

# The Founders Journal



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Contend  
for the  
Faith

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Cover by Kenneth Puls

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# The Founders Journal



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# Contend for the Faith

*Thomas K. Ascol*

The letter of Jude found in the back of the New Testament was written by the half brother of Jesus and brother of James. It is a letter of warning and exhortation. Oddly enough, it is not the letter that he intended to write. But it is the letter that Jude had to write. He explains in verse 3:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

There are two letters mentioned in this verse—the letter that he intended to write and the letter that he actually wrote. His desire was to write a warm, pastoral letter. But he was compelled to write a letter of strong exhortation and warning.

## **The letter that was not written**

The letter that was not written was going to be a warm, pastoral letter designed to build his readers up in the faith. Jude contemplated writing such a letter with an eager desire. This is what he means by being “diligent.” In other words, he was filled with a zealous concern for his recipients and that concern had motivated him to write them a pastoral letter.

This indicates that Jude obviously had a good relationship with his readers. He thought about them and wanted to encourage them. He desired to help them become more solidly grounded in God’s gracious salvation. To him they were “beloved.” Because of these close, pastoral ties Jude planned to write a letter that would be a

great encouragement to them. The content of that letter was going to be their “common salvation.”

Obviously, we do not have that letter, but it is not hard to imagine that it would have addressed the nature of salvation. Perhaps Jude planned to write about the wonders of justification or the mystery of regeneration. Maybe what he had in mind was the completeness of the atonement or the power of the resurrection.

Whatever the specific direction than he planned to pursue, Jude intended to write a letter in a leisurely, studied, pastoral fashion so that his readers would be encouraged by considering all that God had done for them in granting them salvation through Jesus Christ. That would have been a great letter to write—and a great letter to receive. But it is not the letter that we have here in the Bible.

## The letter that was written

The letter that we do have was born not out of a leisurely desire but out of a sense of urgency and necessity. “I found it necessary to write to you,” he says. Instead of edification, his purpose shifted to exhortation. The same pastoral love that fueled his desire to write a letter of warm devotion also inflamed his heart and mind to put that desire on hold for something of great urgency and importance. As Michael Green has written, “Christian love is no acquiescence in what others are doing; it is no substitute for conviction.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, true love emerges out of conviction.

The letter that Jude did write is a call not for reflection, but for action. Specifically it is a call to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” This action is what I want to focus on in this article. Jude declares that every Christian must be willing to contend earnestly for the faith.

## What is to be done?

What is it that Jude has in mind when he admonishes us to “contend earnestly for the faith?” The verb he employs means to struggle for or to fight for. It was used to describe the strenuous, even grueling effort that Greek athletes exerted in their competitions.

Jude uses it to call believers to stand firm on the truth of God's Word—energetically, forcefully, going to great lengths and at great pains, if necessary—in order to insist that His revealed truth is not compromised.

This is what he means by “the faith.” *The* faith. A very literal translation would read, “the once-for-all-having-been-delivered-to-the-saints faith.” This refers to faith not as believing but as that which is believed. Jude is referring to a recognized body of truth. This is that apostolic doctrine that united the early church (Acts 2:42).

The New Testament is quite clear in teaching that God has revealed truth to His church. In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul calls the church the “pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is the repository of God's truth. It is the place where God has chosen to put His revealed truth on deposit.

When Jude speaks of the faith that has been once-for-all-delivered to the saints, he is referring to the doctrinal propositions that define the Christian faith. He is speaking of propositional revelation. I know that in our day it is out of fashion to speak of revelation as consisting of propositions or truth statements. We are told today that revelation is personal, not propositional; that we should simply focus on Jesus, and not quibble over doctrine because God has revealed Himself in a person, not in truth statements—as if the two are mutually exclusive.

That is not the way the New Testament looks at it. Jesus made it very plain that the personal God reveals Himself in the truth statements of Scripture. When He refuted the Sadducees Jesus accused them of “not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Then He said, “Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’” (Matthew 22:29, 31–32a). “Have you not *read* what was *spoken* to you by God.” Jesus is here affirming that written Scripture is exactly what God spoke to them. God revealed Himself (spoke) in propositions (such that they can be read).<sup>2</sup>

This is also the way that our Lord's apostles understood revelation. They recognized the existence of a body of truth that must be

learned, believed, defended and passed down throughout the ages. Paul refers to this truth as the “traditions” in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (see also 2 Thessalonians 3:6). In 2 Timothy 1:13 he writes, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Obviously Paul had in mind a body of truth that he had taught Timothy. We may even have an outline of his “body of divinity” in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff.

The same perspective is in Jude’s mind when he exhorts his readers to stand up and fight for “the faith.” He is pleading with us to commit ourselves to the revealed truth of God that is given to us in His holy, infallible and inerrant Word, and to be willing to contend strenuously for it. In the words of the wise man, we are to “buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).

If we are to take Jude’s admonition seriously then we must not be deceived by those who would pit “Christ” against “doctrine” as if we can have one without the other. Such people are biblically ignorant and are attempting to tear apart that which God has joined together! “Keep your doctrine just give me Jesus!” That sounds very pious and spiritual. But it is actually deadly—it destroys biblical Christianity.

No one saw this more clearly than J. Gresham Machen, the great Presbyterian theologian of the last century. In his 1923 book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, he shows Liberalism is not simply another kind of Christianity, it is an altogether different religion from Christianity. He argues that liberalism and orthodoxy are not “two varieties of the same religion,” but in reality, “two essentially different types of thought and life.”

There is much interlocking of the branches, but the two tendencies, Modernism and supernaturalism, or (otherwise designated) non-doctrinal religion and historic Christianity, spring from different roots. In particular, . . . Christianity is not a “life,” as distinguished from a doctrine, and not a life that has doctrine as its changing symbolic expression, but

that—exactly the other way around—[Christianity] is a life founded on a doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

The faith that has been once for all delivered to the saints is the faith that has been revealed to us. It is the truth that has made Jesus Christ known to us. It is the truth that constitutes Christianity. Jude says that we must contend for it.

### Who is to do it?

Who is responsible for this kind of contending? Certainly pastors and elders are. Scripture says much about the responsibility of faithful shepherds to feed and lead the church in the truth of God. The qualifications for spiritual overseers include “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). But Jude is not writing primarily to elders or pastors. Rather, he addresses his letter to what we might call “ordinary believers” or “regular” church members.

