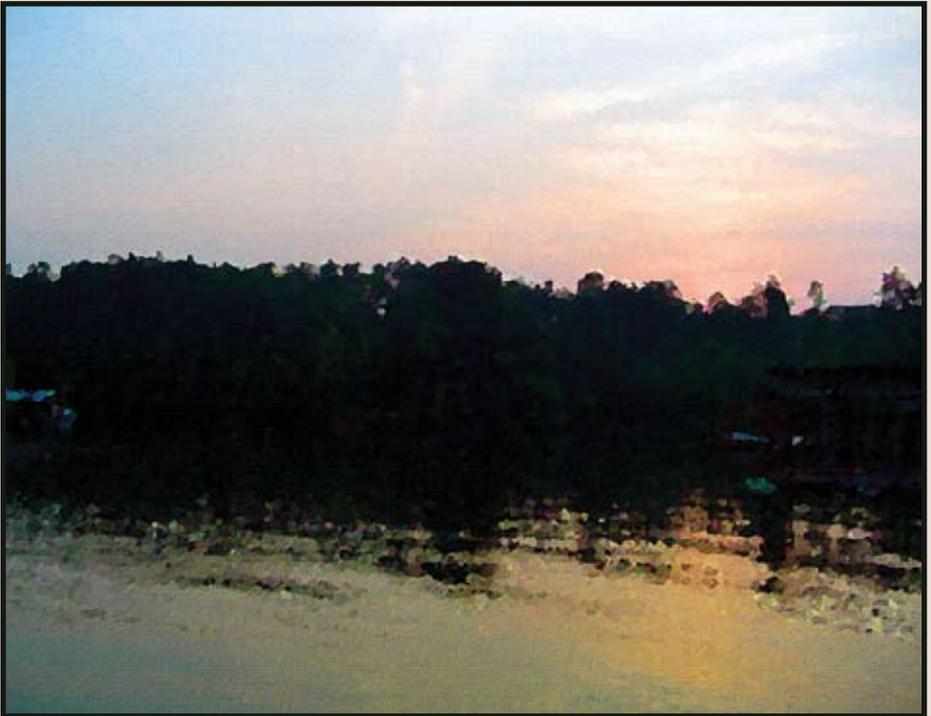
The Founders Journal



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“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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Servants Who Served Well

Thomas K. Ascol

“David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep...” (Acts 13:36).

In this brief statement the Apostle Paul summarizes the life of King David. In one sense, it is an epitaph that could be written on the tombstone of every man and woman. For, like David, God has ordained for us all the days of our lives, before any one of them ever came to be (Psalm 139:16). He fulfills His purpose for every creature that He brings into existence. So, not only David, but also Pharaoh fulfilled the purpose of God in his life (Romans 9:17). But in another sense, Paul’s words about the Patriarch are a sober reminder of the great responsibility that we have to live intentionally in the few years we have left on this earth.

The Lord has a purpose for each of our lives. Included in that purpose is a call to serve our generation well. Paul’s words have been construed in a slightly different way by the New King James version, which says that David served his own generation by the will of God. The point that should not be missed is that the great king’s life could be summarized in one word: service. David was a servant. He served the purpose of God by serving his generation.

Servanthood is one of those ideas that we spend more time talking about than actively pursuing. Yet, servanthood is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Jesus described His mission on earth in terms of service. He said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Our Lord came as a servant. Only those who are served by Him in His mediatorial offices of Prophet, Priest and King can experience His salvation.

“No servant is greater than his master,” Jesus said. If we would be true servants of Christ, then we must be willing to follow Him in the course of living our lives in service to others. The first time Jesus made this statement was immediately after washing His disciples’ dirty feet. “I have given you an example,” He said, “that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15–16).

Jesus' self-sacrificing lifestyle is to be the pattern for our own. Our Lord expects His followers to serve others just like He did. This is what Paul means when he writes, "Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification" (Romans 12:2). He is not advocating man-pleasing but rather man-serving. Eugene Peterson captures Paul's meaning by stating, "Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, 'How can I help?'"

Every disciple of Jesus Christ should utilize his or her gifts while taking advantage of God-given opportunities to serve others. It is in this way that we will serve our generation well by the will of God.

This issue of the *Founders Journal* pays tribute to two men who did just that. R. F. Gates and Curtis Vaughan lived through days of serious spiritual decline among American evangelicals. As Southern Baptists they witnessed the subtle erosion of doctrinal conviction within the denomination in the middle part of the last century. Pragmatism undermined orthodox confessionalism and opened the door to liberalism. They also witnessed the beginnings of doctrinal and spiritual reformation among many of the churches identified as Southern Baptist.

But they were more than mere witnesses to these reformation efforts. Both were instrumental in advancing those efforts—Dr. Vaughan, in the seminary classroom and through his books; Pastor Gates, through his itinerant preaching and teaching ministry and encouragement of young pastors.

Dr. Vaughan's New Testament Greek classes were legendary. It was my great privilege to have been his student. Along with teaching Greek to his "boys," as he called us (although he was always sensitive to and respectful of the occasional "lady" in the class), Dr. Vaughan would not allow his students to skirt the theology of the New Testament. I remember one classmate who was particularly flummoxed by Paul's Greek in Ephesians 1:4–6 and expressed his frustration to the professor. "I know what it says, but what does it *mean*?" With his characteristic, mischievous grin, Dr. Vaughan scanned the class and replied, "Boys, it means what it says."

It was in Greek class that I first learned to love *Pilgrim's Progress*. Dr. Vaughan opened the first several classes of that course by reading to us from Bunyan's classic work. One Wednesday, he paused from his reading long enough to ask the class, "How many of you have never read *Pilgrim's Progress*?" Just as my honesty was overcoming my embarrassment and my hand began to lift off the desk, he mercifully added, "Don't raise your hands. I would be too discouraged to see how many of you are in that category. But if you have not, then you absolutely must read it . . ." His words

were very slow and punctuated at this point, and I was already writing down the title to make sure that it got put on my “to read some day” list when he finished his sentence, “... before the end of the week!” That class full of preacher boys was absolutely silent. I think we expected—or at least hoped—that he would add some kind of qualifier to his exhortation (like, “I’m just kidding” or “but if you can’t do that, then make sure you get to it before you graduate”). But he simply let his words hang in the air for several weighty moments before resuming his reading.

I have no idea if anyone else in that class took his words seriously, but by the grace of God and out of respect for my professor I went that day to the bookstore (actually I went to two—the Baptist bookstore did not have it) and bought my first copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. By the end of that week Bunyan’s book became one of my favorites. Twenty-five years and several editions later, it remains one of the most helpful and valuable books I have in my library.

I am one of thousands whom Dr. Vaughan served well through his long, faithful, God-honoring teaching ministry.

It was also my privilege to know and be served by R. F. Gates. My brother, Bill, introduced me to R. F. in Shreveport, Louisiana where they were members of the same church. R. F. was part of the original group of men that met to establish the Founders Conference. One of the most memorable experiences I ever had with him occurred during a stormy night on some back roads in Arkansas. We were riding with several other men in a church van on our way home from the first Founders Conference. A short-cut had left us lost and a terrific electrical storm left us almost unable to read the signs along the two-lane highway. Then the battery died in the van and the van died in the middle of the highway. Though the rain had hindered our vision and considerably slowed the speed at which we had been traveling, it did not seem to have the same effect on the eighteen-wheelers that had been regularly passing us for the previous hour. Now we were sitting dead in the middle of the highway, on a rather sharp curve, with not even a flashing taillight to warn other drivers of our presence.

