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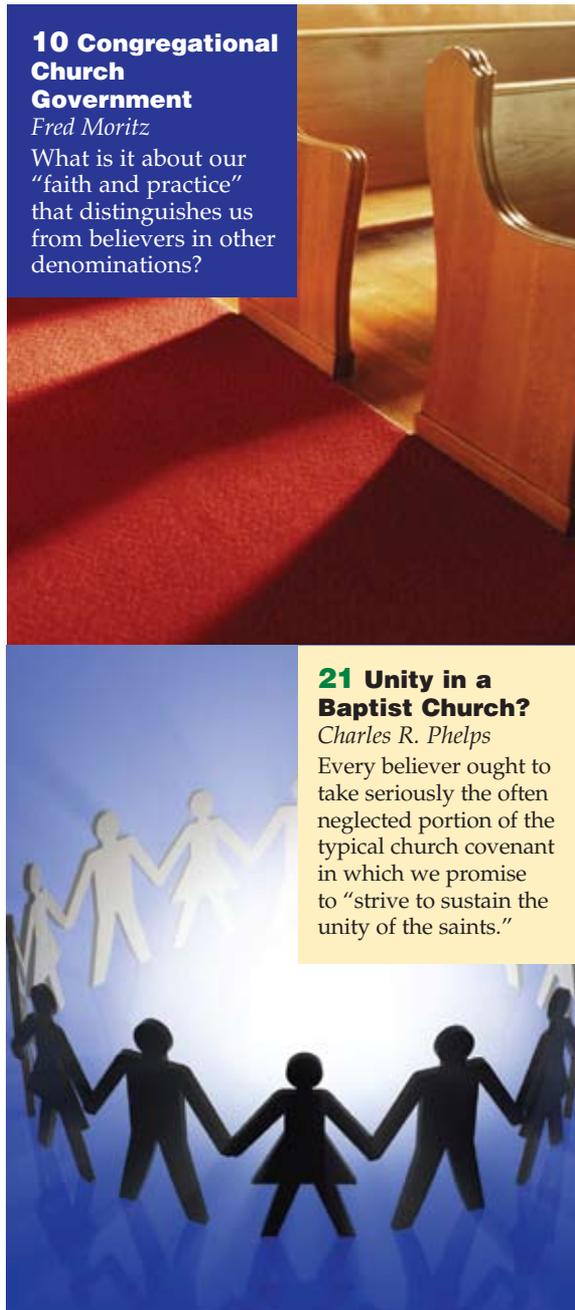
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What God Is Doing in Uncertain Times

Brian Trainer

Editor's Note

Recently a reader asked for clarification on the format of *FrontLine* magazine, particularly, "Why are the page numbers in the middle of the magazine out of sequence?" Most long-time readers of *FrontLine* know that the center section is designed to be removed for filing in a collection. It is written primarily for pastors, whereas the rest of the magazine is written for a broader audience of Christian readers. At first glance, this particular issue may appear to be addressed only to readers in full-time church ministry, but we pray that it will receive a much wider reading among all Fundamental Baptists—pastors and lay people alike. The articles to follow were planned and written by leaders of the Bible College and Seminary of Maranatha Baptist Bible College, and for continuity we have asked Brian Trainer, Chairman of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha, to write an introduction in *On the Front Line*.

The content of this issue of *FrontLine* is timely; it is the simple foundation needed in ongoing discussions among Fundamental Baptists regarding church governance and polity. We deeply appreciate the team at Maranatha and commend these articles to you for your edification.

During this time of economic, political, and ecclesiastical uncertainty, it is comforting to know that our unchanging God is completely in control. He has revealed His interest and sphere of action in this dispensation. A review of the Book of Ephesians will stabilize the troubled hearts of concerned Christians and set the compass for leaders. Within the first three chapters God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the

primary actors or subjects of activity. Chapter one describes the work of God the Father as He blesses, chooses, predestinates, adopts, redeems, forgives, empowers, and enlightens a people for His name to the praise of His glorious grace (1:3–19). The result of these actions is the creation of a body and the construction of a building called the church (1:22, 23; 2:20–22). These called-out ones are not to live independently of each other but are to be joined together as one new man functioning as a single household of God (2:12–19). The accomplishment of the task of bringing together this redeemed group of strangers into a single body has a single intent: that all earthly and heavenly powers would know the "manifold wisdom of God" (3:10).

For those who wonder what God is doing in our uncertain times, the answer is clear: He is constructing a building and creating a body through the work of Jesus Christ to the intent that all may recognize His manifold wisdom and glorious grace. He is still at work through the local church. This truth makes all that we do in our local church context vitally important. That is the arena to which God is directing His attention. That is the fellowship to which He targeted specific inspired instruction. What we do in church is not trivial, routine, dutiful, or merely traditional. We have the unique joy and responsibility of conducting all of our affairs in such a way that His glory is magnified within this lost world.

The theme of this edition of *FrontLine* highlights an aspect of Biblical local church conduct. Baptist churches seek to model Biblical instruction regarding church governance. We embrace autonomous congregational polity not

from tradition but from the text. The five main articles, written by members of the faculty of Maranatha Baptist Bible College and Seminary, seek to develop facets of this truth. Each article approaches the topic from a particular point in the hermeneutical circle. Dr. Larry Oats's article presents a systematic theological framework for congregational government in comparison to other models.

Dr. Fred Moritz and Mr. Andy Hudson provide exegetical studies from Acts displaying how the early church functioned. Each focuses on different aspects of body life. These are followed by a historic study of the position of Francis Wayland by Dr. Dave Saxon. Wayland's

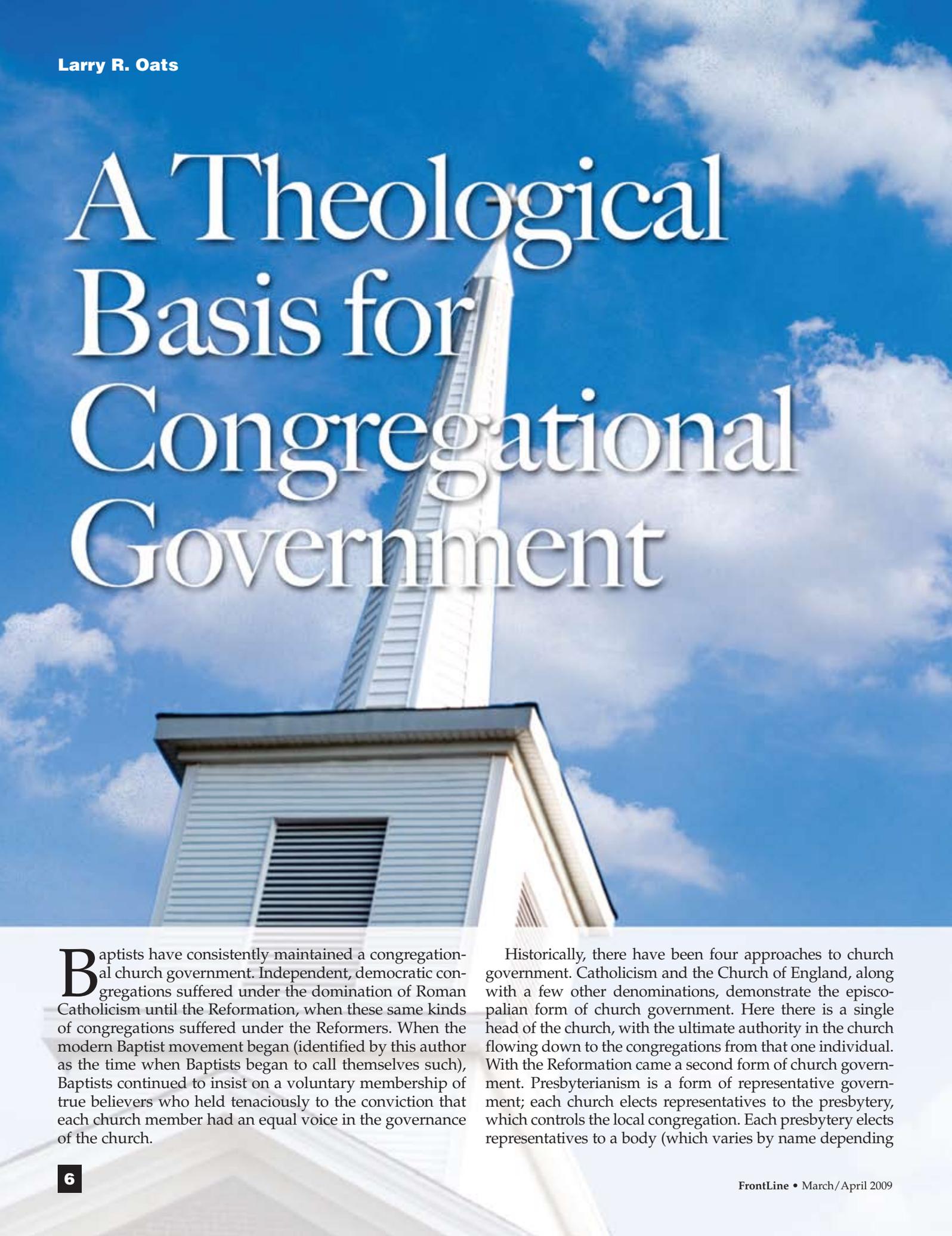
principles of congregationalism were forged at a time when autonomous local churches were a rarity. These insights from the 1850s assist in discerning contemporary issues in church governance. Then Dr. Charles Phelps gives practical, pastoral lessons on how local churches operate. He writes from the perspective of over twenty years of pastoral experience.

It is our desire that this edition would provide encouragement, guidance, and instruction. Every hymn sung, every message preached, every lesson taught, and every decision made in a local church has the great potential to bring glory to our God and make known His wisdom in heavenly places. The local church is where God is at work today. May we reflect on that truth and rejoice in our privilege to be part of His body.

The local church is where God is at work today.

Brian Trainer is chairman of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha Baptist Bible College in Watertown, Wisconsin.

A Theological Basis for Congregational Government



Baptists have consistently maintained a congregational church government. Independent, democratic congregations suffered under the domination of Roman Catholicism until the Reformation, when these same kinds of congregations suffered under the Reformers. When the modern Baptist movement began (identified by this author as the time when Baptists began to call themselves such), Baptists continued to insist on a voluntary membership of true believers who held tenaciously to the conviction that each church member had an equal voice in the governance of the church.