Every believer receives this admonition because God’s truth belongs to the whole church and not exclusively to church leaders. The stewardship of truth most certainly is not restricted to professional theologians! Theology belongs to the church, not to the academy. Therefore, Jude charges the whole church to contend for the faith.

Paul demonstrates this same conviction in his letter to the Galatians. In the opening chapter he teaches us that all church members are responsible to guard the doctrinal purity of the gospel.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6–9).

Paul assumed that they would understand the gospel well enough to recognize when it was being perverted. And he calls on them to stand against those who would do so. In fact, Paul expected them to be so discerning about the gospel that even if an angel from heaven or an apostle of the Lord Jesus were to come preaching a different message, the members of those churches would recognize it and stand against it. Every church member has the responsibility to know and contend for the truth in this way.

One clear implication of this is that no faithful follower of Jesus Christ should support ministries where the gospel is being perverted. Believers should not pretend to be in agreement with those who reject the clear teachings of God's Word. We must contend for the faith. This is the call of God's Word to every Christian.

Brothers and sisters must acknowledge and joyfully embrace this responsibility that God Himself has laid on each one of us as followers of Jesus Christ. And those who are charged with the added responsibility of shepherding God's flock as elders and pastor-teachers must teach God's people to be involved in and to support the effort of contending for the faith.

### **Why must this be done?**

Why does Jude give such a strong exhortation? What provokes him to issue this charge? The reason is because heretics have entered the camp. People have come into the church and, according to verse 4, they have turned "the grace of our God into lewdness." In other words, they cheapen grace. They treat salvation by grace as a common, insignificant thing. They profess and teach that the grace that saves does not necessarily cause a person to live any differently from the way unbelievers live.

In addition, they deny "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (ESV). This is a very bold claim. Jude is saying that these people who have infiltrated the church and become accepted as part of the church have actually renounced Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. How have they done this? Well, it is obvious that they have not done so openly or defiantly. Otherwise, they would not have remained "unnoticed." Everyone would have recognized what they were doing

had they simply declared, “We deny Jesus Christ and turn the grace of God into lewdness.”

Instead, these are people who come in casually, nonchalantly. They profess Christ, but they are not passionate for Him. They claim to be His followers, but will not bow unconditionally to His sovereign Lordship over their lives. They take a cafeteria-style approach to His teachings and commands.

The Bible regularly warns against the subtle emergence of false teachers among the people of God.<sup>4</sup> Jesus warned that such spiritual terrorists will infiltrate the ranks of God’s people as wolves in sheep’s clothing. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that from within their own ranks men would emerge who would prove to be savage wolves, teaching perverse things (Acts 20:29–30). They look good, sound good and are accepted by the church. But their teaching—their misrepresentation of the faith once for all delivered to the saints—wreaks havoc on the people of God.

As a pastor I have witnessed this very thing more times than I care to remember. It is always painful to see the spiritual carnage that is left in the wake of those who propagate wrong views of the faith. People are spiritually damaged by the teachings and counsel of those who misconstrue the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because this is true, we must be diligent in our duty to contend for the faith.

But there is a second, more ultimate reason that we must heed Jude’s admonition to contend for the faith. We cannot afford to neglect this because of what is at stake. If the body of doctrine that constitutes “the faith” is lost, then salvation will be lost. Jude states that these infiltrators “turn” the grace of God into licentiousness. The point is that they transpose God’s grace, they use it as an argument to justify lewdness. Yet, the Bible teaches that we cannot have both God’s grace and licentiousness.

Paul writes in Titus 2 that the “grace of God that brings salvation” teaches us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age” (vv. 11–12). Hebrews 12:14 says that without holiness, no one will (savingly) see the Lord. To depart from the biblical gospel that makes men pursue holiness through faith in Jesus Christ is to miss the grace of God. So,

what is at stake is eternal salvation. Contending for the faith is not a mere academic exercise—it is a fight for life and death.

If we care about the souls of men and women we must be willing to contend for the faith that has been once for all delivered to the saints. We must stand against those who subtly come into the camp and promote a teaching in the name of salvation that does not take seriously the Bible's teaching on holiness. What such false teachers advocate is not biblical Christianity. Jude recognizes this and therefore calls on us to defend the doctrines of our faith for the sake of the gospel itself.

Make no mistake, there is no salvation if Jesus Christ is denied even though His Name is invoked. Everyone who talks about Jesus Christ is not necessarily preaching Jesus Christ. People who teach that you can be saved by God's grace and contentedly live immoral lives or who think that you can be saved by Jesus Christ while denying His Lordship over their lives are lost. They will go to hell believing those lies and unless they are refuted will take others along with them.

So do not confuse the call to contend for the faith with an invitation to engage in academic pursuits. Jude does not encourage us to participate in theoretical speculations. Rather, he commands us to stand for truth so that the salvation that God gives to sinners will not be hidden from those who desperately need it.

## Conclusion

Contending for the faith is the duty of every believer. It is not optional. Neither is it easy. To take this admonition seriously opens you to many temptations. Most notably, it carries with it the temptation to develop a crusty, pugilistic attitude. It is very possible in the midst of contention to forget the reason you are in the fight. For a Christian, it is never simply to win arguments. Rather, our contending must always be for the purpose of winning people.

There is also the danger of developing a love for the fight. Some people naturally enjoy the vigor of a good debate. Yet, Christians ought to contend for the faith not with excitement about the fight but with zeal mixed with grief and horror and love that are born out

of the realization of what is at stake. Robert E. Lee's sage observation applies to believers who contend for the faith: "It is well that war is so terrible, lest we grow too fond of it."

As God gives us grace, ability and opportunity, each follower of Jesus should aspire to be like Bunyan's "Valiant-for-Truth." This noble character in *Pilgrim's Progress* can teach us much about the duty and dangers of contending for the faith. When we first meet him he has his sworn drawn and his face is bloody from battle. He tells of being attacked by three enemies who threatened him with three options: 1. He could become one of them, 2. He could go back where he came from, or 3. He could die on the spot. Since he would not be intimidated to leave the path to the Celestial City, he was forced to fight. The names of his enemies were "Wild-head," "Inconsiderate" and "Pragmatic" (which in the 17th century meant officious, meddlesome, or dogmatic in a dictatorial way).