I do not remember the details of how we got out of that predicament (the van eventually started again and we limped home, coasting time and again right up to kind motorists with jumper cables), but I will never forget R. F.’s prayer. We were all praying. But he began praying out loud. The joyful, confident tone of his words seemed out of place to me, almost being drowned out by the pounding rain. But it was the words themselves that arrested me. “Lord, we don’t know where we are, but You do. We just know that we are lost, dead on this highway without any lights or help.

Father, these big, ol' tractor-trailers are all over this highway and one could come barreling around this corner at any moment and just wipe us out. So, Lord, if You want to be glorified by having us all killed right here in that way, then just do it! All we care about is for You to get glory, however You choose to do it.”

I have to admit that I opened my eyes and stared at him as he prayed. I wanted to make sure my ears were not playing tricks on me. There he was, his silhouette barely visible, hand held high, face lifted toward heaven, telling God that it was OK with him if all of us died on that wet, dark, Arkansas highway. I could not bring myself to say “Amen,” but I also could not help but wonder what this man had that I did not. In fact, to my shame, I wondered if what he had was real. Through the years since then I had the privilege to pray with R. F. many times. I learned to say “Amen” to his prayers. His joy in the Lord was as contagious as it was real. And his passion for God to be glorified at whatever personal expense never diminished. He was the first guest speaker I invited to Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida after I was called to serve there as pastor. I am among the countless number of pastors all across the United States who have been personally blessed by his private and public ministry.

Both Curtis Vaughan and R. F. Gates were friends of Founders Ministries. R. F. helped found this ministry and regularly preached at Founders Conferences. Dr. Vaughan granted us the rights to reprint all of his study guide commentaries telling me that he was delighted to have them reissued under the imprint of Founders Press. We will miss them, but their influence lives on. Having used their gifts and opportunities to serve the purposes of God in their generation, they now rest from their labors. But the fruit of their labors lives on and their example remains an encouragement for those of us who love the gospel they preached to persevere in serving our own generations to the best of our abilities by the strength and grace of Jesus Christ. ☺



Curtis Vauhan
1925–2005



R. F. Gates
1932–2005

THOU GOD OF MY END,

Thou hast given me a fixed disposition
to go forth and spend my life for Thee;
If it be Thy will let me proceed in it;
if not, then revoke my intentions.
All I want in life is such circumstances
as may best enable me to serve Thee in the world;
To this end I leave all my concerns in Thy hand,
but let me not be discouraged,
for this hinders my spiritual fervency;
Enable me to undertake some task for Thee,
for this refreshes and animates my soul,
so that I could endure all hardships and labours,
and willingly suffer for Thy name.
But, O what a death it is to strive and labour,
to be always in a hurry and yet do nothing!
Alas, time flies and I am of little use.
O that I could be a flame of fire in Thy service,
always burning out in one continual blaze.
Fit me for singular usefulness in this world.
Fit me to exult in distress of every kind
if they but promote the advancement of Thy kingdom.
Fit me to quit all hopes of the world's friendship,
and give me a deeper sense of my sinfulness.
Fit me to accept as just desert from Thee
any trial that may befall me.
Fit me to be totally resigned to the denial of pleasures I desire,
and to be content to spend my time with Thee.
Fit me to pray with a sense of joy of divine communion,
to find all times happy seasons to my soul,
to see my own nothingness,
and wonder that I am allowed to serve Thee.
Fit me to enter the blessed world where no unclean thing is,
and to know Thee with me always.

—From *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*,
ed. Arthur Bennett (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 1983), 178.

Curtis Vaughan

A Tribute by Personal Testimony

Tom J. Nettles

During my junior year in high school (in 1963), at a valentine banquet held at First Baptist Church in Brandon, Mississippi, my Presbyterian friend Wayne Herring asked me if I believed in predestination. I really had never heard the word but pretty quickly figured out what it meant. “Why ask me a question like that at a valentine banquet?” was my first but silent reaction. After only a brief pause, “Of course not!” rolled out the words in all the southern oratorical skill that three words could muster from a mind innocent of all pertinent knowledge and equally as unintimidated by the importance of the question.

One year later, the January Bible Study book for Southern Baptists was Ephesians. I loved those occasions in the church. The teacher, a professor of philosophy, came from the near-by Baptist college, Mississippi College. The textbook came in the very familiar form. Several people I knew had very neat little libraries of these January Bible Study books. Published by Convention Press, the text was a little gray hardback book, suited for about a ten-session study with appropriate study questions at the close of each chapter. The title stood against the gray printed in black along with the author’s name, Curtis Vaughan. Quickly I learned that my friend’s question of a year ago was not merely an idle provocation from him, but had origin in Bible words. My King James Version, right there in the first chapter of the book, said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

The philosophy professor helped us understand that that did not mean that God already had selected individuals for salvation, but just that

he had chosen that he would save anyone who would consent to believe in Jesus. The writer of the textbook, however, said, “It is God’s gracious and sovereign choice of individual sinners to be saved in and through Christ.” He went on to explain that “the doctrine of election is often vigorously opposed.” Sometimes the opposition comes from misunderstanding, sometimes from its presentation in a harsh and forbidding manner, but most often, so Vaughan explained, “the prejudice against election is an expression of imbedded conceit, for this teaching deals a crushing blow to human pride. It is indeed a leveling doctrine, stripping away all trust in flesh and bringing men to see that their only hope is the grace of God in Christ.”

How many of those words I actually read at the time, I don’t recall, or if all of them were actually in that particular text, because presently I am reading the Study Guide edition (originally published by Zondervan, 1977, and now available from Founders Press, 2002). I do recall, however, that a clear difference in interpretation stood boldly before the entire group, some alarm at the viewpoint of the writer and a great deal of relief when it was explained softly and gently by the teacher.

I clearly received two impressions: First, I would love to spend my life studying theology and trying to sort out some of these things. To me it did not seem that the teacher had done justice either to the Bible or to the writer of the text. Second, the ideas in Vaughan’s explanation intensified a sense of spiritual insecurity in my soul that had been developing since the summer of 1963. This was to grow in intensity for the next six years.

In 1968, my new bride, Margaret, and I moved to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I vaguely knew that Curtis Vaughan taught there but went simply because it had a reputation among some of my friends for being the most conservative of the six Southern Baptist seminaries. About one year from the time of arriving at Southwestern, my six years of struggle culminated in the experience of the new birth manifest in a clear sight of my sinfulness and the sufficiency of Christ as my only hope for forgiveness. That next semester I enrolled in second year Greek under Curtis Vaughan. Through other reading, I already had basically embraced the doctrines of grace that had been so perplexing, confusing and a source of insecurity [rightly so] years earlier. Now I would be able to study immediately under the person whose writing had played a part in troubling my mind toward truth.