Historically, there have been four approaches to church government. Catholicism and the Church of England, along with a few other denominations, demonstrate the episcopal form of church government. Here there is a single head of the church, with the ultimate authority in the church flowing down to the congregations from that one individual. With the Reformation came a second form of church government. Presbyterianism is a form of representative government; each church elects representatives to the presbytery, which controls the local congregation. Each presbytery elects representatives to a body (which varies by name depending

on the denomination) that bears the authority over the local churches. The authority flows up from the churches but rests in a body outside the local congregation. Baptists and our forefathers, known by various names, have argued for and practiced a congregational form of church government. In this polity, the earthly authority of the church rests solely in the congregation. While the church may be a part of a fellowship or association of similar churches, there is no authoritative organization beyond the local church. A final form of polity, if it can be called that, is no polity. Churches such as the Quakers argue that there should be no formal polity for a church but that the church and its members are dependent upon the moving of the Holy Spirit.

There is, sadly, an erosion of congregational rule among Baptists today, some purposed and some accidental. Purposeful erosion occurs when elder rule replaces congregational government. It also occurs when deacons or committees make decisions that should be reserved for the congregation. Purposed erosion occurs as well when pastors begin to assume a CEO-style authority beyond their Biblical mandate. Informal erosion occurs when only a small minority of members participates in business meetings, creating a de facto oligarchy. It may also come as a result of a church growing through the assimilation of members from hierarchical churches who transfer their old polity to their new Baptist church and assume that the church must be in complete agreement with some form of denominational oversight.

The church that adheres to congregationalism is a church that comprehends the theological foundations of the dispensationally distinctive position of the church. The dispensationalist argues that the church is not Israel; therefore, the polity of the church is not patterned on the methodology of the nation of Israel and its temple worship. Elements that are part of the distinguishing function of the church include the priesthood of the believer based upon the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the necessity of a regenerate church membership, and the autonomy of the local church.

There are numerous Scriptural passages that argue for congregational government in the local church. Matthew 23:8 introduces the idea of a single level of church membership—all are brothers. Jesus' teaching in Luke 22:25–27 indicates that the leaders of the coming church are actually to be servants. The congregation elected the deacons in Acts 6:3–5 and elders in Acts 14:23;¹ the entire church sent out Paul and Barnabas in Acts 11:22 (and compare Acts 13:1–3 with Acts 14:27, when they returned to the church as a whole to give a report) and Paul and Titus, according to 2 Corinthians 8:19. The congregation then received Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:27; 15:4). The entire church was involved in the decisions concerning circumcision (Acts 15:22–25). Discipline was carried out by the entire church (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:12; 2 Cor. 2:6, 7; 2 Thess. 3:14). All the members are responsible for correct doctrine by testing the spirits (1 John 4:1), which they are able to do since they have the anointing of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20).²

Some of my colleagues are focusing their attention on some of these exegetical arguments. The New Testament texts which they will examine clearly argue for congregationalism, but these texts do not necessarily give the underlying reasons why. The purpose of this article is to briefly survey the theological foundations on which congregational polity stands. By examining the theological changes for the New Testament dispensation of the church, the rationale for congregational government can be found.

Dispensational Distinctiveness

Dispensational Distinctiveness

The first theological foundation for congregationalism is the dispensational distinctiveness of the church. In the Old Testament, there was routinely some form of hierarchical oversight of the sacrifices. Noah appears to have functioned in some form of patriarchal role (Gen. 8:20), and Job clearly functioned in that role as he sacrificed on behalf of his children (Job 1:5). Abraham was the overseer of the religious activity of the family. In Genesis 12 and 13 Abraham alone built an altar. In Genesis 18 Abraham functioned as the mediator between God and Sodom. Isaac and Jacob appear to have followed Abraham's example. Under the Mosaic Law the priesthood was developed to oversee the spirituality of the nation.

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WHAT ALLOWS THE NEW TESTAMENT SAINT TO FUNCTION IN A WAY UNLIKE ANY PRECEDING DISPENSATION.

Under Jesus Christ and the inauguration of the church age, however, one of the significant changes that took place was the elimination of the Old Testament priesthood and the new indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.³ Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of John indicates that a significant change in the relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit would take place with the ascension of Jesus Christ. In John 14:16, 17 Jesus declared that He would pray to the Father for "another Comforter," the "Spirit of truth" who "shall be in you." Again, in 14:25, 26 Jesus indicates that the Father's sending of the Spirit would be future. In John 15:26 Jesus indicates that He would send the Holy Spirit at some future time. In John 16:7 Jesus indicated that He must go away so that the Holy Spirit could come to the disciples. In Acts 1:5 Jesus stated, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." This indicates once again that the New Testament work of the Holy Spirit had not yet begun, but it was anticipated to begin just a few days after Christ's declaration. Acts 2:1–4 makes it clear that this specialized ministry began at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is what allows the New Testament saint to function in a way unlike any preceding dispensation. Abraham and Job served as the priests for their families. Under the Mosaic Law a single tribe was given the duties of the priesthood of the nation. In the Old Testament it appears it was imperative to have some form

of mediator between God and man. In the church age, however, every believer is a priest (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10) and Christ alone is the High Priest of the church (Heb. 2:17; 4:15; 7:26) and Mediator between God and men (Heb. 7:25; 1 Tim. 2:5). One of the themes of the book of Hebrews is the priesthood of the entire Christian commonwealth, with an emphasis on the New Testament believer entering into the very presence of God, an activity that only the High Priest could accomplish under the Law (Heb. 4:16).

The priesthood of the believer provides each church member with an equal right to direct access to God; it follows logically that these New Testament priests are entitled to equal privileges in the church. Equality before God makes men equal in their ecclesiastical standing.⁴ Unlike the Old Testament priesthood, there is no New Testament law of primogeniture; there are no favored sons who inherit thrones or the high priestly office. The government of the church is that of a spiritual brotherhood of equals.

**FOR BAPTISTS THERE IS NO
SUBMISSION OF A CHURCH
TO ANY AUTHORITY BEYOND
ITSELF. EVEN WHEN A MEMBER
OF AN ASSOCIATION OR
FELLOWSHIP, EACH CHURCH
MAINTAINS ITS AUTONOMY.**

If church officers, in or out of the local church, carried the ultimate authority, then the priesthood of the believer would be impinged. The work of Christ makes such leaders unnecessary.⁵ Instead, the ultimate earthly authority is the congregation, following the truth of the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures.

Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it is reasonable to assume that the Old Testament saints were in need of a priest and king. A nondispensational approach to ecclesiology would support an episcopalian polity. The Jewish king and priest would naturally carry over to the bishop and even pope, spiritual overseers of a less spiritual people. The nation of Israel was a mix of believing and unbelieving Jews. In the Reformed church, there is the continuing expectation of unsaved church members, who would be in need of some kind of ecclesiastical overlord. Baptists, however, arguing for a new indwelling presence of the Spirit and the accompanying empowering that attends this indwelling, understand that the New Testament saint has a greater independence from men and a greater dependence on God.

Regenerate Church Membership

A second theological foundation is the Baptist requirement of a regenerate church membership. This requirement is predicated on the belief that all the members of a local

church maintain a spiritual equality. This equality of all the members underlies the desire of a democratic ecclesiastical polity. "Hence, since the entire membership of the church is lifted into the plane of a divine freedom, and is subject only to Christ, it is endowed with autocracy; in its totality it elects and deposes its officers, determines all its methods of procedure, augments or diminishes its numbers by the exercise of its discipline. It projects no select guild or order of men above itself for its sovereign control, nor does it accept the imposition upon itself, from any source whatever, of such a sovereign guild."⁶

The nondispensational approach to church membership expects a mix of saved and lost church members. This belief goes back to Augustine, who believed the church to be a "mixed body" (*corpus permixtum*) of saints and sinners. The holiness of the church is not that of its members, but that of Christ.⁷ His main illustration and proof was found in Matthew 13 in the parable of the wheat and the tares.⁸ In doing so, Augustine laid the theological foundation for the Catholic Church. Catholicism, following Augustine's teaching, came "to distinguish an invisible church within the one, holy, visible, catholic church, outside of which is neither possibility of salvation nor knowledge of the truth."⁹

The Reformers made little improvement in this area. Having saints and sinners in the same church was not a problem for Luther. He accepted, with some modification, the Catholic concept of the invisible church. Luther preferred the word *abscondita* (hidden) over the usual *invisibilisi* (invisible).¹⁰ Only God can know precisely who are the members of the church, although the true believers (the *fideles*) can recognize what is the true church by the presence of its marks. It is only in later Lutheran theology that Calvin's distinction between the visible and invisible church was drawn.¹¹ Calvin's ecclesiology made some improvements over Luther's, but the linkage of church and state and the distinction between a visible and invisible church maintained the problem of a church filled with the unregenerate.



Calvin declared, "In this Church are included many hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and appearance; many persons ambitious, avaricious, envious, slanderous, and dissolute in their lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because they cannot be convicted by a legitimate process, or because discipline is not always maintained with sufficient vigour. As it is necessary, therefore, to believe that Church, which is invisible to us, and known to God alone, so this Church, which is visible to men, we are commanded to honour and maintain communion with it."¹²

If the church consists of both saved and unsaved, then there is good reason not to give the vote to the congregation. Without the requirement of a regenerate church membership, the vote of the congregation could be worldly, selfish, and unspiritual. The need of a spiritual overlord would be as much a necessity in the New Testament church as it was under the patriarchs and Moses' Law.

Autonomy of the Local Church

The autonomy of the local church is predicated upon congregational government. The episcopal church system imposes an authority from outside the local congregation upon the local churches. The presbyterian form of church government still places an outside body over the local churches. These two forms of church government, especially the episcopalian form, are typical outgrowths of an attempt to maintain some form of continuity between Israel and the church. Among the Baptists, however, the authority rests in the members of the local congregation, because these churches see no higher earthly authority than the congregation.

For Baptists there is no submission of a church to any authority beyond itself. Even when a member of an association or fellowship, each church maintains its autonomy. In such fellowships and associations, each individual church has a vote in the fellowship. In their practice, then, Biblically oriented fellowships of churches imitate the congregational government of the churches in that fellowship. Nothing outside the church has authority over the church.

Even the New Testament process of church discipline demonstrates the autonomy of the church and the priesthood of the believer. Under Moses, certain sins resulted in the execution of the sinner. Not so in the New Testament. The ultimate church discipline extends only to the exclusion of the person from the membership of the church.¹³ Nowhere did Jesus Christ or the disciples establish a court other than the local congregation. Apostles and pastors exerted their authority not as lords of the conscience but as brothers (1 Pet. 5:3).