With these names Bunyan is teaching us that the greatest enemies that a man who is Valiant-for-Truth will ever face are the enemies that reside within his own heart. What is the answer to the temptations that every contender for the faith inevitably faces? Pull back? Become less strident about the faith once delivered to the saints? Downplay conviction or doctrine? No! The answer is to become as valiant for the truth being worked out in your own heart as you are for it being preserved and proclaimed in the church. Go hard after the application of truth in your own life.

John Piper has somewhere said, "If it is worth fighting over, it is worth rejoicing over!" I agree. The faith that we contend for is the faith that has given us Jesus Christ. It is that which has revealed to us the forgiveness of sins in Him. It is that which assures us of an eternal home in heaven. So as we fight, we must do so joyfully and never let our commitment to contending become a cover for mean-spirited rancor.

May our Lord call out all who will live and serve as such contenders! ☞

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude, an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprinted 1994), 170.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to James White for pointing out the significance of this verse in demonstrating the propositional nature of revelation.

<sup>3</sup> From "Christianity in Conflict" in *Selected Shorter Writings*, J. Gresham Machen, edited by D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2004), 563-64.

<sup>4</sup> See Green, 173.

**W**e admire a man who was firm in the faith, say four hundred years ago... but such a man today is a nuisance, and must be put down. Call him a narrow-minded bigot, or give him a worse name if you can think of one. Yet imagine that in those ages past, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and their compeers had said, "The world is out of order; but if we try to set it right we shall only make a great row, and get ourselves into disgrace. Let us go to our chambers, put on our night-caps, and sleep over the bad times, and perhaps when we wake up things will have grown better." Such conduct on their part would have entailed upon us a heritage of error. Age after age would have gone down into the infernal deeps, and the pestiferous bogs of error would have swallowed all. These men loved the faith and the name of Jesus too well to see them trampled on...

It is today as it was in the Reformers' days. Decision is needed. Here is the day for the man, where is the man for the day? We who have had the gospel passed to us by martyr hands dare not trifle with it, nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors who pretend to love it, but inwardly abhor every line of it... Look you, sirs, there are ages yet to come. If the Lord does not speedily appear, there will come another generation, and another, and all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to His truth today. We have come to a turning point in the road. If we turn to the right, mayhap our children and our children's children will to that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to His Word.

– C. H. Spurgeon, quoted in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Iain Murray (reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 96.

# Preaching and The Doctrine of Election

*Charles M. Blake*

The doctrine of election is often slandered as the enemy of missions, evangelism and a passionate faith in Jesus Christ. Few things could be further from the truth. In reality, this doctrine is a great motivation to missions and evangelism and it leads to a great love and joy in Christ. In addition, the doctrine of election brings great comfort to the soul of the minister as he preaches the gospel.

## Stating the Doctrine

Calvin sets the importance of knowing and understanding God's purposes in election when he writes the following:

We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.<sup>1</sup>

Predestination is God's marking off beforehand individuals to their eternal destination.<sup>2</sup> Hidden in the councils of eternity past, before we did anything, God determined what our eternal state would be. The first time we hear such a thought, it can be difficult to grasp (let alone accept). Nonetheless, this is the clear teaching of the Scriptures. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."<sup>3</sup> Far from being a horrible decree, this is the decree of grace. It is the foundation of our salvation through faith in Christ.

Concerning election, J. L. Dagg writes, “All who will finally be saved, were chosen to salvation by God the Father, before the foundation of the world, and given to Jesus Christ in the Covenant of Grace.”<sup>4</sup> The elect are a definite number of people chosen by God according to His own free grace. He was not moved by anything in them (seen or foreseen). Only the elect will be saved. But, the elect *will* be saved.

Jesus Himself said, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). In His high priestly prayer He said, “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours” (John 17:9). Clearly, Jesus believed in election and was moved to prayer by it. He was certain that His Father would accomplish all His purposes.

### A Word about Preaching

Preaching is the main task of the preacher. This is so because normally, by God’s design, saving faith is “brought into being through the preaching of the Word.”<sup>5</sup> Further, as the Confession goes on to say, such saving faith is increased and strengthened through preaching. William Perkins, in his *The Art of Prophesying* writes:

There are two parts to prophecy: preaching the Word and public prayer. For the prophet (that is, the minister of the Word) has only two duties. One is preaching the Word, and the other is praying to God in the name of the people.<sup>6</sup>

God, in His sovereign governance of the world, has decided to use men to share the gospel and be the instrument of bringing others to faith in Jesus Christ. As such, preaching is a great privilege. There is no greater or higher calling on earth. On the other hand, preaching is also an awesome responsibility. We who are earthen vessels are given the task of calling fallen men, women, and children to believe. This they can only do if God in His sovereign grace

should grant them faith and repentance. From this perspective, we must ask, “Who is sufficient for such things?”

## How Election Helps Preaching

As we rejoice at our calling and tremble at the responsibility, the doctrine of election offers six helps to the soul of the minister as he preaches the truth.

First, the doctrine of election assures the preacher of “success.” As the preacher proclaims the great truths of the Scripture and beckons sinners to throw themselves upon the mercy of Christ Jesus, he knows that the elect will respond with faith and repentance. Certainly, no man knows how many are numbered among the elect in the congregation of those who hear him preach. Nonetheless, any man may know that the elect will come to faith in Christ, for this has been decreed from before the foundation of the world.

Election keeps the preacher proclaiming the unadulterated truth of God during the dry seasons. When others turn aside to new measures or to a new message, the gospel preacher will plod on, proclaiming justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. He stays the course knowing that the elect will come to faith in Christ.

Second, the doctrine of election causes the preacher to be in awe of God. It is amazing to consider that God in His great mercy has chosen a man to be counted among the redeemed. It is humbling to consider that Christ Jesus has shed His blood for your salvation. It is overwhelming to consider that the Holy Spirit has mercifully applied the work of Christ to your soul. In addition to such awe-inspiring thoughts, the preacher is confronted with the fact that God has not only called him to faith in Christ but also has called him to be the herald of that good-news to other fallen human beings. It is a wonder that God uses sinners to bring others to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

As with salvation, so with a man’s call to preach, this decision is hidden in the eternal counsel of God. A man is not called to preach because of his goodness. He is not called to preach because he is

the best specimen of Christianity available. Oh, no! He is called to preach because God in His mercy has determined to call him. As we read of Jeremiah's call and Paul's call, this divine decision is made before we are born (Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15).