The class was no disappointment. Not only did we go through the rigors of learning Greek syntax, theological ideas that emerged from the text often occupied class attention. In studying the syntactical uses of

participles in 1 Peter, Curtis Vaughan made sure everyone dealt with what it means to be “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” He suggested an etymological study of “foreknowledge,” and I found that its biblical use includes much more than mere pre-cognition. The translation that Dr. Vaughan emphasized was one he included in his 26 Translations edition of the New Testament from James Moffatt’s translation: “whom God the Father has predestined and chosen.” When the noun form appeared in Romans 8:29, he liked the Williams translation, also included in 26 Translations, “For those on whom he set his heart beforehand.”

This experience of a semester’s baptism in the exegetical study of the New Testament under one of the Southern Baptist evangelical masters of the twentieth-century gave a solid textual basis to my developing theological convictions.

A PhD seminar expanded my admiration of Vaughan and increased the benefits I received from his teaching. He clearly disliked studying the New Testament from the standpoint of engagement with all the critical theories. He assumed the authenticity, integrity and inspiration of the text and really believed that its study should give spiritual maturity and equip the man of God for every good work. He recommended books in which the class could engage all the critical issues concerning our appointed study, but he focused the attention of each class session on the literary and doctrinal meaning of the text. He saw no point in spending time with that that was speculative, unedifying, and skeptical.

When I went to Southwestern to teach in January, 1976, Curtis Vaughan welcomed me in his low-key, friendly, almost shy manner. Much to my pleasure and sense of true privilege, we began to develop a friendship. More mature men on the faculty were closer to him in many ways, but eventually he and I would speak about theological issues that he was normally hesitant to introduce in more diverse company. In a small group in the teachers’ lounge, he recommended *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. The following conversation amounted to a rebuke of his admiration of Spurgeon since Spurgeon proved to be divisive. With gentle grace, Dr. Vaughan issued a call for such theological courage in the context of Southern Baptist life. When *Baptists and the Bible* came from the presses of Moody in 1980, Curtis Vaughan as a minority of one, along with Dean Huber Drumwright, expressed to Russ Bush and me his sincere appreciation for its contents.

One of the great personal losses of my departure from Southwestern in 1982 was the opportunity to expand and enrich my friendship with Curtis Vaughan. He was a careful and reverent scholar. He was a man of true piety and earnest zeal for godliness. Theologically and experientially he reveled in the Puritans and Spurgeon. He lamented the loss of purity, discipline, and doctrinal robustness in the churches. He loved teaching the Bible and gained the devotion and admiration of hundreds of students. His influence was for good and Southern Baptist churches have received great blessings through this singular gift of God's grace. ☪

I remember Dr. Vaughn with great admiration and fondness. He was, without a doubt, one of the most influential voices in my theological development.

I remember sitting in his class in 1977 and having him give explanation of Romans 8:28–39. As he completed the section on 8:28–30, I raised my hand and politely said “Dr. Vaughn, when you explained those verses you sounded like a Calvinist!” To which he calmly replied, “That may be so, because I am one.” At which point, I became a bit disturbed and said, “But you can't be—you believe in missions and evangelism.” He very graciously spent the next half hour explaining to this pitiful head full of mush how the two are not in conflict. This was the first explanation I had ever heard by a man that I respected as a scholar. He didn't convince me at that point . . . that didn't come until 1980 . . . but that class probably set my mind to re-thinking old assumptions that had no foundation in the Scriptures, only in oral tradition I had grown up in.

Bill Haynes, Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church
Somerset, Kentucky

I have fond memories of sitting in Dr. Vaughan's Greek class. He was a godly man; one I admired greatly. Last summer Sarah and I went down to Texas and he let us stay with him at his house. He was working on commentary work even then. He never stopped his biblical studies, and that spoke wonders to me. I am grateful to God for the blessing he gave in Dr. Vaughan.

Jay T. Collier
Reformation Heritage Books
www.heritagebooks.org

The late Dr. Curtis Vaughan was Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth Texas where he served on the faculty from 1950 to 1995. He was a graduate of Southwestern (BD and ThD) and Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. The following excerpt is from his commentary on Ephesians, first published by the Convention Press of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 as the textbook for the Church Study Course on Ephesians. The commentary was later revised and republished by Zondervan Press in 1977. It has been republished as part of the Founders Study Guide Commentary series and is currently available from Founders Press (2002).

The Blessing of God's New People: A Doxology

(Ephesians 1:3–6)

Curtis Vaughan

Most of Paul's epistles begin with an expression of thanks to God for certain spiritual qualities produced by divine grace and power in the readers' lives (cf. Rom. 1:8ff.; 1 Cor. 1:4ff.; Phil. 1:3ff.; Col 1:3ff., et al.). Ephesians, however, is different. Here, instead of the customary thanksgiving, there is what more appropriately may be called a doxology—a majestic hymn of praise to God. (The thanksgiving, to be sure, is eventually brought in [cf. 1:15], but, as Robinson says, “not until the great doxology has run its full course” [p. 23].)

This outburst of adoring praise requires and rewards the closest study. Two matters should be considered before we attempt to interpret it. The first is its *structure*. In the Greek text verses 3–14 constitute one magnificent sentence intricately and skillfully put together. The KJV, to help the reader keep the connection of thought, places a period at the end of verses 6, 12 and 14. Following this punctuation, one may think of Paul's inspired hymn as falling into three stanzas. The first (vss. 3–6) relates to the past and centers largely in the gracious purpose of the Father. The second (vss.

7–12) has to do with the present and revolves mainly around the redemptive work of Christ. The third (vss. 13, 14) points to the future consummation of redemption and magnifies the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Each stanza closes with a refrain: “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (vs. 6), “to the praise of His glory” (vs. 12), “unto the praise of His glory” (vs. 14).

The second matter to consider is the *theme*. The entire passage, throbbing with a sense of the majesty and goodness of God, may be seen as an ascription of praise to Him for His gracious benefits to His people. This note, which resounds throughout the paragraph, is first struck in verse 3: “Blessed be . . . God, . . . who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.” Notice the joyous and emphatic reiteration: “blessed,” “hath blessed,” “blessings.” It is reminiscent of Psalm 103: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless The LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (vss. 1, 2).

“Blessed” translates an adjective used in the New Testament exclusively of God. (Cf., e.g., Mark 14:61; Luke 1:68; Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3.) The inference is that He alone has an unchanging claim on our homage. In “blessing” God we do not, of course, add anything to Him or bestow any benefit on Him. We simply acknowledge His mercy and offer praise and thanks to Him for His goodness to us. The Greek word means “to be praised,” “worthy of praise.” “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NIV).

“Hath blessed” translates a verb the tense of which sums up all the blessings of God and treats them as a single whole. The primary reference appears to be to those blessings that come to the believer in his experience of conversion, but the concept is broad enough to include every act of divine blessing.

Our blessing (praising) of God, it is implied, is in response to the blessings (benefits) we have received from Him. Those blessings are *described* in verses 3–6, and some of the principal ones are *enumerated* in verses 7–14.

A Description of the Divine Blessings (1:3–6)

One of the richest and most overwhelming passages in the Bible is this discussion of the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. Calvin speaks of the “lofty terms” employed and explains that they are intended to rouse believers’ hearts to gratitude, “to set them all on flame, to fill them even to overflowing with this disposition.”