Conclusion

Many Evangelicals today argue that there is no specific New Testament church polity. Congregationalism, episcopalianism, and presbyterianism all find some basis in the New Testament, and they declare, as a result, that any kind of church government is acceptable. To argue for one form above another is viewed to be narrow and

exclusive. This author believes the Scriptures are abundantly clear, both theologically and exegetically: there is a form of church government which fits the text and theology of the New Testament, and that form is clearly congregational in practice and authority.

Dr. Larry R. Oats is dean of Maranatha Baptist Seminary.

¹ The word "appointed" is particularly interesting; it means to "choose; elect by raising hands." BAGD.

² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 358.

³ Some dispensationalists argue that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is unchanged from His Old Testament ministry. Most dispensationalists, however, accept the argument that the Holy Spirit's indwelling of all individual believers is a ministry restricted to the New Testament.

⁴ E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1908; reprint Watertown, WI: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 2003), 127-28.

⁵ Roy McNutt, *Policy and Practice in Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1935), 21-26.

⁶ C. B. Crane, "The Spiritual Constitution of the Church," in *The Madison Avenue Lectures* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1867; reprint Watertown, WI: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 2003), 74.

⁷ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 409.

⁸ Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, 23.1. That he made the church identical to the Kingdom of Heaven and identical to the world in the same parable apparently did not trouble him.

⁹ Earl D. Radmacher, *What the Church Is All About* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 51.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "Ad librum eximii Magistri Nostri Magistri Ambrosii Catharini, defensoris Silvestri Prieratis acerrimi, responsio," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Weimar edition (1521), 7:722.

¹¹ Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church according to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 8.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.7.

¹³ In the episcopalian and presbyterian forms of polity, however, execution for ecclesiastical sins was a common event.

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Congregational Church Government

Introduction

What is a Baptist? What is it about our “faith and practice” that distinguishes us from believers in other denominations?

Chester Tulga served in years past as the research secretary for the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship. This outstanding Baptist thinker and spokesman affirmed the principle with which we rightly begin our discussion. He said, “The basic tenet of the historic Baptist faith is that the Bible is the Word of God and the sole authority of faith and practice.”¹

We must further sharpen this distinction. Our brothers in Christ in some other groups would gladly make the same affirmation. But we Baptists insist on applying the sole authority of Scripture in one area that distinguishes us. We apply the sole authority of Scripture to the doctrine of the church.

British Baptist pastor and historian Jack Hoad has clearly articulated our emphasis, stating, “It is the Biblical doctrine of the church, with an unqualified submission to scripture as the Word of God, which becomes the test of what is a Baptist church.”²

We believe in believer’s baptism rather than infant baptism *because we find the principle and practice in Scripture* (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:41; 16:14, 15).

We believe in a regenerate church membership *because we find it taught in Scripture* (Acts 2:41, 42, 47). We do not admit unsaved, sprinkled infants to church membership, nor do we admit adults to church membership without a credible testimony of salvation followed by believer’s baptism.

We believe in the autonomy of the local church *because Scripture sets the precedent for this practice* (Acts 15:3, 22, 30).

We embrace a congregational form of church government because Scripture teaches it. The Bible is clear that certain church decisions are to be made by the congregation. These include: disciplining its own members (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:1–5), electing its own officers (Acts 6:1–6), commissioning its missionaries (Acts 13:1–3), and provid-

ing accountability in ministry efforts (Acts 14:27). The entire churches of Antioch and Jerusalem functioned holistically in resolving a doctrinal dispute and responding with advice (Acts 15: 1–3, 22, 23). Paul instructed the churches to give the offering, and the churches chose their messengers to convey that offering to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 19, 23). Scripture demonstrates the practice of congregational church government in the account of the first missionary journey and the events that surrounded it.

Congregational Authority

The church at Antioch came into existence as the result of missionary activity (Acts 11:19–26). The Jerusalem assembly sent Barnabas to encourage, ground, and disciple the new believers. He immediately saw the need for help and went to Tarsus to find Saul. The two of them labored for a year with that body of believers.

The church grew, and when we see it again in Acts 13:1–3 there are five men who are serving on what we would today call the “pastoral staff.” They are called “prophets and teachers.” We understand those terms in the light of Paul’s words to the Ephesian church when he says, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11, 12). These five men were gifted and called as prophets and teachers for the local church in Antioch. As they served the Lord in the church, the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to take the gospel to “the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). From this group of leaders, the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul. We do well to note the circumstances in which this decision was reached.

The Spirit’s call came in a time of ministry and fasting (v. 1). Barnabas and Saul did not immediately leave, but deliberately fasted and prayed more to make sure of divine

leading. Then the church laid hands on them and sent them away.

From this account we learn several important truths. First, local churches are the “incubators” in which missionaries are prepared and called to service. Our colleges and seminaries can do a valuable work in training, but it is service in the local church that prepares missionaries for ministry. Second, God the Holy Spirit must call missionaries. That calling will come in an atmosphere of service and sensitivity to the Lord. Churches must be places where people walk with God, serve Him, and are open to the Spirit’s work in lives.

Third, local churches recognize the call of the Holy Spirit to service. The people in the Antioch church recognized God’s call on the two men, and they obviously recognized the men’s fitness for the work. Their testimony of godliness and consistent service was acknowledged by the people. Fourth, the laying on of hands conveys the idea of human recognition and approval of God’s call. The ancient practice of laying on of hands came from the custom of stretching out the hand in an approving vote. Man does not call missionaries, but godly people can recognize and approve the call of the Holy Spirit on the life of the one called. This symbol communicates the idea that Barnabas and Saul went to the work under the authority of the Antioch church. We see the congregational authority of the church in the symbol of approval.

Having served as a mission agency administrator for nearly twenty-eight years, I want to emphatically state the Biblical principle that local churches send missionaries and missions agencies do not. Since 1792 Baptists have formed agencies to facilitate a cooperative effort among churches to fund and support the Great Commission work, but in the Biblical pattern missionaries go under the authority of their sending churches.

Congregational Action

It is important for us to note the action of the apostles and the churches they planted during the first missionary journey. Acts 14:23 reports, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” There is some debate about the meaning of the word “ordained,” but most Bible commentators believe the word indicates congregational voting in the selection of pastors.³ It seems clear that whatever the process involved, the local congregations participated in the selection of their pastors.

A. T. Robertson elaborates on the word “ordain” in Acts 14:23, saying,

It is an old verb that originally meant to vote by show of the hands, finally to appoint with the approval of an assembly that chooses as in II Cor. 8:19. . . . But the seven [deacons] were first selected by the Jerusalem church and then appointed by the apostles. That is probably the plan contemplated by Paul in his directions to Titus (1:5) about the choice of elders. It is most likely that this plan was the one pursued by Paul and Barnabas with these churches. They selected the elders in each instance and Paul and Barnabas “ordained” them as we say, though the word . . . does not mean that.⁴

Robertson was a Baptist, but the Anglican Alford succinctly concludes, “Nor is there any reason here for departing from the usual meaning of electing by show of hands. The Apostles may have admitted by ordination those *presbyters whom the churches elected*” [emphasis Alford].⁵

Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski concurs in this conclusion, saying:

For the question at issue is whether Paul and Barnabas chose these elders without congregational participation or whether they conducted a congregational meeting in which a vote was taken by show of hands, the congregation choosing with participation of the apostles and under their guidance. The latter is undoubtedly correct, just as the praying with fastings by no means includes only the two apostles but each congregation as well. The method used is fully explained in Acts 6:2–6.⁶

The New Testament testimony is that these new churches, the product of missionary church-planting labor, congregationally chose their own pastoral leadership.

Congregational Accountability

When Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary ministry, they returned to Antioch and reported on their work. The entire congregation heard their report. Scripture gives us the report:

And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:26, 27).

The church commissioned Barnabas and Saul and sent them to the work. They went under the *authority* of their church. When they returned from their ministry, they “gathered the church together” to report on the work. They were *accountable* to their church.⁷

We must make the point here that it was the church as a corporate body that heard the report of their trip, and it was that body to whom they were accountable. I do not want to diminish in any way what the Bible says about the leadership of a pastor. But the action in sending and hearing the report of the missionaries was congregational, not pastoral. The entire congregational body was involved in the action at the beginning and the end of the first missionary endeavor.

Congregational Affinity

The last evidence of the practice of congregational church government is in the record of Acts 15. Those “certain men which came down from Judea” brought the heresy of combining works with grace for salvation. They insisted no one could be saved apart from circumcision (Acts 15:1). This passage of Scripture stresses some dominant themes. Those themes are salvation by faith (vv. 7–9) through the grace of God (v. 11), the offer of the gospel to the Gentiles (vv. 13–18), and standards for Christian conduct and testimony (vv. 19–21).

As Luke tells us the story of how these issues were debated and the appropriate conclusions were

reached, he also teaches us something of the relationship between the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem. We learn how the church in Antioch worked to resolve the issue and how the church in Jerusalem related to the church in Antioch. We can develop the idea of the autonomy of the local church from this passage. There was an affinity between the two churches based on their common faith in Christ and on a loving, fraternal relationship between the two bodies. Our purpose in this brief study is to see that these decisions were made by the congregations involved.

When the false teachers came from Jerusalem, the church determined that the best way to solve the problem of their doctrine was to take it to Jerusalem and the church from which they came. Verse 2 tells us that they made the decision to go to Jerusalem. Verse 3 states that they were "brought on their way by the church." The church in Antioch made the decision to send them to Jerusalem. That was congregational action.

The church in Jerusalem received them (v. 4). These people came from Antioch seeking answers from the apostles and elders (v. 2). They came to the leaders because the apostles were the teaching authority for the churches, and their teaching carried the force of Scripture until the Word of God was completed (Acts 2:41, 42). They came seeking advice from the leadership, but the church corporately received them. This passage describes the interaction of the churches in language that indicates corporate decision-making or congregational government.

When the theological decisions were made and the dec-

larations written, the "whole church" (v. 22) determined to send leaders to Antioch to convey the decisions that were made. Again, Luke specifically tells us of congregational action in this matter.

When the party arrived in Antioch, they "gathered the multitude together" (v. 30). The congregation rejoiced at the apostolic message (v. 31).

Our point is this: When a doctrinal dispute arose, one congregation asked advice of another. Each congregation took action to send some of its own people to the other congregation. No church controlled the other, but each congregation responded to the call of the other. The decisions were made by congregational deliberation and action.

Conclusion

Scripture demonstrates the practice of congregational church government in the account of the first missionary journey and the events that surrounded it. The church at Antioch sent the first missionaries, and those missionaries were accountable to the congregation. The newly planted churches called their pastors by congregational action. When theological heresy appeared, two congregations worked together to combat it.