Third, the doctrine of election brings freedom and joy to the preacher as he carries out his gospel task. In order to see the freedom and joy, all one need do is to consider the implications of preaching if there were no doctrine of election. Without election, who would dare preach? Without this glorious, God-honoring doctrine, the preacher would have no assurance that anyone would be saved. Under such a misunderstanding, the preacher would never have any confidence in the efficacy of the truth he was sent to proclaim.

On the other hand, if for some reason, the preacher did begin to preach, how could he ever stop? If you take away the doctrine of election, then the salvation of the hearer to some extent relies upon the preacher. He must be clear enough, engaging enough, comprehensive enough, or some other thing enough. Certainly, no honest man could ever believe that he has what it takes to convince and convert a sinner apart from the election of God. Under such pressure, the preacher would not be able to stop preaching until everyone present believed—or at least until everyone present gave a verbal consent to the message.

However, when a man believes the Bible and hence the doctrine of election, then there is great joy and freedom in the act of preaching. With a biblical view of salvation, the preacher is better able to know his duty as well. The preacher is responsible for proclaiming the gospel. He is to open the biblical text and make clear, piercing application to the hearts and minds of his hearers. The results, whether of faith and repentance or sneering and jeering, are in God's hands. The response of faith or rejection is God's responsibility—not the preachers. So, at the end of the day, if the preacher has been true to the Word and clear in his presentation, then he can sleep soundly knowing he has done what he has been commissioned to do.

Within any gathering of people, the likelihood is great that some are elect and some are reprobate. The elect will come to faith in God's time and God's way. Perhaps it will please God to bring them to faith during this proclamation of the truth. The reprobate will

not come to faith. They will be passed over and left in their sin. The distinction and division between the two groups is hidden within the eternal council of God. So, the preacher proclaims the truth and leaves the results with God.

Fourth, the doctrine of election guides the prayers of the preacher. We have confidence to pray for the salvation of the men, women, and children that we know because God has invited us to make such petitions. As we look out into our community, we do not know everyone who lives around us. As evangelists and servants of social ministries, we reach out into our community seeking to be used of God to bring people to Christ. But as men of prayer, in our prayer closets and studies, we do not have the names of everyone who needs our intercession. So what can we do? We can pray the doctrine of election.

We can ask God to bring His elect to faith in Christ. We can ask that it would please our Heavenly Father to use the message we are working on to be the means of bringing one or more of His chosen ones to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We can pray that the little words and conversations we have throughout the day will push God's elect toward Christ and redemption. In other words, we ask that God would bring to pass in time that which He has decreed in eternity concerning the salvation of the people who live in our community.

Fifth, the doctrine of election brings a blood-earnestness to the proclamation of the gospel. On the surface, this may not appear to be the case. For many will hear of the doctrine of election and reprobation and say if that is so, then there is nothing to be done. But such reasoning is false, dangerous, damnable, and close to heretical. The fact of the matter is that there are men, women, and children, who hear us each time we open our mouths who will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. We will give an account to our God and Savior for the way we preached.

Jeremiah warns, "Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness" (48:10a, ESV). It is a great privilege to be called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The privilege also carries great responsibility. But along with the warning against negligence, the doctrine of election brings great promise and comfort.

We can be bold in proclaiming the truth. We do not have to back off for fear that if we offend a man and he refuses to hear the gospel again, then we are responsible for his damnation. Oh no. If we have told the truth, then his blood is on his head. And so with boldness and conviction, we point our listeners to Jesus Christ and the eternal life that He grants to everyone who believes in Him. Today is the day of salvation. Since it is, we demand faith of our listeners.

Finally, the doctrine of election brings great praise to God. At the end of the day, the preacher knows that anyone who professed faith under his ministry did not do so because of him. The preacher will not pat himself on the back for the number of people he led to Christ or saw profess faith or that he baptized. But he will praise God for each one of them as he petitions the throne of grace to keep and hold those men, women, and children near the cross of Christ. God is to be glorified for the way in which He allowed the preacher to participate in bringing the eternal decree to bear in time.

## Conclusion

The doctrine of election succors the soul of the preacher as he carries out his God-given task. In times of discouragement, it brings the promise of “success.” In times of pride in our accomplishments, it counters with humility. And everywhere along the way, it keeps the preacher cognizant of the great end of his task: The Glory of God Alone! ☞

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3:21:1 (921).

<sup>2</sup>Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 272.

<sup>3</sup>Unless noted, all Scripture comes from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>4</sup>J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 305.

<sup>5</sup>*A Faith to Confess: The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. Rewritten in Modern English*, (Leeds: Cary Publications, 1975), 14.1 (36).

<sup>6</sup>William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (1592; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 7.

# Musings On Church Planting

*Phil A. Newton*

**S**o, you're thinking about planting a church. That's a great idea! You're not alone. Aspiring to establish a new church is a good and necessary work, as we join others through the centuries in the regular exposition of Scripture, the development of a disciplined body of believers, and the right practice of Christ's ordinances for His church. But before you go too far, let's consider a few issues that might help your plans.

## Evaluating the Reasons

It is important to evaluate your reasons for wanting to plant a church. I'm always encouraged to hear men express a desire to plant a church. Yet, I realize that in every case, the motives may be less than appropriate to begin such a noble task. Ask yourself some searching questions: Is my desire to plant a church simply a reaction to being wronged in another pastoral setting? Am I angry or bitter over the way that I've been treated and assume that planting a church will avenge my hurt? Am I secretly (maybe even unconsciously) hoping to "kick sand" in some opponents' eyes by planting a new church in their neighborhood? Have others convinced me to plant a church because of their reaction to previous church hurts? Do I have a genuine burden from the Lord for planting a church? Is there a need for planting a church in my area? Am I doing this for convenience or because I recognize a genuine need for a new work in my area?