1. *Their Character* (vs. 3). God has blessed us “with all spiritual blessings” (vs. 3). Some think the word “spiritual” is used to emphasize that our blessings are derived from the Spirit and communicated to us by Him. These blessings do, of course, come from the Spirit, and are realized in us only through His work, but it is doubtful that the apostle had this in mind in using the word “spiritual.” Paul’s term emphasizes, not the source of our blessings, but their nature. That is, they are spiritual rather than natural or material. Paul, a childless, landless, homeless man, knew little of material blessings, but in regard to things spiritual he knew himself to have boundless wealth. The contemplation of these blessings opened in his heart the floodgates of grateful praise.

“All spiritual blessings” is taken by some to mean that there is no spiritual blessing that we have that does not come from God. This is of course true, but perhaps it is better to understand the word in the sense of “every kind of.” Whatever our spiritual lives require, God amply and abundantly provides. He has given us “every possible benefit in Christ!” (vs. 3, Phillips).

2. *The Sphere in Which they Are Experienced* (vs. 3). Two expressions define the sphere in which God’s people are blessed. One is the phrase “in the heavenly places” (vs. 3; literally, “in the heavens”). This unusual expression occurs five times in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12, ASV) but nowhere else in the New Testament. To determine its meaning, one should study carefully each passage where it is used. In 1:20 it is the sphere to which the risen Christ has been exalted and enthroned; in 2:6 it is the region to which believers have been lifted in fellowship with Christ; in 3:10 it is where principalities and powers learn of the wisdom of God as exhibited through His people; in 6:12 it is the spiritual battleground where believers confront the forces of wickedness. It appears, then, that the phrase “heavenly places” refers not to a physical locality but to a realm or region of spiritual reality to which the believer has been lifted in Christ. That is to say, it speaks not of the heaven of the future but of the heaven that lies within and around the Christian here and now. Believers do indeed belong to two worlds (Phil. 3:20). Temporally they belong to the earth; but spiritually their lives are linked with Christ’s, and they therefore belong to the heavenly realm.

The other phrase defining the sphere of Christian blessings is “in Christ” (vs. 3). The thought occurs no fewer than twelve times in the first fourteen verses of this Epistle. Believers are faithful in Christ (vs. 1), chosen in Him (vs. 4), receive grace in Him (vs. 6), have their redemption in Him (vs. 7), are made a heritage in Him (vs. 11, ASV), are sealed in Him

(vs. 13), and so on. Here (vs. 3) where it said that God's people are blessed in Christ, the meaning is that the blessings they experience come to them by virtue of their union with Christ. He is the great reservoir of blessing, but only those who have living connection with Him share in His benefits. To those, however, who do enjoy this vital union God gives the key to His treasures and says in effect, "Go in and take what you will."

3. *The Ground on Which They Come* (vss. 4–6). These blessings come to us in accordance with an eternal purpose of God. He "hath blessed us ... according as [i.e., in conformity with the fact that] he hath chosen us" (vss. 3, 4). The suggestion is that divine election is the source and ground of all our spiritual benefits.

If you have ever watched a surveyor checking property lines where new houses were to be built, you know how very careful he must be about where he places his transit instrument. This is because the exact point-of-being must be located before any surveying can be done. If the point-of-being is wrong, property lines will be confused, houses will be misplaced, and the courts will be flooded with people protesting the violation of their property rights. So important is this that builders refuse to begin their work until the survey is completed.

The present passage deals with the point-of-being in spiritual matters—both for the individual Christian and for the whole body of Christ—and traces it back to eternity, to the sovereign will of God.

The two key expressions are "hath chosen" (vs. 4) and "having predestinated" (vs. 5). Since all else in the passage revolves around these two ideas, it is absolutely necessary that we understand their meanings. "Hath chosen" means that God has chosen Christians to be His people, to be the means of carrying out His purpose in the world. The root meaning of the Greek word is "to pick out" or "select" (for oneself). It is used in various connections in the New Testament—for example, of Christ's choice of the apostles (Luke 6:13), of the early church's choice of deacons (Acts 6:5), and of the selection of official delegates by the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:22, 25). In the present passage, where the word relates specifically to God's selection of sinners for salvation and service, there is a connotation of kindness and love.

"Having predestinated," the other focal term in our passage, translates a Greek word that literally means "to mark off in advance" (cf. Knox, "marking us out beforehand"). The idea is that of determining in advance. Other renderings are "predestined" (NIV), "destined" (TCNT, RSV, NEB), "planned" (Phillips), and "foreordained" (ASV). In the New Testament it is always used of God as determining from eternity (cf. Acts 4:28; Rom.

8:29; 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11). Probably no rigid distinction should be drawn between the choosing and the predestinating (foreordaining); they relate to the same divine act and, for all practical purposes, are identical.

Both of these expressions (“hath chosen,” “having predestinated”) are key terms for what is known as the doctrine of election. This doctrine, in a broad sense, may be defined as an act of choice whereby God selects an individual or a group out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny that He appoints. In a more restricted sense, it is God’s gracious and sovereign choice of individual sinners to be saved in and through Christ. We cannot fully comprehend the ways of God, but we may be sure that in His wisdom He knows that this was the way whereby the greatest possible blessing would eventually come to the largest number of persons.

This principle of selection has characterized God’s dealings with the race from the beginning. For example, He chose Abraham from among all the other men in Ur; He chose Isaac rather than Ishmael and the other sons of Abraham; He chose Jacob rather than Esau; He selected Israel over all other nations of the earth and made them His “chosen people.” Other examples could be cited, but these are enough to show that Paul was not teaching a new doctrine. What he does assert is that God has chosen a *new people*, and this has been done without regard to geographical or racial distinctions.

The doctrine receives great emphasis in Paul’s Epistles, (cf. Rom. 8:28–11:36; 1 Thess. 1:2–10), but it is not peculiar to him. The New Testament uniformly teaches that all saving grace in time flows from divine election in eternity (cf. John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; 1 Peter 1:1, 2). The teaching is often brought in (as it is in the present passage) in contexts of praise and devotion and is intended to elicit the adoring gratitude of redeemed people.

The doctrine of election is often vigorously opposed. Sometimes this opposition arises from a misunderstanding of the doctrine. Sometimes it represents a reaction to those who have made the teaching harsh and forbidding. Often, however, the prejudice against election is an expression of imbedded conceit, for this teaching deals a crushing blow to human pride. It is indeed a leveling doctrine, stripping away all trust in flesh and bring-

It is indeed a leveling doctrine, stripping away all trust in flesh and bringing men to see that their only hope is the grace of God in Christ.

ing men to see that their only hope is the grace of God in Christ.

The KJV attaches the phrase “in love” to the thought in verse 4: “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Many interpreters favor placing the mark of punctuation before “in love” and construing these words with “having predestinated” (vs. 5). The RSV, for instance, has a period after the phrase “before him,” then makes verse 5 read: “He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ.... “God’s predestinating is thus seen to be no harsh and arbitrary act, but rather a gracious and merciful decree *made in love*. It is to be thought of, then, not as a blind, impersonal, and mechanical thing, but as an act of infinite goodness and wisdom. In light of this, the expression of worship and wonder that closes Paul’s most detailed and profound discussion of divine election is a fitting response for all of us: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Five things about election (the divine choice) are brought out in the present passage. First, *it has its ground in Christ*.¹ God chose us “in him” (vs. 4). The thought is that apart from Christ and His foreseen work on our behalf there would have been no election and, therefore, no salvation. Since, therefore, the redemption of sinners is bound up so intimately with the person and work of God’s Son, no one should think of himself as one of God’s elect unless he knows himself to be in Christ. “Do not conceive,” said Spurgeon, “that some decree, passed in the dark ages of eternity, will save your souls, unless you believe in Christ. Do not ... fancy that you are to be saved without faith.... That is a most abominable and accursed heresy, and has ruined thousands. Lay not election as a pillow for you to sleep on, or you may be ruined” (p. 82).