We hold to the tenet of congregational church government because the New Testament teaches it by precept and example. The record reveals that early churches governed themselves by action of the congregation from the time believers were saved and baptized. When we argue for congregational government, we argue from Scripture, not from tradition.

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¹ Chester E. Tulga, "What Baptists Believe about Soul Liberty" in *The Baptist Challenge* (Little Rock: Central Baptist Church, October 1997), 21.

² Jack Hoad, *The Baptist* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 1986), 7.

³ Most commentaries recognize some form of congregational voting or consent in the choosing of local church pastor in this passage. *The Pulpit Commentary* is a notable exception.

⁴ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in The New Testament* in Logos Library System.

⁵ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1877), II:160, 161.

⁶ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), 585-86.

⁷ It is aside from the main thrust of this article, but it is clear that missionaries go under the authority of their churches, and they are accountable to them. Authority and accountability are two defining, Biblical concepts in the relationship between a missionary and his sending church.



Are Your Deacons Helping Your Church?

God has entrusted to each local congregation authority to govern its own affairs. There are times that some of that authority is transferred from the congregation to a group of elected representatives (usually called deacons). Is this transfer of authority Biblical? How much authority should be invested in a group of deacons? How will giving your deacons authority help the church?

Act 6:1–7 provides a Biblical example of a congregation transferring authority to a group of elected representatives. In this account the deacons helped the church grow through their effective ministry. Following the example in this passage will enable the church to better fulfill its mission.

The Need for Representative Leadership

According to Acts 6:1, a “murmuring” arose among the Grecians against the Hebrews in the early growing church.¹ “Murmuring” is the expression of a complaint or displeasure through grumbling.² The cause of this grumbling was the neglect of the Grecian widows in the daily distribution of aid. This was not an occasional oversight. Luke employs a word that stresses the continuous nature of this neglect of the Grecian widows. An occasional oversight may have been accidental. Continual neglect must have been an intentional practice. Luke does not record the motive for this continual intentional neglect. Whatever the motive, this situation created a threat to the continued growth of the young church. The church could not simply ignore this threat and hope it would go away. It needed to be addressed.

The Appointment of Representative Leadership

When the twelve apostles became aware of the situation, they proposed a solution to the “multitude of the disciples” (Acts 6:2–4). Barnes says, “It is not necessary to suppose that *all* the disciples were convened, which amounted to many thousands but that the business was laid before a large number.”³ However, the phrase is often used of religious communities to indicate *all* members of the group.⁴ In addition, it would have been unwise for the apostles to include only part of the church when the issue at hand was a division between Grecians and Hebrews. Also, it is this “multitude” that chooses the seven representatives (Acts 6:5). It would be odd that a subsection of the church chose

representatives for the whole church. It is likely that the apostles called the whole church to propose a solution.

The solution proposed by the apostles was to elect a group of seven men who would be put in charge of the daily distribution of aid. In other words, the church would elect seven men who would be authorized to act on behalf of the church. The church would transfer its authority over the daily distribution to the seven elected men. Whether these seven men held the office of deacon or a position that developed into the office of deacon is debated.⁵ Either way, the early church used a form of congregational governance that included representative leadership.

This proposed solution pleased the whole church (Acts 6:4–6). The church “chose” seven men to be representative leaders who would mediate reconciliation between the Grecians and Hebrews.⁶ The church presented the seven men to the apostles. After praying, the apostles laid hands on the seven and appointed them to the business of the daily distribution.

It is important to note that all authority began with the church in this situation. The apostles did not approve the solution—they merely proposed it. The apostles did not elect the seven men—the church did. The church congregation has been entrusted by God with authority to govern the affairs of its local church. One might argue that the apostles had some authority over the Jerusalem church since the apostles appointed the seven to the daily administration. One must ask who gave the apostles the authority to appoint the seven men over the daily distribution. The church granted the apostles the authority to appoint the seven men over the business of the daily distribution when it approved the apostles’ proposed solution. The church granted authority to the seven men—not the apostles. God made Christ the Head of the church. Christ entrusted authority to govern the affairs of the church to the congregation. In Acts 6 the church transferred some of that authority to the apostles (authority to appoint) and some of that authority to the seven “deacons” (authority to care for the daily distribution).

The Task of Representative Leadership

Over what exactly did the church give these seven men authority? There are three descriptions of the task that these seven representatives performed. First, it is described

as the “daily ministration” (Acts 6:1). Apparently, there was a daily distribution of aid for those who qualified for it within the church. The money for this aid came from wealthy church saints who sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the church (Acts 4:32–35). Second, it is called “[serving] tables” (Acts 6:2). Kent comments, “It is worth noting that the expression ‘serve tables’ may not demand that we imagine the apostles as caterers or table waiters in the restaurant sense. ‘Tables’ often denoted ‘banks,’ because money lenders sat at tables to conduct their business. The word is used in that sense in Luke 19:23 and Matthew 21:12. The apostles may have meant that they should not leave their ministry of the Word to serve as bankers or money-dispensers.”⁷⁷ Obviously, the task involved authority to dispense the church’s money to those who had a genuine need. Third, it is presented as “this business” (Acts 6:3). Literally, the word translated “business” is a “need” or “lack” or “difficulty.” The need here was an equitable distribution of aid so that the threat of division in the church could be addressed. The seven were granted authority over the distribution of aid. Theirs was a limited authority. They were only authorized to oversee what the church placed under their control.

As the church grew to several thousand members, the distribution of aid would have become more difficult. The apostles did not feel it was appropriate to leave their ministry of prayer and the Word to oversee the distribution of aid. The word translated “ministry” in reference to the apostles is the same word translated “distribution” in reference to the seven representatives. The apostles would focus their attention on the ministry of the Word and the seven would focus on the ministry of aid distribution. Both ministries were necessary for the church to continue its growth.

The Qualifications for Representative Leadership

Authority to distribute aid was not to be entrusted to just anyone, nor was it a popularity contest. The apostles proposed five qualities that would make one an effective representative of the church (Acts 6:3). First, the elected representatives were to be men. Luke is careful to use the word that means “male,” not the more generic word that could mean “humankind” in his description of who qualified to oversee the distribution of aid.

Second, the effective representative was to be chosen from “among you.” The church chose seven men who were members of its own congregation. They were not to seek men from outside their local church. Those within the church would have been most familiar with the situation and, therefore, most effective in administering a solution. Those within the church would have been most familiar with the goals of the church and, thus, would most likely propose a solution that was consistent with the congregational goals. The church was not to surrender authority to any person or group outside of the local congregation.

Third, the effective representative was to be “of honest report.” The church was to choose men who were “well spoken of.” The seven representatives would have authority to dispense aid. This distribution had already proven problematic. The reason these men were placed over the

distribution was so that they could remedy the inequitable distribution that caused the problem in the first place. In this situation, the honesty of the representative is vital. Any hint of dishonesty in one’s character (or even in one’s reputation) would undermine the ministry of the representative. Confidence that the distribution was done fairly required representatives with reputations that generated trust rather than suspicion.

Fourth, the effective representative was to be “full of the Holy Ghost.” This phrase indicates that the representative needed to be submissive to the leading of the Spirit rather than the leading of the flesh. Hartog states, “The filling of the Spirit means allowing Him to control our lives.”⁷⁸ The seven representatives were responsible for large sums of money. They had authority to dispense it. This authority would certainly incite desires of the flesh such as greed and pride. A representative who is controlled by these fleshly desires could not be trusted with the authority to distribute aid. People do not trust a leader who is corrupt. One who is controlled by the Spirit will dispense the aid in a way that glorifies God. He will also instill confidence in the fairness of the distribution of aid.

Fifth, the effective representative was to be “full of . . . wisdom.” One could be a male member of the church who had a good reputation and was submissive to the Spirit and still not be qualified to be an effective representative. One also needed to have the mental and administrative capabilities to oversee the distribution of aid. Capable men rather than inept men were best suited for the distribution of aid. Church members would continue to question the distribution of aid if it were done by those who did not have the skills for the job. The representative needed to be practically qualified as well as spiritually qualified to represent the church in the distribution of aid.

Kent summarizes the importance of choosing qualified men for the task of distributing aid. He says, “Real discretion needed to be exercised in choosing these men, for their task would require honesty, tact, sympathy, and considerable practical wisdom.”⁷⁹

The Results of Representative Leadership

According to Acts 6:7, the threat that the neglect of the Grecian widows posed was successfully addressed by the seven representatives. The apostles were able to focus on their ministry of prayer and the Word. The conflict generated by the distribution of aid did not cause lasting damage to the church. Instead, the Word of God increased and the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly. Even a large number of priests placed their faith in the work of Christ.

In Acts 6:1–7 we have record of the early church transferring some of its authority to a small group of elected representatives for a specific purpose. The result of this transfer of authority was spiritual and numerical growth in the church. Representative leadership proved to be both a Biblical and wise practice. It does not threaten congregational church government if practiced correctly.

Practical Application of Representative Leadership

There are several points of application from Acts 6:1–7 that are appropriate for the contemporary church. First,

while pastors do not have the office of apostle, they do need to focus on the ministry of prayer and the Word. If a church is going to be successful, the pastor ought to view leaving the ministry of prayer and the Word as inappropriate. Pastors must not allow themselves to be distracted from prayer and the Word by other church ministries or business. Distributing aid to the widows is a good ministry. It is also necessary to address disputes between church members to maintain a healthy church. But neither is the primary ministry to which pastors are called. Pastors should be capable administrators and maintain a servant's heart, but they must not sacrifice the ministry of the Word and prayer for the waiting on tables.

Second, deacons should do all that they can to ensure that the pastor has the time to dedicate to prayer and the Word. They should focus on those ministries and business of the church that could distract the pastor from his ministry of prayer and the Word. The church should invest some authority in its deacons so they can effectively minister in a way that frees the pastor for his ministry. All ministries in the church are important. If every believer focuses on the ministry to which God has called him or her, the church will have success.

Third, the church transfers some of its authority to deacons. The deacons do not have authority over the church. Deacons should never think that they "run" the church. They are invested with authority as elected representatives of the church. No outside group should have authority over the church either. This authority structure maintains congregational church governance.

Fourth, deacons must be qualified for their representative leadership position. If men who are not qualified serve as deacons the congregation will not fully trust them. In this case the deacons will be given a position but not the authority to function as representatives. This will create a church that is full of turmoil, distrust, resentment, frustration, and anger. A church so afflicted will not be focused on sharing Christ's love with others, nor will the pastor be freed to focus on prayer and the Word.