Some of these questions may be unsettling. But consider what church planting involves: you are seeking to establish an outpost for God's kingdom in the world (1 Peter 2:4-10); you are seeking

to develop a body of regenerate members who will live in unity and mutual trust (1 Peter 1:22–23; Colossians 3:10–17); you are seeking to be salt and light in your community (Matthew 5:13–16); you are seeking to baptize disciples and invite believers to the sanctity of the Lord’s Table (Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 22:19–20). While such a work is noble and necessary, it is still a difficult work. Will it be made more difficult due to mixed motives that underlie the rationale for planting the church?

## Learning the Right Lessons

What have you been learning about the church and pastoral ministry? In all likelihood, you have already walked through varied church experiences. You may have been a senior pastor seeking to lead a church through theological reformation, and in the process, you were shown the door. Sometimes the appropriate move is to plant a church built upon a solid theological foundation. Consequently, your motivation for church planting increased! Yet even with this, it is vital that you do not jump into a new church start as a reaction to those rejecting biblical theology. It may be that their reaction has become a divine springboard for launching you into planting a church. However, even with such a God-directed motive, learning lessons from previous experiences will prove indispensable for the new church.

It would be helpful to make a list of the things that you have learned about yourself, local churches, pastoral work, pragmatism v. biblical practice, church leadership, decision-making, leading worship, and relationships that have come out of your past experience in pastoral ministry. This is important, especially in thinking through what you would have done differently, why you would have done it differently, what you would have done precisely the same way, what you could have done differently without compromising truth and perhaps ameliorated some of the difficulties in your situation. In many respects, when you are at the starting point of beginning a church, you have been handed a gift—that of stopping and thinking about church ministry in a new light. Step back and take a fresh look at the church from a biblical perspective. Recommended books

to simulate your thinking include Mark Dever's *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004, expanded edition) and Philip Ryken's *City on a Hill: Reclaiming the Biblical Pattern for the Church in the 21st Century* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003). These are good starters for thinking about the church and how you need to direct your energies. A couple more books to help you think through on your own role as the pastor are Thomas K. Ascol, editor, *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004) and John Armstrong, editor, *Reforming Pastoral Ministry: Challenges for Ministry in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). These books may help sharpen your thinking in evaluating your ministry as you begin a new church.

Rather than rely on your memory from the things you read and evaluate, take the time to spell out in writing your own understanding of the church. Lots of strange ideas float about the evangelical airwaves these days, so take no chance on being misunderstood. Write your own statement on the theology of the local church and pastoral ministry. Out of this you might also pen a philosophy of pastoral ministry statement that clarifies how you think the shepherds in the church are to function.

## Ah, Yes, Finances!

Church planting is a great idea until finances are considered. Unfortunately, many superb ideas have been shattered due to lack of finances. You may find this to be the most difficult thing in getting started in planting a church, especially one built upon a reformed theological foundation. Some church planters begin with only their own family. Others have a few other families or individuals interested in speculating on a new church. Be forewarned: not everyone that talks about planting a new church is willing to put his money where his mouth is! You will need to outline some of the initial and projected costs for beginning. You will need a regular meeting place, chairs, tables, equipment for childcare, hymnals or song sheets, printed materials, some type of sign to announce your location, and maybe even a few spot ads in your local newspaper to let the community know about the church. And what about your

personal financial needs? Depending on the size of the initial core group, you may find bi-vocational ministry to be a necessity as you begin your efforts. Are you willing to do this for the sake of planting a new church? Here's where you will need to make much use of plural leadership in the church.

The best approach to church planting originates out of the burden and support of another church or churches. Here you begin with a natural financial and accountability base. A sponsoring church may supplement the core group's gifts and even take care of some of the major needs, such as paying for temporary meeting space or providing the church planter's salary. If you are burdened to plant a church in a particular area, contact other churches in the region that might be open to discussion as a partner in the work. Your local association or state convention office might also be willing to pitch in with much needed finances for the early months. Beyond this, you might network with other like-minded churches outside of your area that share your burden for a new church.

## Dialoging with Your Core Group

Assuming that both you and the others that want to join you have a similar burden to plant a church, dialogue on what you believe about the Scriptures, the gospel, the local church, etc. so that you know you are in agreement on the essentials of the Christian faith. Be careful of presuming that everyone is on the same page theologically. Some have good hearts but poor understanding of foundational doctrines. Others have a theological agenda in church planting that may run contrary to your own understanding of Scripture. Open dialogue is essential with your core group. Put everything on the table. Write a doctrinal statement or adopt one that is closest to your group's theological convictions. Out of this, develop a philosophy of church ministry statement that assures the entire group agrees concerning what the church is to be and how it is to function. Since with any new church start, core members come from varied backgrounds, it is important to develop some kind of statement about church polity. You need to work through the questions: how is the church governed? Who are the church's leaders? How are they to lead or

rule? How are decisions made in the church? How does one become a member of the church? What are the expectations of members? You will find some help in Mark Dever, editor, *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform [now, 9Marks Ministries], 2001), Mark Dever, *A Display of God's Glory: Basics of Church Structure* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), and Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005). You will also want to avail yourself of some excellent articles on the 9Marks Ministries [[www.9marks.org](http://www.9marks.org)] website that deal with the church and leadership. Print selected articles and pass them among the core group to read, reflect upon, and discuss.

## When to Start

Project a reasonable timeframe for beginning the church. I am amazed at those who announce one day their intentions to begin a church's first service the next week! In God's wisdom, upon the conception of a child, nine months normally pass before he/she is fully developed and ready for public involvement. That's a pretty good timeframe for birthing a new church, as well! Your situation may vary, but I think that it is safe to assume the need for 6-12 months for planning, preparation, prayer, and working out the details for a new church. You will probably meet for Bible study and discussion for several months before hanging your shingle out that a new church has begun. I also recommend that you pay attention to the time of year that you are beginning your new church. The summer months tend to make a fragmented beginning since so many people travel during that time. From Thanksgiving to Christmas also seems to be rocky times for new churches to get off the ground. One new church start in a university community waited until the start of the school year in September before launching their public ministry. My own church began on Easter Sunday; others have started around the first of the New Year.