Second, God’s choice was made “*before the foundation of the world*” (vs. 4). That is to say, it was an eternal choice; it was made before any created thing came into being, indeed, before time began. The New Testament appears to emphasize this fact in order to bring out that God’s choice is immutable, that nothing can happen in time or eternity to shake His determination to save His people. God’s purpose cannot miscarry, nor can they be checkmated.

Third, God’s choice was *purposeful*. This truth is brought out in two statements. The first, “that we should be holy and without blame before him” (vs. 4), expresses the purpose of divine election as to our character. God wanted us to be a certain kind of people: He wanted us to be *holy* (i.e., separated to Him); He wanted us to be *blameless*. The two words really express two sides of the same thing.

Barclay points out that the word *holy*, which speaks in this context of inner consecration, has in it “the idea of *difference* and of *separation*.” His comments are significant. “A temple,” he explains, “is *holy* because it is different from other buildings; a priest is *holy* because he is different from ordinary men; a [sacrificial] victim is *holy* because it is different from other animals; God is supremely *holy* because He is different from men; the Sabbath day is *holy* because it is different from other days. So, then, God chose the Christian that he should be *different* from other men” (p. 89). This difference consists in his separation, his dedication to God.

The word that is translated “without blame” is sometimes used of blamelessness in character and conduct (cf. especially the Septuagint rendering of the Psalms), but essentially it is a sacrificial term. In reference to sacrificial animals it meant “without blemish” or “without defect.” In the New Testament, where the word occurs eight times, it is used in various contexts. For example, it is used of Christ, who “offered himself *without spot* to God” (Heb. 9:14) and whose blood was like that “of a lamb *without blemish*” (1 Peter 1:19); of Christians, who are to show themselves to be “children of God *without blemish*” in the midst of an evil generation (Phil. 2:15, ASV); and of the church, which as Christ’s bride is one day to be presented to Him “holy and *without blemish*” (Eph. 5:27; cf. Col. 1:22; Jude 24). The root meaning of the word is “flawless.” In the present passage Paul uses it to denote the stainless life that God purposes for His people to live.

The second statement of the purpose is put in terms of our standing before God: “unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ” (vs. 5). Adoption embraces more than our relationship to God as His children. This relationship we have by the new birth. Used in the New Testament only by Paul, the Greek word for “adoption” literally means a “placing as sons.” (Compare ASV, “adoption as sons”; NAB, “his adopted sons”.) Once (Rom. 9:4) Paul uses it of the covenant relationship between Israel and God (cf. Exod. 4:12), but everywhere else he uses it to emphasize the privileges that belong to believers. The complete manifestation of our adoption and the full realization of its privileges are yet future (Rom. 8:23).

This adoption is further defined as “unto . . . himself” (vs. 5). The sense is that God Himself is the one to whom believers are brought into a filial relationship through adoption. Thus the phrase is practically equivalent to a possessive pronoun. Compare RSV: “He destined us in love *to be his sons* through Jesus Christ” (italics mine). The further intent of the phrase is to emphasize the glory and wonder of our adoption.

Fourth, the divine election is “*according to the good pleasure of his will*”

(vs. 5). This means that the reason for God's choice, for His foreordaining us to be His children, is not to be found in us but in His own goodness and in the deliberate resolve of His own mind. F.F. Bruce explains: "It was not because He foreknew that we would believe the gospel, that He singled us out for such an honour as this. The ground must be sought exclusively in His own gracious character" (pp. 29, 30). The Greek word for "good pleasure," found three times in the Gospels (Matt. 11:26; Luke 2:14; 10:21), six times in the writings of Paul (Rom. 10:1; Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 1:15; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:11), and nowhere else in the New Testament, suggests a gracious purpose or resolve. Salmond says that when Paul uses it of God, it is "a term of grace, expressing good pleasure as *kind* intent, *gracious* will" (p. 252). Here it directs attention to the fact that God's election is an act of His own pure goodness, of His own benevolent sovereignty. What He did, He did solely because it seemed right and good for Him to do it. "Grace," writes Simpson, "is not measured by desert, but bestowed at the option of the donor. If I give all my goods to feed the poor or ransom a crew of galley-slaves I have an undoubted right to select my beneficiaries as I think best" (p.25).

Fifth, the ultimate² end of God's choice, of His foreordination of sinners, is "*the praise of the glory (splendor) of his grace*" (vs. 6). Just as Israel was chosen to live to God's praise (Isa. 43:21), so those who are chosen in Christ must live to the praise of the splendor of His grace. The "glory of his grace" may suggest generally grace in its gloriousness. The context shows that the reference is to the profuse outpouring of God's grace "wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (vs. 6). Weymouth: "with which He has enriched us in the beloved One." The overall teaching, then, is that grace has been gloriously manifested and (because of this) is to be eternally praised. "The design of redemption," wrote Hodge, "is to exhibit the grace of God in such a conspicuous manner as to fill all hearts with wonder and all lips with praise" (p. 38). ☺

Notes:

¹ We are here following Salmond's terminology. Calvin's interpretation, though not identical, is not radically different. He understood Paul's statement to mean that Christ is in the primary sense the "Elect" of God and that in electing Him, God chose us "in him."

² The immediate purpose has been stated in verses 4, 5: that we should be holy and blameless and that we should receive adoption into the family of God.

Relton Floyd (R. F.) Gates

A Man Who Walked with God

Bill Ascol

Relton Floyd (R. F.) Gates, Jr., one of God's most faithful witnesses, went home to be with the Lord Jesus Christ on Wednesday, February 2, 2005, at the age of 72. He was born September 17, 1932, in Jonesboro, Louisiana, to Relton Floyd and Tavia Golden Gates. He graduated in 1951 from Byrd High School in Shreveport and in 1954 from Centenary College with a degree in accounting.

Brother R. F. came to know the Lord at the 1951 Billy Graham Crusade in Shreveport, Louisiana. His call to the ministry quickly followed and so he pursued ministerial training, receiving a BD in 1957 and a ThM in 1958 from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. For fifteen years he pastored churches in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, and in 1966 formed the R. F. Gates Evangelistic Association, which included the "Men for Jesus" organization. From that time on, he ministered as a full time evangelist across the United States and in several foreign countries. In addition to his itinerant evangelistic ministries, he also served for the past twelve years as one of the pastors of the Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport. Brother R. F. was an original member of the Founders Conference Planning Committee and was greatly used by God to bless many pastors and congregations both through his preaching ministry at various Founders Conferences and in the pulpits of many Founders friendly churches.

R. F. was married to his loving wife of 52 years, Nancy McGregor Gates, of Shreveport. The Lord gave them three children, Timothy Gates and wife Valerie, of Fort Collins, Colorado; Kim Bonner of Shreveport; and Dan Gates and wife Brenda, of McKinney, Texas. He lived to see his children's children (eight of them) as well as his children's children's children (seven of them). The impact he made upon the lives of others will reverberate all the way into eternity.