Fifth, deacons must be given limited authority. If they are acting on behalf of the congregation, they must know

what the congregation wants them to do. These limits can take the form of a church budget, constitution, by-laws, or other documentation. For example, a constitution may limit the amount of church money deacons can spend without church authorization. Deacons must not overstep these limits. Not only would that be unethical, it would also disrupt the church as well.

Representative leadership is an effective tool at the disposal of the congregation. It does not violate congregational rule, since the representatives are still under the authority of the congregation. Appropriate use of representative leaders can lead to church growth today just as it did in the early church. So, are your deacons helping your church?

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¹ Grecians were likely Jews who lived outside of Judea and had adopted a good deal of Hellenistic culture. Hebrews were likely Jews who lived in Judea and had adopted far less of the Hellenistic culture.

² BAG, 164c.

³ Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Acts of the Apostles*, revised edition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1870), 124.

⁴ BAG, 668d.

⁵ For a helpful discussion of the nature of the position these seven men were elected and appointed to, see John Hartog II, *Pastors and Deacons: Biblical Qualifications, Scriptural Roles, and Right Relationships* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2008), 77–80.

⁶ Couch says, "This is not a vote, but an examination of the most able candidates to do the work." Mal Couch, ed., *A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 245. Even if Couch is right, the church still needed to "decide" which seven were the "most able candidates." There must have been some sort of vote to determine the will of the congregation. Therefore, it is appropriate to speak of "elected" representatives.

⁷ Homer Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 63.

⁸ Hartog II, *Pastors and Deacons*, 88.

⁹ Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome*, 63.



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Francis Wayland: The Ideal of Autonomous Baptist Churches

Throughout their history Baptists have been committed to autonomous local churches. Like other Christians, however, they have often noted the value of cooperation and fellowship between churches. A tension has resulted between the principle of independence and the benefit of association. Actual Baptist practice has resulted in a range that has, at one end, radically independent congregations who eschew any affiliation with organizations that lack specific NT sanction. At the other end are those Baptists who commit to regional (or national) conventions in which is consolidated considerable power for directing church life.

The goal of this article is to trace the history of associations in Baptist circles from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and then to consider the theology of Francis Wayland, who developed a strong critique of the convention concept during a time when it was gaining considerable momentum in American Baptist history.

A Brief Survey of the History of Baptist Associations

Seventeenth-century English Baptists found various ways of connecting with one another. Embattled by the dominant state church, facing various legal disabilities, and struggling to survive, Baptists supported one another by crafting confessions of faith that reflected groups of congregations, joining one another in stated days of fasting and prayer, and eventually forming regional associations of churches.

Baptists at the time were divided into two major bodies, the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists. The Particular Baptists were more numerous in England and tended to stress the autonomy of local congregations. This was a response to a context in which all of the major religious bodies emerging from the Reformation organized according to the parish system under a centralized authority and permitted little or no autonomy at the local level.

Somewhat surprising is the early tendency of the General Baptists to organize in a more connectional, centralized fashion. The Orthodox Creed of 1678 clearly affirms the authority of General Baptist representative assemblies in a way that

Particular Baptists would have roundly repudiated.

General councils, or assemblies, consisting of the Bishops, Elders, and Brethren, of the several churches of Christ, and being legally convened, and met together out of all the churches, and the churches appearing there by their representatives, make but one church, and have lawful right, and suffrage in this general meeting, or assembly, to act in the name of Christ.¹

Thus, two forms of Baptist church life emerged in England in the seventeenth century: a loosely-organized collection of regional associations of Particular Baptists, jealous of their independence; and a smaller number of centralized associations of General Baptists, who placed a higher premium on integrated cooperation.

In America the first organization of Baptist churches was the Philadelphia Association, organized by Particular Baptists in 1707. Given their history, it is not surprising that these Baptists took pains to disclaim superintendence over the member churches. In 1749 the Association adopted an essay by Benjamin Griffith that argued for the appropriateness of Baptist churches associating freely together as long as the central body had no “superintendency” over the churches. The principal right of the association to interfere in the affairs of a member church was the power to expel a church for a “defection in doctrine or practice” that threatened the doctrinal and ecclesiastical basis of uniting in the first place.²

As new associations arose in America, each had to address the delicate balance between local autonomy and the powers granted to the representative body. In the South, where the churches were widely separated geographically and strong personalities tended to hold sway,³ Baptists tolerated a greater degree of centralization. In the North, the determination to guard the independence of local assemblies remained strong.⁴

As is well known, the conversion of Adoniram and Ann Judson and Luther Rice to the Baptist position during their voyage to India in 1812 created an unusual opportunity for American Baptists. While the Judsons moved on to their ministry in Burma, Rice returned to America to garner support

for foreign missions among the Baptists. The Baptists were poised for just such an effort, and Rice's work eventuated in the formation of the first national Baptist organization.

In May 1814 representatives of Baptist churches from across the nation met in Philadelphia and established the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States. Because of its determination to meet every three years, this body became known as the Triennial Convention. This effort more or less superseded all of the older regional associations and united Baptists into what they willingly called a "denomination."⁵

The first president of the Triennial Convention was Richard Furman, the dynamic pastor of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina. His election was a step in the direction of greater centralization. It was widely recognized that the Southerners preferred a stronger association, while Northerners believed a society approach to cooperative efforts would provide more protection of church autonomy. Thus, during the first fifteen years of the Triennial Convention, controversy raged over the extent of its powers and its appropriate realm of activity. By 1832, just eighteen years after its beginning, the all-inclusive convention idea was dead in the North, killed by concern for autonomy. One of the leading voices for autonomy was Francis Wayland.

Francis Wayland and His Argument for Autonomy

Wayland came to faith in Christ after hearing a sermon by Luther Rice, studied for the ministry, and at age twenty-five became the pastor of prestigious First Baptist Church in Boston. His leadership skills, vigorous intellect, and strong personality made him, in just a few years, a leading voice in denominational affairs. Writing under the pseudonym "Backus," Wayland contributed several articles to *American Baptist Magazine* that advanced a strong denominational plan. He envisaged conventions at the local, regional, and national level, with delegates from each level representing their constituent churches at the next level above. In this way, "the whole denomination might be brought to concentrated and united action."⁶

In 1827 Wayland left First Church to become the president of Brown University, where he would remain for twenty-eight years. His efforts there were extraordinarily successful, and he became one of the foremost educators in the United States. As a professor, he gave careful thought to the questions of liberty and individual responsibility. During these years his view of conventionalism among Baptist churches underwent a transformation. He became convinced that the convention ideal for which he had labored in the 1820s was incompatible with the Baptist conviction of autonomous local churches.

Wayland's teachings find expression in 1857 in his *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*.⁷ He lays down the following concepts as the "plain and well-established principles" upon which rests "the doctrine of the independence of the churches":⁸

1. Religion is "exclusively" individual in its basic nature. Its primary function is to relate individuals to God.

2. Apart from divine revelation, man cannot determine for himself how to serve God acceptably.

3. The New Testament is God's means of supplying man with an explanation of how he can approach and serve God acceptably.

4. Every individual is responsible for understanding and obeying the NT commands. God provides aid "to guide every candid inquirer." No one can excuse himself from this obligation because some human authority places him under competing demands.

5. "Men who, by such an examination of the New Testament, arrive at the same conclusions respecting its requirements, unite together in churches for the sake of promoting holiness in each other, and subduing the world to obedience to Christ. In doing this, however, they neither assume on the one hand, nor concede on the other, any power of original legislation over each other. Christ is the head of the church in general, and of every individual church in particular. The members all profess obedience to his laws, and by his laws they submit, at all times, to be judged. Whatever the New Testament teaches, either by precept or through example, the church may require of its members; and the individual members may require of the church. Whatever passages beyond this rule, must be left to the judgment and conscience of the individual, being without the limit of church authority."⁹

6. This fact implies that in matters of conscience neither a church nor an individual can or should ever submit to the will of the majority. For instance, the citizens of the United States submit to their elected representatives the right to make various laws that govern their lives and properties. Nevertheless, in matters of direct responsibility to God, Christians do not give to their government representatives the right to contravene His authority.

7. "Such being the nature of representation, I ask how can a church of Christ be *represented*? The matters which could be committed to representatives are clearly but two: First, those which Christ has *not* commanded, but which are properly left to the decision of individual conscience; and secondly, those which *have been commanded* by Christ or his apostles. Concerning the first class, these, not being commanded, but being left to the decision of individual conscience, are already without the jurisdiction of the church, and, of course, the church can commit jurisdiction concerning them to no representation. It can not transfer to another a power which by concession it does not possess. But take the other class of duties, or obligations, those commanded by Christ. Can it commit the commands of Christ to any human tribunal? Can a church, or can churches commit the precepts of Jesus to a representation, thus acknowledging their power to add to, to abolish, or to modify what the Master has enacted? Or again: can it concede to any representation the right *to interpret for us* the precepts of Christ? This would be to abolish the right of private judgment, and convert us

into Romanists. Nor, lastly, can we commit the *execution* of these laws to representatives, since the power to enforce the laws of Christ rests with each church itself. It would seem, from these simple principles, impossible that a church of Christ can be *in any proper and legitimate sense be represented.*"¹⁰

The result of Wayland's argumentation is that any ecclesiastical organization beyond the local church inevitably violates individual conscience in one of two ways. It either declares what must be believed via prescriptive creed, which, Wayland asserts, is an open attack on the authority of Christ over His church's doctrine. Second, the ecclesiastical organization may legislate only in matters that are not clearly revealed in Scripture. In this case, according to Wayland, the conscience of the individual Christian is externally forced to submit to an issue that Christ has left to private decision.

TODAY, MANY "YOUNG FUNDAMENTALISTS" APPEAR TO BE ATTRACTED BY THE POSITIVE TRAITS OF CENTRALIZATION.

In a representative body, such as a convention, individuals who constitute churches *delegate* to their representatives the right to participate in a corporate process that makes decisions—either doctrinal or practical—for those churches. Such delegation, Wayland argues, is an attack on the sole authority of Christ in His church. On this basis, he supported the society method of organizing denominational work rather than the convention method. Societies are not representative bodies but rather merely independent agencies managed by individual Baptists. Local churches expressed their agreement or disagreement with a given society simply by giving or withholding financial support.

Autonomy was fully secured at the local level.

Two years after penning his *Notes*, Wayland published *Thoughts on the Missionary Organizations of the Baptist Denomination*.¹¹ In this work Wayland took his logic a step further and argued that mission societies themselves involve delegated authority. Only local churches and private individuals have the right to obey New Testament mandates, since the NT knows nothing of parachurch organizations. This was a surprising position for the president of a Baptist college to take! He evidently believed that collegiate training was indifferent in the NT and therefore could be conducted by a parachurch organization. Missions, however, is mandated in the NT and thus subject solely to the authority of the local church.