Waiting time is not wasted time. Lay the groundwork for the church by wisely training your core group in the Scripture,

evangelism, church ministry, church polity, discipleship, etc. You can also use this time to begin to spread the word that you will begin a new Southern Baptist Church on \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday. During the months that precede your first public Sunday, make full use of personal contacts, interviews and articles in the local newspaper or radio interviews to get the word out in the community. Design flyers that catch the eye and clearly convey your intentions for beginning a new church in the area. Your goal must be to let the community know that a new church will be starting on such-and-such a date.

Assuming that you intend to establish a church that is theologically reformed, you will need to communicate this in the community without being manipulative, resorting to crass methods, or appearing to be “in-your-face” with your approach. Start on the positive note, that you are seeking to begin a new church that emphasizes expository preaching, God-centered worship, historic Baptist doctrine, mission opportunities, Christian discipleship, and other distinctions. The fact is, as one planting a reformed church, your great goal is not to hoist a Geneva flag but to be biblical, through and through. Announcing the start of a “Five-Point Calvinistic, London-Baptist-Confessing, Historic-Charleston-Association-Minded, Hymn-Singing-Only, No-Compromising Southern Baptist Church,” may close many more doors than it opens! If your goal in planting a church is to reach only those who have already come to terms of agreement with reformed theology, then maybe you ought to stop before you begin. While there may be need for such a church, it seems that a better goal is to be faithful in teaching others, even those with an indiscriminating theology. You are seeking to reach unbelievers with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are also seeking to be a haven for Christians that have grown tired of the circus-sideshowes that mark many churches. Some of these Christians do not know reformed from non-reformed theology, but they are hungry for God’s Word—and teachable. Be careful that you do not block their visit to your church by the use of too many buzz-terms that might put them off before they have the chance to realize that you only desire to faithfully teach the Scripture and lead others in following Christ.

## By All Means, Be Flexible!

No church is ideal. You will have to make some adjustments and maybe operate outside your own level of comfort, and so will your core group. You will have to make the most of temporary space. Yes, there will be inconveniences and adversities. You may even find it necessary to meet at out-of-the-ordinary times. But make the most of it. View it as an ongoing challenge and a chance to build the unity of the body as you labor together in Christ's name. At the start, you may not be able to have a full-blown, typical church schedule. For that matter, you may not ever need to have the typical schedule. Focus on the essentials: worship, exposition, teaching and training disciples, prayer, leadership development, building relationships, local outreach, and missions. This may mean that you use a local school or daycare or funeral home or theater or civic building or unoccupied house or Jewish community center or Seventh Day Adventist Church to get started. You will likely spend plenty of time in one another's home. Invest in people rather than buildings. While a good meeting place will be important, never let it overshadow the relationships that you are building with others in the body of Christ.

### Conclusion

A few years after our church began, an eager seminary student asked me the most important word that I had learned in church planting. Without hesitation, I replied, "Details!" With that in mind, let me close with a few details or priorities for you as the pastor of a new church: preach, teach, pray, lead, endure, and pay attention to details!

Do not attempt to be a one-man show. Engage others in the work of planting a new church. Call upon them to stand with you upon the faithful promises of Christ in the gospel. Exemplify in practice what you are teaching in precept. Keep growing personally, learning from others, and aiming for the glory of Christ in all things. ☞

# Book Reviews

Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land, A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*, Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003. 126 pages.  
\$14.99. ISBN 080241121-5

Reviewed by Paul Tautaes

Occasionally a new book on preaching demands our fullest attention. Steven Lawson's *Famine in the Land* is one of these. If you are a pastor, you may be thinking, "With all the books about preaching that I already have on my shelves, why do I need another?" The answer is: because this book will go straight to your heart and reignite a passion for the primary task to which God has called you—expository preaching. Lawson's book has done for me what John Piper's *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* did ten years ago. It brought me before God in worship for the gift of His Word and the immeasurable privilege of pulpit ministry.

Written with deep conviction, this thin book (126 pages) is comprised of material that originally appeared as four sequential articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra*. However, this is not merely an academic treatment of the subject, but rather a passionate call for clear exposition toward the goal of Christ-like application.

What also makes this book unique is its expository approach to the subject of Bible exposition. In other words, each chapter is actually exposition about exposition. In the first chapter, the author unveils the priority of biblical preaching as modeled in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. He writes, "Acts 2:42–47 headlines the priority of biblical preaching. The apostles' teaching ignited this first congregation and it will do the same today in churches that are committed to biblical exposition" (50).

Chapter Two is an exposition of the book of Jonah that compels us to be courageous messengers. Lawson contends, "One God-called man armed with one God-sent message, committed to one

God-prescribed method—preaching—is *always* sufficient for *any* situation” (62).

In the third chapter, the reader is drawn into the post-exilic ministry of Ezra, which serves as a challenging model of personal obedience and Word-saturated teaching that grows out of diligence in the pastor’s study. This, Lawson says, is the defining mark of all true expositors.

In the fourth and last chapter, the author explains Paul’s clarion call to young Timothy to be “absorbed” in the work of preaching, an all-consuming preoccupation (1 Timothy 4:13–16). He writes, “Biblical preaching is like giving birth to a baby every week or sometimes, twice or three times a week, giving that great pain is associated with the delivery of both.... The rigors of exposition drains the entire man—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually” (p 120).

I urge my fellow pastors to get a copy of this book as soon as possible and then block out half a day early in the week, go to the local library, or some other quiet place, turn off your cell phone, and read and meditate and pray for Holy-Spirit-transformation to begin in your pulpit. This is the need of the hour, for the sad reality is that there is a famine in our land. ☪

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Peter Grainger, *Firm Foundations: 150 Examples of how to Structure a Sermon*, Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2003, pb. 256 pages. \$17.99. ISBN 1-85792-678-1

Reviewed by Ray Van Neste

This book is primarily a compilation of sermon outlines from Peter Grainger, the current senior pastor of Charlotte’s Chapel, Edinburgh. Outlines of sermons from 14 different series covering various portions of Scripture are included. The series range from consecutive chapters (e.g., Revelation 1–3, Psalm 120–134) to thematically related passages (“Encounters with Jesus,” selections

from the Gospels), to character studies (e.g., John the Baptist, David) to complete books (e.g., John's Gospel, 2 Corinthians). The breadth of coverage is a striking element of the book giving ideas about approaching a vast range of genres in various ways, all explicitly expositional. The opening notes for each series also list commentaries and studies which the author has found particularly helpful. The book concludes with a sample sermon, a full manuscript of a sermon on Revelation 2:1–7.