I had the unspeakable privilege of meeting “Brother R. F.” in the late 1970s while I was serving on staff at the Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. Our meeting was a precious providence of God, who in His goodness and mercy brought into the life of this preacher one of the most truly godly men I have ever had the privilege of knowing. I often expressed my desire that the Lord would let us labor together in a shared ministry, not at all quite sure how God might bring such a situation to pass. In 1992 God did a wonderful thing in my life when He called me back to Shreveport to take up the pastorate of Heritage Baptist Church, a new congregation whose beginnings involved the regular exposure to the preaching ministry of my dear friend, Brother R. F. We were both set apart to the work at Heritage as co-elders and fellow-pastors. The twelve and a half years we spent together went by far too quickly and afforded me untold opportunities to learn from R. F. both by precept and example what the Scriptures meant by “walking with God.” I do not know of another person who always spoke with people about their souls, and almost always had a gospel tract to leave for them to read. He was driven by the burning desire to share Jesus Christ with others. My friend and fellow pastor, R. F. Gates, was truly a man who walked with God—living by faith in Jesus Christ and dying in faith.

Dr. Tom Nettles said of him, “Of all the people I have ever known, R. F. exhibited more thoroughly transparent joy in the presence of God than virtually anyone.” And now that joy has no doubt become exponential, since he who walked by faith for more than fifty years now worships by sight in the presence of the Lamb forever and ever.

Dr. Don Whitney, whose teaching and writing ministry has impacted the spirituality of young ministers across this nation, said, “Perhaps the most important and life-changing message I ever teach—both to seminary students and in the churches where I speak—is on praying through Scripture. And I trace the practice in my own life back to R.F.’s visit to our church on March 1-4, 1985. I still remember the turning point: he held up the Bible and said, ‘Use the prayer book!’” And use the “prayer book” he did. He practiced in prayer what he proclaimed from the pulpit.

R. F. was a master in turning a phrase and was gifted with the ability to make a penetrating observation or ask a disarming question. I wish that I had written down all the “Gatesisms” through the years. I will offer two as an example of his divine wit.

Concerning church members who tend to complain over petty matters, he would say, “I ask myself, ‘Now where would I fit that into the book of Acts?’”

Concerning church members who would act in a mean and selfish way toward others, he would say, “Did that person have to get saved to be that way, or could he (she) have been that way naturally?”

R. F. Gates, like Enoch, walked with God and then suddenly “was not,” for God took him. He will be missed, but, by God’s grace, we will join him in glory one day. ☹

It is with both joy and sadness that I respond to your note concerning our dear R. F.’s entrance into the presence of our Lord. Surely, there was no one that I have ever met that had more consciousness of desiring to see Christ than this dear brother. He gave us sweet tastes of Christ’s glory in the way he lived and ministered. I’m sure that the bitterness of the moment in losing such a close ally in ministry will be overtaken by joy in considering R.F.’s new estate. We see things only dimly but now our brother sees Christ face to face, seeing Him as He really is in all of His fullness and glory.

Phil Newton, Pastor
South Woods Baptist Church
Memphis, Tennessee

I have just received the news of the death of RF. I did not expect it to be so soon. I recall having one of my last meals in Shreveport with him in that restaurant. I have his photo on the laptop, which we took with the new digital camera. I will treasure it for life.
Your African cousin,

Conrad Mbewe, Pastor
Kabwata Baptist Church
Lusaka, Zambia

Thanks for letting us know about R. F. We have lost a good friend and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, he beat us to the throne.

Tommy French, Pastor
Jefferson Baptist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The Mighty Anthem

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,” says the apostle. “But how can I make melody in my heart?” asks somebody. “I don’t feel like singing.” My friend, consider him until you do! Ask the Spirit so to reveal him until you cannot keep silent. This is what you must do, says the apostle: “Be filled with the Spirit.” And as you are led by him, you will look at the Son and you will not be able to contain yourself. You will burst forth in praise.

Let those refuse to sing
That never knew our God:
But children of the heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad.
—Isaac Watts

Do you sing, or do you say, “Why didn’t you deal with the present international situation? The world’s in a terrible state. Why have you spent time telling us all these things we already knew?” I will tell you why: it is because you do not sing about them! And I sometimes wonder whether I should not go on just repeating this Sunday by Sunday until we are all singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. There is no greater insult to the person of Christ than to forget him because you are so interested in the state of the world, and so on. It comes near being the final blasphemy.

Let us not be among those who, in their ignorance, refuse to sing. Rather, we want to say, do we not,

Brightness of the Father’s glory
Shall thy praise unuttered lie?
Break, my tongue, such guilty silence,
Sing the Lord who came to die!
—Robert Robinson

—Excerpt taken from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Singing to the Lord* (Bryntiron, Wales: Bryntiron Press, 2003), 58–59.

News

Southern Baptist Founders Conference

The national conference for 2005 will be held July 12–15 at Riverbend Community Church in Ormond Beach, Florida. The theme is *The Gospel and the Family*. Keynote speakers will be Paul and David Tripp. This year we will also be offering sessions for youth and children. The youth sessions will be taught by Michael Harsch, who serves as Pastor of Students at Riverbend Community Church. The youth will focus on the theme: *We are Family: Ten Reasons God Gave Us Our Families*. Cindy Malott, the Children's Ministry Director at Riverbend will coordinate all of the children's sessions. The children will participate in a *Reformation Celebration: A Look at the Life of Martin Luther*.

For more information, call (386) 362-5239

Or see our website online: www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc_fl/

New Book by Dr. Phil Newton

Kregel Publications has just released a new book by Dr. Phil Newton: *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*

Dr. Phil Newton is the Pastor of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

A biblically functioning church requires intentional devotion to the New Testament model of church leadership. In this practical book, experienced pastor Phil Newton examines this biblical model of leadership by explaining the necessity of elder plurality and how it functions in a congregational setting. Newton presents the history of elder plurality in Baptist life from personal experience, expounds three biblical texts to shed light on the New Testament model for spiritual leaders, and provides answers to commonly asked questions.

The book is available from Founders Ministries at:
<http://www.founders.org/fpress/elders.html>

What Is the Gospel?

Founders Ministries is sponsoring a conference November 10–11, 2005 in the Tampa, Florida area. Speakers include Tom Ascol, Fred Malone, Roy Hargrave, Steve Kreloff and David Wooten. The conference will address foundational questions such as: "What is the Gospel?", "What is Evangelism?", "What is Preaching?", "What is the Church?", "What is Salvation?" and "What is Christianity?" It will conclude with a concert by Grammy Award winning musician, Steve Camp. The conference will be hosted by Lakeside Community Chapel in Clearwater, Florida.

For more information, call (877) 753-3341

Or visit online: www.sovereigncruises.org/founders/conference.htm

Coming this Fall 2005

To the Online Founders Study Center

Worship: with audio lectures by **Dr. Bruce Leafblad**

Dr. Bruce Leafblad is Professor of Church Music and Worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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This will be the first in a series of courses on systematic theology. Topics included in this first course include: the Place of Systematic Theology, Divine Revelation and the Authority of Holy Scripture.