Some Subsequent History and Conclusions

Following Wayland's logic, Northern Baptists employed the society approach to denominational work throughout the nineteenth century. This method had two primary characteristics: it was inefficient (although under energetic leaders, each society had impressive accomplishments), and it guarded local church autonomy. Momentum was gathering for greater centralization, however, and the Northern Baptist Convention united all ministry societies in 1907. The story of the titanic struggle for the Northern Baptist churches between 1907 and 1930 plays out in a convention context, conservatives battling liberals over the control of convention colleges, seminaries, mission boards, etc. When the Fundamentalists subsequently withdrew from the convention, they established independent Baptist churches that associated—if at all—in loose fellowships.

Today, many "young Fundamentalists" appear to be attracted by the positive traits of centralization. The resurgence of conservative political strength within the SBC has caused some Fundamentalists to desire to become a part of that convention struggle. Might Wayland's logic be a helpful reminder? Was Wayland right?

Some might challenge Wayland's commitment to individualism. Given the strong sense of community that existed in the NT churches, is his individualism derived from

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the Scriptures or from the nineteenth-century American context? Nothing Wayland says militates against the local church functioning as a community for sanctification and evangelism. On the other hand, Romans 14:10 clearly teaches the ultimate individual responsibility entailed by religious truth: every one of us will give personal account of our beliefs and actions. Our church aids and nurtures but does not determine our spiritual status. Each individual stands alone before God.

Given this premise, Wayland's logic in the *Notes* is unassailable. I cannot—yea, dare not—delegate to any man the right to make decisions for me that I will one day answer to God for. This teaching does not make every person a local church in that my association with others in a local church does not involve delegation of my responsibilities. It rather expresses my agreement with others in essential matters and our mutual acceptance in nonessentials. Indeed, the genius of congregational polity is that it carefully guards the priesthood of the individual believer even as he associates in the local body with others. A Baptist congregation *delegates* authority to its pastors and deacons or recognizes them as *representatives* of the congregation only in matters that do not pertain to the conscience. The spiritual leaders of a local Baptist church feed the congregation and serve it so that the people can govern themselves according to their mutual understanding of the mind of Christ. The joining of a local church with a convention, presbytery, or other hierarchical jurisdiction, however, does entail the delegation of individual stewardship directly from Christ to human representatives who may or may not act Biblically.

This does not mean, as Wayland eventually asserted, that local churches cannot voluntarily support mission agencies, Bible colleges, or other parachurch organizations. In my opinion, no NT responsibility is *delegated* in such an arrangement, and the parachurch organization does not *represent* the local church in any real sense.

In short, the present loose fellowships of independent Baptist churches that characterize the Baptist Fundamentalist landscape best reflect the autonomous ideal of Wayland at his best. Those desiring for the centralization of the SBC, ABC, PCA, or other similar bodies should reevaluate whether or not they can move in that direction while honoring the Scriptural and Baptist ideal of autonomous churches answering solely to Jesus Christ in all matters.

Dr. David L. Saxon is professor of Bible and Church History at Maranatha Baptist Bible College.

¹ Lumpkin, 120. Cited in H. Leon McBeth's *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 96.

² See the text of Griffith's essay in McBeth, 146.

³ For instance, what Lumpkin calls the "statesmanlike" leadership of Shubal Stearns (*Baptist History in the South* [St. John, IN: Larry Harrison, n.d.], 44), McBeth refers to as a "dictatorial" leadership style (*The Baptist Heritage*, 232). Stearns was the pastor of Sandy Creek Baptist Church and the patriarch of the Separate Baptists in NC. The leading Regular Baptist in the South was Richard Furman, who was also a very strong personality and who favored centralization.

⁴ Isaac Backus, the Separate Baptist pastor who became the leader of the battle for religious liberty in New England, initially refused to join the Warren Association until he "could be satisfied that this Association did not assume jurisdiction over the churches" (McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 243).

⁵ Leonard comments, "The willingness to use the word 'denomination' to describe this new society was an important step for Baptists in the new nation. It brought together various associations, individuals and churches concerned about the foreign missionary task" (*Baptist Ways: A History* [Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003], 165).

⁶ Leonard, 170.

⁷ New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1857. See especially pages 177–90.

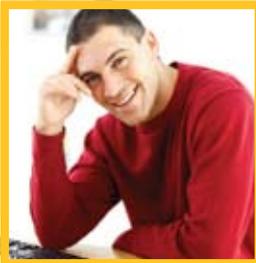
⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 179–80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 180–81, italics in the original.

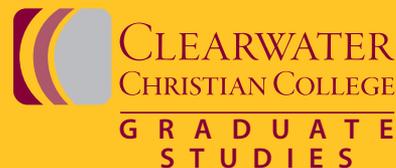
¹¹ New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1859. Cited in David A. West Sr., "Introduction to the 1988 Reprint" of *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*.

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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

What's an Evangelical to Do? Part IV

This is the last of four columns addressing the problem of theological confusion within Evangelicalism. That it is reaching an epidemic level is documented by leading Evangelicals themselves. It is also apparent from the necessity various coalitions within the movement are feeling to clarify their doctrinal convictions. One of the most highly publicized recent efforts is an "Evangelical Manifesto," released to the public last May and signed by over eighty Evangelical leaders (www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com). Although many right-wing Evangelicals are withholding endorsement or have even publicly criticized the document, the concerns of its creators are valid. Those concerns include, in the words of the document, *the fact that the confusions and corruptions surrounding the term Evangelical have grown so deep that the character of what it means has been obscured and its importance lost.*

The premise of this brief four-column appraisal is that this confusion is due, in large measure, to the way Evangelicals respond to those who call their own orthodoxy into question.

I've not attempted to prove that premise. But in brief, I'm beginning with the assumption that all truly evangelical ministries are, by definition, orthodox (employing the same logic with which one argues that *by definition*, all bachelors are unmarried). That being the case, it seems indubitable that an evangelical ministry that tolerates unorthodox (that is, nonevangelical) persons within itself or that behaves in other ways towards them as if they were evangelical, should expect that one

of the consequences will be confusion about the essential doctrinal elements necessary to being evangelical.

If this premise is true, that much of the theological confusion in Evangelicalism stems from the way in which it responds to unorthodox persons, then the vital question concerns what corrections Evangelicals ought to make to their current approach to those who are not.

"The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6)

Unfeigned Assent to the Fundamentals

Historically, orthodox men have frequently combated doctrinal confusion by formulating written creeds clarifying the fundamentals of sound theology. I've alluded to the fact that some within Evangelicalism, alarmed at the present theological amorphism of the movement, are attempting this very approach.

But, as a previous column argued, the formulation of creeds must be followed up by a fellowship policy that confirms their gravity. True Evangelicals ought to require that any Christian ministry organization to which they belong, or any professing Christian theologian with whom they enter into any spiritual cooperation whatsoever, give unfeigned, unqualified, dogmatic assent to every single fundamental of the Christian Faith. Disingenuous pleas that the Bible alone ought to be the only creed to which we require men to subscribe (argued, for example, by non-Trinitarian ministers embedded within Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist churches in early 18th-century England) would have to be confronted, exposed for what they are, and dismissed.

What to Do with the Unorthodox

What is to be done, then, when Evangelicals discover men within their churches, denominations, or other ministry organizations who will not subscribe to orthodox affirmations of the essentials of the Christian Faith? There are several New Testament passages providing answers to this very question.

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Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

There are two pieces of information offered here: (1) a description of certain persons and (2) mandated responses to them. Regarding the first, the text describes persons whose teaching is creating division in the Body of Christ or is causing men to stumble because it is *contrary to orthodox theology (the doctrine which ye have learned)*. Embedded within this description are two additional pieces of information. One concerns the character of these persons' teaching: it is *contrary to, or against* orthodoxy. The other concerns the effects of this teaching on Christians: it divides them, or it trips them up.

This last point is particularly instructive, since those who contend for orthodoxy are frequently accused of being divisive. According to this text, it is the unorthodox who create division, not the other way around.

Would it not be more Scriptural to conclude that separation is the only right course when orthodox men discover that the nature of the organization of which they're a member precludes the possibility of their obeying passages such as Romans 16:17, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, and 2 John 9–11? And that whether they're in the majority or not? And whether they're silenced or not?

The second major piece of information in this text concerns the question of how to respond to such people. The verse mandates two responses. First, *mark* them. The word refers to *looking closely at, or scrutinizing*. Again, this is a vital point. It commands orthodox men to look carefully at those who are calling their own doctrinal integrity into question. In other words, it is not Christlike charity to overlook the disturbing or questionable opinions that unorthodox men publish and preach. It is the opposite.

Second, if after Scriptural examination, men are proven to be unsound in the Faith, we are directed to *avoid them (ekklinete ap' autōn)*. This is the only New Testament occurrence of this phrase, so we don't have the advantage of being able to compare multiple texts to get at its usage. But the verb *ekklinō* means to *turn away* or to *shun*. A directive to *turn away* presupposes relationship or at the least the kind of acquaintance one gains from *looking closely at or scrutinizing* someone. *Turn away* is therefore commanding a discontinuation of that relationship after acquiring factual acquaintance with the person's heterodoxy. So this change in

relations is instituted knowledgeably, deliberately, and obediently to God's command. Here, then, is a Biblical mandate answering the question as to how any of us, Fundamentalists or Evangelicals, are to respond to unorthodox men.

A second passage directing response to those whose beliefs position them outside the pale of Christianity is 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1. I'll quote only portions of the passage.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness . . . or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.

The background of this passage is Paul's struggle to part the Corinthians from certain religious leaders who were undermining his apostolic credentials and thus in turn his ministry of reconciling men to God through Christ alone. He apparently knew enough about these shysters' belief system to be able to label them *unbelievers*. Perhaps secondarily his directive counters a continuing tendency on the part of some within the Corinthian church to associate themselves in various ways with idolatry, despite his previous teaching against this as he discussed the problem in 1 Corinthians 8–10.

In any case, the Holy Spirit's directive through Paul's pen prohibits being yoked together with unbelieving persons. First Corinthians 5:9, 10 had clarified that Christians must not extend prohibitions like this to every kind of unbeliever in every kind of situation. In other words, the separateness enjoined in 2 Corinthians 6 is not unqualified. But in general, true Christians are prohibited from harnessing themselves together with unbelievers in a double yoke. The imagery of the yoke suggests the undertaking of some joint venture with them, not merely befriending or associating with them for the purpose of evangelizing them.