In addition to the bulk of the book, Grainger begins with a six page essay entitled, "Preparing to Preach" where he lays out his basic approach to sermon preparation. He gives good basic advice and is careful to note that there may be various ways to approach the task within the same theological framework. He is clear in his call for exegetical, expositional preaching.

Perhaps the most endearing part of the book to this reviewer was the Foreword by Ian Balfour, the current Secretary of the Church (a position of significant lay leadership in Scottish Baptist churches). In this foreword Mr. Balfour relates the history of the church tracing the history of committed biblical exposition. This history is inspiring as one considers the influence of this church through the years. This account alone is enough to inspire us to uphold the place of lively expositional preaching.

In the end, I would say this book is interesting but not a must buy. The greatest value in my opinion is its testimony to a blessed expositional ministry. I do not find sermon outlines themselves terribly helpful in sermon preparation, and I encourage preachers to spend their time digging for themselves. As a help at the final stages of sermon preparation, the usefulness of this book would be enhanced by including in the Table of Contents not only the series title but the passages of Scripture which are covered. 🍀

Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism: Old Truths for a New Awakening*, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005, pb. 226 pages. ISBN 0-85151-901-6

Reviewed by Mack Tomlinson

It is always very profitable to read any book by Iain Murray. This one is no exception. Every minister or Christian worker should read everything he has ever written. Accordingly, I could wish that every preacher, pastor, missionary, and Christian worker could have this newest title placed in their hands.

*The Old Evangelicalism* consists of addresses Mr. Murray gave at various conferences around the world over the last thirty years. Particularly, the content that made up these messages consists of a number of fundamental truths that deal with doctrinal and experimental subjects related to the great themes of salvation and the gospel.

What truths are we speaking of? Murray says, “Sin, regeneration, justification by Christ’s righteousness, the cross and the love of God, assurance of salvation—these are the truths that once thrilled churches and changed nations. They are the message that ‘turned the world upside down.’ Yet where evangelicalism continues to affirm these truths, without such results, it is often assumed that she must have new needs that cannot be met without something new. Hence the call for change, and such words as ‘mere doctrine is not enough’.”

No one in our generation writes on these subjects with any more depth and clarity of understanding than Mr. Murray. His help is simply superb for both ministers and Christians in general to understand Christian truth in its splendor and richness.

Chapter one is entitled, “Preaching and Awakening: Facing the Main Problem in Evangelism.” The main problem, argues Murray, is the lack of both the fear of God and conviction of sin. Quoting from the 1859 revival in Scotland: “The one deep dominant note was an overpowering sense of sin.” Murray convinces the reader that “times of revival are invariably times of widespread spiritual concern and that concern is ever related to a recovery of the fear of

God.” This is surely greatly missing in our modern evangelism and gospel message. Who preaches regularly to produce the fear of God in the hearts of people? The initial need in evangelism is not to win acceptance for Christ, or as is said in America, get someone to make a decision for Christ. Rather, the goal ought to be preaching for the results of divine regeneration and conviction of sin. It is preaching to the heart, preaching to the conscience, Murray argues, that produces true conviction and brings about true conversion.

The book continues to take up the further next two subjects of true conversion and Christ our Righteousness—the grand doctrine of justification. The doctrine of conversion is addressed in light of the preaching and ministry of C. H. Spurgeon. The doctrine of true and biblical conversion has been all but lost in the modern church world. And the doctrinal content of conversion is strange language to many professing Christians in our day. Spurgeon, commenting on the nature of conversion, said: “In all true conversions there are points of essential agreement; there must be in all a penitent confession of sin and a looking to Jesus for forgiveness of sin, and there must be a real change of heart, such as shall affect the entire after life, and where these essential points are not to be found, there is no genuine conversion.” Murray proceeds in this chapter to unfold the true nature of regeneration, repentance, and saving faith, setting forth also the argument that true preachers ought to preach for conversion, that this ought to be their goal in gospel preaching.

In taking up the subject of justification, the heart of the gospel is addressed here. The need for justification is seen in the truth that all men are in darkness and lack true righteousness. The gospel then shows us why the righteousness of God is indeed good news. The doctrine of imputation is the central issue in justification, even from the Old Testament era.

The final three chapters deal with several edifying and important subjects, the first being what Murray calls “The Cross: The Pulpit of God’s Love.” Preaching the cross truly, doctrinally, and the work of redemption is what is desperately needed in our day. But it is not enough to say, “Jesus died for you.” In our generation, people are either bored by the words or they mean absolutely nothing to them. The preaching of Christ crucified with passion, accuracy,

and doctrinal clarity is what is most needed in modern preaching. The depth of the love of God both generally and specifically for all believers is at the forefront of the gospel message.

Murray then asks the question, “What Can We Learn From John Wesley”? He then proceeds to show us that there are wonderful things that every Christian can learn from Wesley. Murray argues that there are some basic things we learn.

First, Wesley has something to teach us on the relationship between true Christian zeal for the gospel and church government, procedures, and church practices. Secondly, in Wesley and Methodism we are taught that it is the persuasion of the love of God for men makes churches truly evangelistic. Thirdly, Wesley challenges us on the focus of our doctrine of sanctification, that is, our view of holiness and how the believer attains it and increases in it.

Perhaps the best or the most important chapter in the book very well may be chapter six on the doctrine of assurance. True preaching and accurate teaching on this doctrine is sadly lacking today. Very few Christians have a solid understanding of biblical assurance and how it relates to saving faith. It is here that Murray may provide his best help. The Holy Spirit in the work of assurance is wonderfully dealt with here, as is the true biblical basis of assurance. The possession of salvation and the possession of assurance of salvation are two different things and the difference is very important to understand.

The final chapter deals with Christian unity and church unity. The issue of denominations and unity is addressed, and the chapter shows that church unity and Christian unity are not one and the same thing, and that Christian unity is a bigger and more important issue than church unity.