Study theology under one of the preeminent theologians in America. Dr. Roger Nicole is a retired professor of theology emeritus at both Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

Intro to the Puritans: with audio lectures by **Dr. Mark Dever, Dr. J. I. Packer** and others

This course offers students a brief historical overview of the Puritans and their value to us today.

Preaching and Preachers: with audio lectures by **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

Learn from one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century as he shares his vision of preaching.

Register Early!

Fall orientation for students will open August 8, 2005.

Fall courses begin on August 22, 2005.

Founders Study Center
An Online Academy for Ministerial Training

For more information, please visit our website at
<http://study.founders.org>

Letters

To: Founders Ministries

Can you help me to understand the history of the *Baptist Faith and Mission*? Is this document receiving support from Southern Baptist Churches? When I visit Southern Baptist Churches I often hear a version of Robert Schuller's gospel of self esteem. The message often seems to be that Jesus really cares and can take your pain and hurts and make you feel a lot better. I often hear pastors call people forward to accept Jesus without ever mentioning who Jesus is or that He died for sin on the cross. When I visit SB churches who have communion it seems like the essential elements of the gospel are obscured. Coming forward for communion in a high church fashion seems to be popular instead of taking communion together as a church. Again the person and work of Christ seem to be woefully missing. When I read the *Purpose Driven Life*, on day 7, the author among other things seems to totally miss the importance of repentance, what genuine faith is, and seems to give a false security to any one who prays his prayer. A SB church in my local area just dropped its Baptist name in favor of "community." The pastor told me that the influence and age of denominations is over. These things seem to be in contrast to the biblical message in the new *Baptist Faith and Message*. Is the Founder's Movement agreeing to this document? Please help me to figure this out.

S.T. via email

Response from the Editor:

Thanks for your note. Your observations are, unfortunately, not isolated incidents. The *Baptist Faith and Message* was originally drafted in 1925 and revised in 1963, 1998 and 2000. It is a fair statement that contains some really good articles. It was based on the *New Hampshire Statement of Faith* of 1833.

It is hard to say how many Southern Baptist churches understand the *BF&M* or take it seriously. You may want to check out the survey related to the Abstract of Principles on our website:

http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/abs_surv.html

It gives at least some idea of what the readers of our website think is understood and being taught in Southern Baptist churches. You may also want to read an article I wrote entitled, "Confusing Times," also available online:

<http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ55/editorial.html>

The reason that Founders Ministries exists is to encourage believers and churches to recover the Gospel and see local congregations reformed according to the Word of God. The problems you have observed are part of the very concerns that make this work so vitally important in our day.

In Christ,
Tom Ascol

.....

Comment:

Your website is extremely helpful to use as a screening tool for speakers and evangelists. If they appear on your site, I know never to allow them anywhere near my congregation.

Besides your site educating your followers, it is an excellent place for those of us who find your brand of hyper-calvinism and elitism reprehensible to stay abreast of your plans to lead the uninformed astray.

The TULIP you wish to plant is one that I pray never appears in my garden. I would liken it to the tares among the wheat.

Dr. Stepansky via email

Response from the Editor:

Dr. Stepansky:

Thank you for your note. I am glad that you have found our website useful, even if it is in a negative way. Be assured that you are always welcome to view anything that we publish there—we have no secret chambers that we try to keep in the dark. Our convictions, concerns, purposes and goals have been clearly stated for more than twenty years so that anyone—whether he or she agrees with us or not—may know where we stand.

May the Lord bless you and prosper your labors as you preach Jesus Christ.

In Christ,
Tom Ascol
Exodus 20:16

.....

Dear Founders Ministries,

I am sending you \$50 in support of your efforts for the Lord. I wish I could send you more but I am retired and on a fixed income. ... I am very excited about all that God is doing with this reform work. I spent 50 years of my life not knowing or understanding the Doctrines of Grace—25 years as a deacon in a Southern Baptist Church. There is such a great need for change in our churches. There is so much need for printed material from our Reformed preachers and teachers. I have 7 grandchildren who will learn of the truth of God's grace. I pray for you folks daily! You are doing such a wonderful work.

In Christ,
T. H., GA

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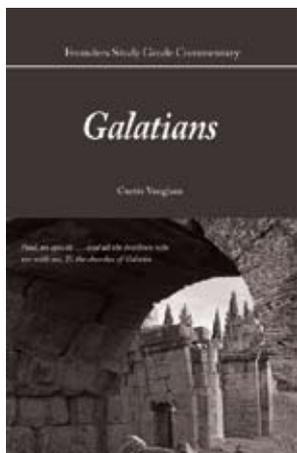
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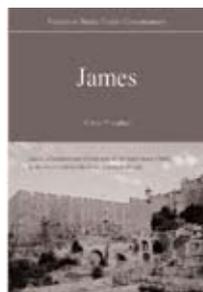
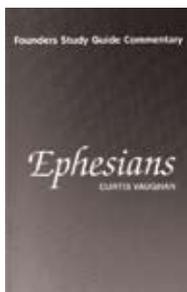
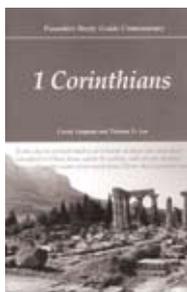
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Book Reviews

James R. White, *Scripture Alone*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2004. pb., 221 pages. List \$13.99

Reviewed by John Divito

Sola Scriptura (Latin for Scripture Alone) may have been the formal principle of the Reformation, but what does it have to do with evangelicals today? James White believes that this doctrine is continuously important—being essential for all true followers of Christ. As a result, he has written *Scripture Alone*, demonstrating the tremendous significance of this reformation principle. Written as an introduction for believers, he desires to reignite the church's passion for the Word of God.

To accomplish this task, White analyzes various aspects of Scripture. “Some of the subjects we have addressed in this work—inspiration, inerrancy, canon, exegesis, allegations of corruption and contradiction—are considered too difficult to be discussed in today's comfortable church. And yet if we do not put forth the effort to master these areas, we cannot claim to have a real and valid faith in the Scriptures” (215). Therefore, White addresses many topics necessary to become established in the sufficiency of Scripture.

His entire work is greatly beneficial. But there are two ways in which it is especially significant. First, White often utilizes fictional dialogues to define and demonstrate his points. In this way, the reader is pulled into a conversation, causing him to think through these issues in a more accessible way than normally allowed for in doctrinal study. While these dialogues may become overly technical at points (due to White's extensive interaction with those of other religions), they still provide unique insight into the matter under consideration.

In addition, White's treatment of the formation of the canon is especially valuable. Because “For many, the issue of the canon is the Achilles heel of scriptural sufficiency” (98), the author gives a clear and insightful overview of the canon. By dividing the canon into two aspects, canon 1 (the divine knowledge and understanding of the canon) and canon 2 (the human knowledge and understanding of the canon), he shows both the consistent nature of Scripture as well as the process of recognizing Scripture through the history of the church. By the end of the chapter, the

reader should be better equipped with an understanding of and appreciation for the canon of Scripture.