Paul gives no extensive list of applications. However, it is apparent from 1 Corinthians 7:39 that marriage would be one such yoke. From 1 Corinthians 5:11 we learn that keeping company with someone representing himself as a believer but practicing scandalous sin is another forbidden yoke. Second John 9–11 reveals that a third kind of prohibited yoke is the one under discussion in this column—receiving as Christians those who do not remain within the bounds of sound Christology. We'll discuss this passage further in a moment.

The Scripture argues for its prohibition through a series of five rhetorical questions designed to expose the incongruity of such yokes. There's not space here to discuss these questions in detail, but the very fact that they're used in this rhetorical way argues that their point is actually self-apparent. To use Paul's vocabulary, the point is that it isn't possible for there to be *metochē* (*sharing, communion*), *koinōnia* (*fellowship*), *sumphōnēsis* (*agreement*), *meris* (*share*), or *sugkataqesis* (*putting*

together, or agreement) between belief and unbelief. Paul really rings the changes on this, doesn't he?

The variety of terms Paul employs provide suggestions as to what he intends for us to understand by being *yoked* to unorthodox people. He intends for us to understand that such a relationship would be created by our *communing with*, or *fellowshipping with*, or *agreeing with*, or *sharing together with*, or *putting [ourselves] together with* unbelieving persons.

R. Kent Hughes, an Evangelical held in high esteem throughout the movement, applies this passage pointedly in a published sermon on this passage (*2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Crossway Books, 2006). Precisely because he is an Evangelical, not a Fundamentalist, his words seem to me to be especially noteworthy.

We are to disassociate ourselves from complicity with those who would attempt to propagate a false gospel within the church. Specifically, it means to sever the yoke with those who insinuate that reconciliation is not all of God and that we can make peace with God, that the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross in which God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21) is not enough, but rather there are rituals and experiences and works that will make our salvation secure. Today it means to reject liberal, moralizing theories of the atonement. It means to reject a bootstrap sentimentality that if we do our best we will make it and that good people will find a way. And within the church, it demands that we never allow those who hold such doctrines to be yoked with us in ministry.

This is a call not to give those who would presume to lead and teach the church a pass because they are nice or theologically educated or gifted or related to us or have grown up in the church. Countless churches have fallen from within because godly leaderships have yoked themselves and their congregation with an unbelieving pastor. Often it has been the pastor's son or a favorite son of the church returned fresh from a prominent theological institution where he quietly discarded his faith but retained his religious vocabulary (redefined for his own purposes) and has learned ecclesiastical craftsmanship. He is pious, disarming, smiling, but unbelieving. Weimar Germany was full of pastors like this. And they sat on their hands while the church plunged into apostasy.

The Evangelicalism of the last half century has generally rejected these kinds of applications. But how heartening it would be now if Kent's position were to become more and more characteristic of Evangelical leaders in the future!

A third New Testament passage addressing the issue of relationship with unorthodox persons is 2 John 9–11.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine,

receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

The persons in view here are those who do not remain within the bounds of orthodox Christology (*abideth not in the doctrine of Christ*). Within the immediate context, John is referring to those who deny the incarnation (v. 7). But verses 9–11 cannot be restricted in their application to *only* incarnation-deniers. This is apparent from the description in verse 9 of the person who is the *opposite* of one who is not abiding in the doctrine of Christ. As might be expected, John describes him as *he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ*. But it's the next statement that is especially helpful for clarifying the person who is the *opposite* of those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. He is a person who *hath both the Father and the Son*.

We know from other New Testament passages that in order for a person to have *both the Father and the Son*, in other words, to be a Christian, he must believe more about Jesus Christ than simply His incarnation. So John's condition to possessing salvation, expressed as *abideth in the doctrine of Christ*, would necessarily include embracing the entirety of the Christology required for salvation (such as the blood atonement, the resurrection, the Lordship of Christ, etc.). And as those who hold to these truths (*abide in the doctrine of Christ*) are those in direct contrast to those who *abide not in the doctrine of Christ*, the latter description could describe persons whose Christology is aberrant in a number of ways, not merely on the matter of the incarnation. Therefore, anyone who departs from orthodox Christology on any point necessary to possessing for oneself *both the Father and the Son* is the opposite of someone abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Such a person, John says, *hath not God*.

This text mandates that the Christian response to such a person be twofold. We are neither to receive him into our homes nor to even greet him. A certain amount of interpretational clarification is necessary regarding these commands. For instance, in view of the fact that the early churches met in private homes, it may be that John is not prohibiting a Christian's ever inviting a heretic into his house (even for the purpose of evangelizing him) but that he is forbidding receiving such a one into a gathering of worshiping believers. Further, by *receive not*, he is probably not directing believers to bar the doors of their churches to such persons (so that unorthodox persons are never even found in attendance) but directing us not to accept them as Christians if they approach. That is, not to extend our welcoming fellowship to them as if they were truly believers.

Similarly, by *neither bid him God speed*, a translation of a phrase that translates literally, *do not speak to him a greeting or a welcome*, John may not be forbidding our saying *hello* or *good morning* to an unorthodox person. He is, however, most certainly forbidding our speaking to him in the warm, welcoming way with which we greet those who are truly brothers and sisters in Christ.

People universally know the difference between the two kinds of greetings, the one merely acknowledging a person's presence and the other expressing our pleasure about it.

The one other matter that must be clarified is that in view of the Great Commission, 1 Corinthians 5:10, and other such passages, it ought to be clear that John's restriction is limited to a certain kind of unorthodox individual. He cannot be prohibiting our association with every unbeliever who has wrong views of Christ. The whole point of evangelism is to get people's Christology corrected!

The kind of individual John is referring to is described as *transgressing* and *not abiding*.

Literally, he is *proagōn*, *going before*. Why John uses this particular characterization is unclear. Perhaps he sarcastically quotes the false teachers' own claim for themselves—"we are progressive; we've gone forward theologically." Be that as it may, further insight is afforded us by John's saying that this person does not *remain* in the doctrine of Christ. It would seem, then, that the person in view has some acquaintance with what Scripture teaches concerning Christ, is perhaps even studying or teaching it, but is extending his own Christology beyond Bible bounds.

John Stott's Position

In the last column I concluded with a brief account of the 1966 clash between David Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott and J. I. Packer over how Evangelicals ought to respond to unorthodoxy in their denominations. Forty years later, both Stott and Packer are still arguing that their position of remaining within their denomination with unorthodox and apostate ministers is the right one. In a recent publication (*The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* [IVP, 2007]), Stott states the conditions under which he would feel he must separate from the Church of England.

Such an extreme situation might be

- when an issue of first order is at stake, such as deserves the condemnation "antichrist" (I John 2:22) or "anathema" (Galatians 1:8–9)
- when the offending issue is held not by an idiosyncratic minority of individuals but has become the official position of the majority
- when the majority have silenced the faithful remnant, forbidding them to witness or protest any longer
- when we have conscientiously explored every possible alternative
- when, after a painful period of prayer and discussion, our conscience can bear the weight no longer

But Stott seems to have disregarded the kinds of texts we've just examined. Those passages provide *Divinely* described circumstances necessitating separation. Stott's list of circumstances doesn't appear to take them fully into account. His qualifications, such as, *has become the official position of the majority* and *when the majority have silenced the faithful remnant* aren't found in these texts or in any others to my knowledge.

Would it not be more Scriptural to conclude that separation is the only right course when orthodox men discover that the *nature* of the organization of which they're a member precludes the possibility of their obeying passages such as Romans 16:17, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, and 2 John 9–11? And that whether they're in the majority or not? And whether they're silenced or not?

In other words, if the structure, the constitution, or the by-laws of an organization make it effectively impossible to obey Scripture, isn't it apparent that I have no recourse but to walk away from that organization? To put it simply, it would appear that to be Scriptural an Evangelical must either unyoke the unbelievers or unyoke himself. Any yoke that precludes the former seems to necessitate the latter.

The Unresolved Controversy

In a previous installment of this extended discussion I recommended Iain Murray's *The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals*. That title sums up the Achilles' heel in Evangelicalism. Until it resolves this controversy Scripturally it will not only continue to be a theologically confused movement but, more tragically, one continuing to dim many of God's glories to the world's eyes.

Every Evangelical should come to a final verdict. What is the Scriptural thing for him to do about his organizational and ministerial associations with unorthodox religious leaders? Lest the arguments of cautious scholarship freeze his response, let me conclude with a warning issued recently by a man who is himself a notable Evangelical. Though the context of his comments concern another issue, they apply aptly to the one addressed here.

More and more evangelical churches and institutions are overthrowing their heritage, sometimes on the superficial basis that scholars are divided on the issue. The truth is that scholars are divided on most theological issues. . . . In other words, giving up a doctrine on the basis that scholars differ in their opinions shows no doctrine is secure and the more liberal perspective or practice will prevail. . . . As followers of Christ, we must always submit our heritage and authority, as well as any cultural consensus, to Scripture lest we make Scripture void (Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 236). ☞

Bring . . . the Books

In Labors More Abundant:
The Life and Ministry of Charles Wesley

My earliest memories of church are of the United Methodist Church in Mission, Texas, where my parents were members. Theological compromise and social liberalism in that church soon drove my parents to seek a spiritual home in a conservative Baptist church across town. Four decades later I find myself very far from my early theological roots.

Almost everything I believe passionately is absent from all but a few conservative Methodist churches. I am generally reformed in soteriology, dispensational in eschatology, and Baptist in polity—positions radically different from most churches, pastors, and theologians in contemporary Methodism. Perhaps this is why, up till now, I have been content to pursue only passing knowledge of the life and ministry of the Wesley brothers. However, while preaching a summer series on music to our congregation, I rediscovered the life and ministry of the younger Wesley brother, Charles. One of the more helpful works I read was *The Lives of the Wesleys*, and my copy was published in 1854.

While I continue to remain at odds with many of the theological positions embraced by the Wesleys, I was deeply blessed by Whitehead's description of their passionate commitment to Christ, zeal for the gospel, genuine care for the souls of lost men, and burden for the spiritual care and growth of their converts.

Charles Wesley is perhaps best known for the more than 7000 hymns he contributed to Protestant Evangelical hymnody. Born on December 18, 1708, when his more famous brother John was five years old, Charles was raised in a minister's home and came under deep conviction of his sin at about age twenty while a student at Oxford. In 1735 he was ordained in the Church of England and remained in that denomination until his death at seventy-nine years of age.

Charles clearly understood the facts of the gospel and even preached them to others well before becoming convinced of his own genuine conversion. Whitehead recounts a fascinating exchange between Charles and a woman to whom he witnessed. Her testimony and unshakeable faith left him even more convinced that he needed to experience personally what he was preaching to others. That assurance came a few days later in May of 1737.