Overall, this book would be immense help and encouragement to every Christian who would take the time to read it carefully, especially helpful to those involved in the ministry of the gospel. They will find here a gold mine of truth, clarity, and help in understanding and communicating old truths for a new spiritual awakening. And what could be more important than that? 🍷

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation*, edited by John Bolt and translated by John Vriend, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2004, 697 pages. \$49.99

Reviewed by Roger Nicole

What a magnificent achievement! Here we get the second volume of Bavinck's monumental dogmatic theology in 4 volumes. Although this appears more than a hundred years after the Dutch first edition, it is amazing how up to date are the presentation and discussion. In the early 1940s, I discovered Bavinck's great work in Harvard Divinity School Library and I decided to learn Dutch in order to have a ready access to this treasure. This has richly rewarded me for more than 60 years, and I can honestly say that it has been to me an inspiration and a challenge throughout my career as professor of systematic theology. One feature that has particularly benefited me is the remarkable serenity that characterizes Bavinck throughout his work; he is so thoroughly grounded in his biblical understanding and his Reformed position that he does not need to caricature those from whom he differs but he makes a fair presentation and criticism of their position. This is the more remarkable because he lived and worked in a nation that has been often embroiled in bitter theological discussions and fights, sometimes on minor points.

This volume includes a new translation of *The Doctrine of God* (William Hendricksen, translator, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951. 407 pages). The footnotes and source references which were omitted in this earlier translation are now included at the foot of relevant pages. A brief introduction and summary by editor John Bolt is prefixed to each of the seven chapters dealing with the doctrine of God.

The second part of the volume reproduces the volume *In the Beginning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999. 291 pages).

Thus the whole second Dutch volume of Bavinck's dogmatics is now available in English in a form that matches volume 1, published in 2003. The editors encourage us to look for the publication of volumes 3 and 4 in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

A fine general bibliography and indices of persons, Bible text discussion, and subjects treated, not available in Dutch until volume 4, do now enhance this edition.

With respect to the biblical foundation of any doctrine, I doubt whether there exists any systematic theology that can approach the number of texts cited. If a complete index is to appear in volume 4, I venture to say that it will occupy at least 50 pages.

Even if you have to buy it without a discount, you will get more than your money's worth in this volume. ☺

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# News

## Upcoming Regional Founders Conferences

The **Florida Regional Founders Conference** is scheduled for January 26-28, 2006 in Live Oak, Florida. The theme will be "A God-Centered Theology of Worship." Speakers include Tom Ascol, Bill Ascol, Steve Camp and Ken Puls.

Online: [www.floridafounders.org](http://www.floridafounders.org)

The **Southern Baptist Founders Conference Ark-La-Tex** will be held February 23-25, 2006 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Theme will be "The Cross of Christ." Speakers include Albert Bisson, Paul Haines, Kendall Holley, Jody Hooper and Joe Nesom.

Online: [www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc\\_alt.html](http://www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc_alt.html)

The **Southern Baptist Founders Conference Midwest** is planned for March 7-8, 2006 in St. Louis, Missouri. The theme will be "Pursuing Godliness." Key speakers will be Roy Hargrave and Don Whitney.

Online: [www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc\\_mw.html](http://www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc_mw.html)

## Subscription Increase

As announced in our eNewsletter earlier this year, due to increased costs for printing and shipping, we are increasing our subscription rate (beginning January 1, 2006). The new subscription price (one year) for the *Founders Journal* is \$20.00 (\$25.00 outside the USA).

## Back in Print

The *Truth and Grace Memory Book: Book 1* is now back in print. Book 1 includes “A Catechism for Boys and Girls” as well as a guided plan for memorizing Scripture and hymns of the faith. The book is available from Founders Ministries at: [wwwFOUNDERS.org/fpress/tag1.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/fpress/tag1.html)

## Founders Study Center

The Founders Study Center will be offering four courses this spring. Courses set to begin February 6, 2006 are *Systematic Theology 1* (16 sessions with audio lectures by Dr. Roger Nicole), *Preaching and Preachers* (16 sessions with audio lectures by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones) and *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition* (16 sessions with audio lectures by Dr. Timothy George). We are offering a new course, beginning March 20, 2006: *Evangelism and the Excellencies of God* (10 sessions with audio lectures by Pastor Jim Odens, President of PAGE Ministries). For more information, please visit our website at [studyFOUNDERS.org](http://studyFOUNDERS.org)

## Monthly Founders eNewsletter

If you are not yet receiving our monthly Founders eNewsletter, you can subscribe by sending a blank email message to:

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or complete the online subscriber form at

[wwwFOUNDERS.org/mailman/listinfo.cgi/newsletter](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/mailman/listinfo.cgi/newsletter)

## Founders Cruise

The first ever Founders Cruise (November 12–19, 2005) provided a wonderful time to relax together and enjoy rich, theological discussion and instruction. Messages included: “Calvinism as a Worldview” (Tom Ascol), “Calvinism and the Christian Life” (Steve Camp), “Calvinism and Evangelism” (Roy Hargrave), “Calvinism and Church Life” (David Wooten), “Calvinism and Parenting” (Tom Ascol) and “Calvinism and Marriage” (Fred Malone).

Audio from these messages is now available on our website:  
[wwwFOUNDERS.org/articles/FOUNDERScruise05.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/articles/FOUNDERScruise05.html)

Make plans now to join us this fall for the Founders Ministries Alaskan Cruise. Our theme will be “The Glory of God.” For more information go to:

[www.sovereigncruises.org/FOUNDERS06/index.htm](http://www.sovereigncruises.org/FOUNDERS06/index.htm)

# Letters

Dear Dr. Thomas K. Ascol,

Greetings in Christ. The Lord has been using and blessing the magazine the *Founders Journal* a lot in the ministry here especially as I teach and preach His word. I received a notice of subscription expiration. I honestly come to you and request for another free subscription. I'm so attached with the theological moorings of Founders that it's hard for me to loose it. Honestly, our country is still in a stable currency devaluation which means everything went up, everything is very expensive yet the Lord remains in control of everything. Dr. Ascol, it's been a while that Founders has been instrumental in my life and ministry here in the Philippines. I pray for more years and even a life-long ministry of Founders.

Gratitude is the memory of my heart,  
L. G., via email (Philippines)

## *Response from the Editor:*

Brother:

Thank you for your note and kind words. I am glad the *Founders Journal* has been of help to you. We will renew your subscription free of charge.

May the Lord strengthen you in your work.

In Christ,  
Tom Ascol

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