White has done contemporary evangelicalism a service by writing this book. In a time when biblical Christianity is being challenged from without as well as from within, this work can assist the reader in trusting and defending the sufficiency of Scripture. Parts of it may be challenging to read for some, but working through the author's arguments will prove itself worthwhile. As White maintains, this issue is simply too important to neglect. Thank God for the revelation He has given us in His Word! ☞

Anthony Chute, *A Piety Above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and Evangelistic Calvinism*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004. hb., 238 pages. List \$45.00

Reviewed by Ray Van Neste

In a day when increasing numbers of thoughtful people are questioning the value of continuing in the SBC it is encouraging to be reminded of some of our heroes of the past, men whose lives are an encouragement and whose ministries can be models for us today. Jesse Mercer is such a man, and Anthony Chute has done us a great service in providing this overview of his life and work, especially since the last (and only!) biography of Mercer was written in 1844.

This book, a revision of the author's PhD dissertation at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, draws extensively from church records and primary sources to provide a stimulating introduction to Mercer with an intentional eye towards how he can serve as a model for today. Chute states clearly his goal in writing this book in his preface.

I hope this study on the life and labors of Jesse Mercer will inform lay Baptists of their Calvinistic heritage, particularly as to how theological convictions informed practical areas of ministry. There was no such thing as an ivory tower on the frontier, but much can be said for those Baptist preachers who prized theological debate as crucial to ministerial formation. Also, historians who refer to early Baptists as possessing a "modified" Calvinism may find Jesse Mercer a challenge to their claim, as he consistently referred to himself as an "Old School Baptist" without at the same time becoming evangelistically impaired. Those who fear that a return to Calvinistic theology among Southern Baptists will sound the

death knell of missions may be surprised to discover that the missionary spirit that they now champion was birthed at a time when Calvin's understanding of salvation was in vogue. And it is hoped that those who appeal to the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention as examples of Calvinistic Baptists will carefully note the pitfalls into which Primitive Baptists fell and avoid them . . . (xiii)

Chute succeeds admirably in his goal. I found myself mining many rich lessons from the life of this early and influential Baptist leader. It is encouraging to read of a time when associations were centers of profitable theological discussion, when theology was considered crucial for the practice of ministry. It is instructive to find in Mercer a model of one who affirms God's sovereignty and leads the way in the mission enterprise, who is concerned about the excesses and errors of Finney and others in the Second Great Awakening but is unwilling to malign the whole movement. It is helpful to read of Mercer's leading of the church in the careful disciplining of her members.

Some representative quotations may help the reader get a glimpse of Mercer and ways this book can be helpful. Mercer (and most of his contemporaries) are examples of the need and usefulness of doctrinally substantive sermons, including the doctrines of grace. Silas Mercer, father of Jesse, speaking of election wrote:

And we believe it [election] to be a doctrine which God generally owns and blesses to the conviction and conversion of sinners, and comforting of his saints. . . . For since it has been so clearly preached in our parts, and insisted upon, the work of the Lord seems to flourish in a more powerful manner than before. (p. 21)

Mercer's own opinion is summarized by Chute, writing, "The doctrines of grace were not to be avoided, regardless of the tendency of some who misunderstood or overemphasized certain points." Mercer, himself wrote:

The doctrine of divine grace, according to eternal purpose, which God [sic] in Christ Jesus before the world began, is a doctrine according to Godliness; and when rightly held and taught, tends to promote comfort, zeal, and perseverance in all holy obedience, from a sense of gratitude; and in nowise interferes with the obligations and responsibilities of men; but when made a party question, and run into extremes, (to which controversy leads), it becomes a snare to many souls—a nurse of inaction, and a conductor to the ruins of Antinomianism. The opposite extreme should assiduously be guarded against—dwelling on practical religion, and insisting on the duties and obligations of man, without keeping in constant view their moral and guilty disability, and the sovereignty of God in affording salvation to them, as unworthy, helpless sinners, as di-

rectly tends to the bogs of Arminianism. The truth of the gospel, rightly held and taught, is that which turns men away from darkness to light, and the power of sin to serve the living God, by faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (p. 81)

Chute summarizes Mercer's view in a way that has much relevance to our work today, stating:

Jesse Mercer was no minimalist regarding the substance of evangelistic preaching. Rather, he advocated preaching from a Reformed perspective in which the doctrines of grace provided the foundation for exhortation to duty.... Preaching which, at the expense of sound doctrine, aimed solely at gaining converts could have the opposite effect than the one desired. If sinners were told that they could turn to God on their own then they would not deal with the real source of the problem—a rebellious heart. They would then experience frustration in their attempts to reform and thus become deaf to further gospel calls. (p. 80)

People today might wonder what the response to such preaching was, and Chute often provides us with first hand accounts of the response. One such account of one man's response to a sermon by Jesse Mercer stated:

Here was given such a view of the nature and ends of the atonement, as nearly entranced us all. For myself, though no enthusiast on such occasions, it was with difficulty I could sit still, or refrain from shouting aloud. Not that the old gentleman was so eloquent as some would call it, or that he was stormy; but on account of the majesty of his thought. (p. 30, n. 16)

May we have more preaching that is riveting due to the majesty of the thoughts contained in it!

Another listener at a different sermon by Mercer, wrote:

As Dr. Mercer proceeded to unfold God's sovereignty, man's depravity and utter helplessness, his need of divine assistance to exercise repentance and faith, I was enabled to see the subject in a new light. . . . He had been speaking of God's electing love. Just as he reached his conclusion, pausing for a moment, he suddenly exclaimed, 'This is the ground of all hope.' As he spoke, tears rolled down his venerable cheeks. The effect upon the audience was subduing. Evidently his meaning was this: Jesse Mercer would not have been saved if God had not called him with a holy calling, according to his eternal purpose and grace, given him in Christ Jesus before the world was. I could not fail to see that if this was true of Jesse Mercer, a fortiori it was true of me and everybody else. (p. 58)

This is true doctrinal, experiential preaching!

Lastly, since so many still believe that substantive preaching and passionate preaching are opposites, I include the following exhortation to fellow pastors which Mercer wrote for the state paper:

As ministers—have we been faithful? Have we been careful to declare the whole counsel of God—careful to make lucid and affectionate exhibition of divine truth? Have we been satisfied simply to present the truth to the minds of our hearers, or have we followed up our labors with earnest prayer, that God would bless us, and establish the work of our hands upon us? In short, have we been diligent in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord? Judging from the result of all our preaching, praying, and exhorting, we have good ground to conclude, that something has been lamentably wrong. Perhaps the solemn truths we have uttered, have not had the influence upon our own hearts, so much to be desired by every good minister of Jesus Christ. We may have been too professional. Our labors in the pulpit, and in other places, may have been regarded by us, too much as a matter of course. We have gone to our people, not as dying men; but, simply because it was expected we should meet them at the time appointed, and engage in certain modes of “bodily exercise,” under the color of religious devotion. Thus we may have performed our duties, as a task, in a cold, lifeless, fruitless manner. Now, if as ministers of the Gospel, we have been thus listless, and have not watered the seeds sown, with our tears, and earnestly besought the Most High to succeed our labors by his blessing, no marvel that sterility and drought have settled down upon our churches; that iniquity abounds, and that the love of many has waxed fearfully cold. (p. 107)

Space does not allow further exemplary citations, though many could be given on the need for ministerial education (as anti-intellectualism holds sway in many corners still today), concern about the Finney style invitation system, the necessity and value of church discipline, and the need for cooperation for the work of mission. Because this book is written in an accessible manner it can be given to a thoughtful lay person or pastor to challenge preconceived notions on a number of hot topics. This is a very useful book and I commend it warmly. 📖



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