Shortly after, Charles was called to Newgate Prison to preach to ten men condemned to hang in a few days. He preached the gospel to them on several occasions, and several of the men were genuinely converted. Nor was he interested in mere decisions. In fact, his explanation of conversion displays a theological emphasis absent in many modern Evangelical approaches to evangelism:

Conversion is the turning of a sinner from his sins to the living God: it is a change: 1. In a man's judgment of himself, so that he condemns his former course of life, and the principles from which he acted even in his best works: 2. In his will; he now chooses God

and the ways of God, in the ways of God, in preference to vice, under any of its enticing forms: 3. In his affections; he hates the things he formerly loved, and loves the things which lead to God and heaven.

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

And while he firmly believed that justification is by faith alone and that a man can't move a step toward God until God first begins a work in that man, he was equally convinced that conversion was the evidence that God had worked and that man had believed.

Charles and John strongly differed with another early member of the Methodist movement, George Whitefield, over predestination and particular redemption. Sadly, John's intemperate words and caustic spirit toward Whitefield provoked a breach that was never healed in spite of numerous attempts by Whitefield. Eventually this breach resulted in a smaller movement of Calvinistic Methodists. Though Charles did side with John in this matter, evidence exists that he was more charitable than John toward Whitefield and his followers. Whitehead reports a wonderful example of this very thing when Charles came to Plymouth in June of 1746.

Here some of Mr. Whitefield's society met him and importuned him to come and preach among them, and he complied with their request. . . . He met them in their house, prayed with them, and endeavored to provoke them to love and good works. He soon found that God was with them. . . . Mr. Wesley observed, "We mourned and rejoiced together in him that loved us. I have not known such a refreshing time since I left Bristol."

There is much that we can emulate from this example. As strongly as we hold some of our theological differences and as important as they rightfully are in our day as in theirs, those of a stronger Calvinistic persuasion found it expedient to issue an invitation to Charles and to compel him to accept, and he was surprisingly refreshed by them in spite of their differences. Though they differed in important ways on significant theological truths, the gospel, the passion they had for Christ and His Word, and a deep desire to evidence genuine conversion provided common ground for mutual appreciation and profitable ministry together. Perhaps in this, Charles might prove a help in our day to the theological descendants of both Whitefield and Wesley. Unfortunately, John's vitriolic spirit and intemperate speech toward Whitefield's position soon eclipsed Charles's gracious spirit. May God spare us today from this evil as well. ☞

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“Greet Andronicus and Junia(s), my fellow Jews and fellow prisoners, who are well-known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me” (author’s translation).

Egalitarian scholars such as Linda Belleville and Eldon Epp have published well-documented journal articles on the identity and vocation of Junia(s) in Romans 16:7.¹ Their arguments center primarily on the gender of the name. The implication is that the gender of the hapax Junia(s) would resolve the issue of female apostleship.

The textual evidence for a feminine or masculine rendering of *Iouinian* is inconclusive. Moreover, though Junia is not commonly attested in Greek literature, the Greek evidence lends itself toward a feminine rendering with the possible exception of a masculine reference by Epiphanius. The Latin evidence strongly attests the name Junia and only Origen as translated by Rufinus attests the masculine name Junias in his Romans commentary. The “shortened-name” theory where Junias is considered to be a contracted form of the lengthier masculine name Junianus still remains a valid option.

Michael Burer and Daniel Wallace have argued, however, that the gender of the name is not the only point of debate in Romans 16:7.² Conceding the probability that *Iouinian* may indeed be feminine, they suggest as a working hypothesis that the comparative collocation “outstanding among the apostles” would be more accurately rendered with an elative sense, “famous” or “well-known to the apostles.” Both the inclusive translation (“outstanding among the apostles”) and the exclusive translation (“famous/well-known to the apostles”) are grammatically possible. The NET Bible and the ESV both translate the phrase exclusively—“well-known to the apostles.” *Exclusive* means that Andronicus and Junia(s) are non-apostles.

Burer/Wallace’s line of reasoning is that comparative adjectives which indicate an inclusive reading are generally followed by genitives rather than datives. Several key examples are presented by Burer and Wallace, including Pss. Sol. 2:6 where the writer indicates that the Jewish captives “were a *spectacle* among the gentiles.” The parallels with Romans 16:7 include (1) people as a referent of the adjective *episēmos* (“well known” or “outstanding”), (2) followed by *en* with the dative plural, and (3) the dative referring to people where the first group is not part of the second group (Jewish captives not part of the Gentiles). Their conclusion is that as the negative notoriety of the Jews existed among the Gentiles, so in a parallel fashion the fame of Andronicus and Junia(s) existed among the apostles as opposed to the couple being members of the group.

Finally, Douglas Moo understands Paul’s use of the term “apostles” in a broad sense.³ Though Paul uses *apostolois* narrowly in reference to the twelve apostles and his own apostolic ministry to the Gentile churches, he

also employs *apostolois* in reference to traveling missionaries, emissaries, and envoys.⁴ If Andronicus and Junia(s) are simply a traveling missionary couple similar to the apostle Peter who traveled with his wife (1 Cor. 9:5) or Aquila and Priscilla, then the egalitarian conclusions of women occupying all levels of leadership in the church become nothing more than special pleading. Even if the egalitarian arguments in Romans 16:7 are conceded on the gender and syntactical questions, the conclusion that Junia possessed apostolic authority as a member of the highest ranks in the NT church is a *non sequitur* and contrary to other clear Pauline passages (1 Tim. 2:11–15; 3:1–8; 1 Cor. 14).

As to the immediate context of Junia(s) in Romans 16:7, if indeed Andronicus and Junia(s) were fellow apostles with Paul, it would be natural for Paul to continue to describe them not only as fellow Jews and fellow prisoners, but more importantly as fellow apostles. Yet, Paul refrains from doing so. Furthermore, Paul specifically mentions that “they were in Christ before me.” Yet again, the Apostle to the Gentiles does not mention that Andronicus and Junia(s) had become apostles before Paul (cf. “those who were apostles before me” [Gal. 1:17]).

What then would be the intended purpose of Paul’s commendation? Paul intends to visit Rome so that the Roman Christians may help him on his way to preach the gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:23-4). Just as he needed the fellowship of the Philippians to support his mission in the East, he also needs Roman sponsorship in the West (vs. 24). It would only benefit Paul for the believers at Rome, many of whom Paul had never met (vs. 23), to know that those fellow Jews who are well-known to the Roman church and who had suffered with Paul for the cause of the gospel would be highly respected among the apostles in Jerusalem as well. Such a glowing reputation of Paul’s fellow countrymen, fellow prisoners, and co-laborers would only enhance Paul’s own reputation among the Roman believers and prepare their minds for the support Paul would need on his future travels to evangelize the West. ☞☞

“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)

¹ Linda Belleville, “A Re-examination of Romans 16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (April 2005): 231–49; Eldon J. Epp, “Text-Critical, Exegetical, and Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variation in Romans 16:7,” *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* CLXI (2002): 227–91.

² Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16:7,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 78–91.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 924.

⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 95–99.

Few of us can begin to calculate the value of good books. Good books will shape your ministry, strengthen your faith, and enrich your life. The author's attempt here is simply to present quotes and illustrations on the topic of reading and books with as little comment as possible.

Spurgeon commented on Paul's desire for books (2 Tim. 4:13) by saying, "He is inspired, and yet *he wants books!* He has been preaching for at least thirty years, and yet *he wants books!* He has seen the Lord, and yet *he wants books!* He had a wider experience than most men, and yet *he wants books!* He has been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet *he wants books!* He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet *he wants books!* The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, 'Give thyself unto reading.'¹

The Importance of Reading

Christians Must Read

"A universal mark of a called minister of the gospel is an insatiable thirst for Bible knowledge, and reading is one sure path to intellectual growth."²

"There is nothing that will strengthen the mind, broaden the vision, and enrich the soul more than the reading of good books."³

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read."⁴

"The leader who intends to grow spiritually and intellectually will be reading constantly. Lawyers must read steadily to keep up on case law. Doctors must read to stay current in the ever-changing world of health care. So the spiritual leader must master God's Word and its principles. . . . To do so, the leader must have an active life of reading."⁵

"John Wesley had a passion for reading, and he did so mostly on horseback. . . . Wesley told the younger ministers of the Methodist societies to read or get out of the ministry."⁶

"If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy."⁷

"To those of his people who had no taste for reading, John Wesley said commandingly that they must acquire it! Alexander Whyte advised, 'Sell your shirt and buy books.'⁸

Libraries Are Necessary

Experience has taught the author that church libraries are seldom or rarely used. Pastors must teach

by example and precept the importance of reading.

Henry Ward Beecher said, "It is a man's duty to have books. A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life."⁹

The godly pastor Andrew Bonar wrote in his diary on May 12, 1855, these words: "Led today to notice that all my books that come to help my study . . . are all part of God's calling of me."¹⁰

"A visiting English preacher observed: In America every minister has a fine car and a television set. He seems always to be talking on the telephone or rushing somewhere. But your ministers do not have libraries. In England our clergy do not have fine cars and usually no telephone, but our ministers do have libraries."¹¹

The Benefits of Books and Reading

The godly Puritan Richard Baxter would offend many preachers with his thoughts of the benefits of a good book over a poor preacher. "Books have the advantage. . . : You may read an able preacher when you have but an average one to hear. Every congregation cannot hear the most judicious or powerful preachers: but every single person may read the books of the most powerful and judicious; preachers may be silenced or banished, when books may be at hand. . . . Books we may have at hand every day and hour; when we can have sermons but seldom, and at set times. If sermons be forgotten, they are gone; but a book we may read over and over, till we remember it: and if we forget it, may again peruse it at our pleasure, or at our leisure. So that good books are a very great mercy to the world: the Holy Ghost chose the way of writing, to preserve His doctrine and laws to the Church, as knowing how easy and sure a way it is of keeping it safe to all generations, in comparison of mere verbal traditions."¹²

Books Impact Others

"There is an influence exerted by books upon the mind which resembles that of diet upon his body. A studious mind becomes, by law of its being, like the object which it studies with enthusiasm. If your favorite authors are superficial, gaudy, short-lived, you become yourself such in your culture and your influence. If your favorite authors are of the grand, profound, enduring order, you become yourself such to the extent of your innate capacity for such growth. Their thoughts become yours, not by transfer, but by transfusion. . . . Their choice of words, their idioms, their constructions, their illustrative materials, become yours; so that their style and yours will

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

belong to the same class in expression, and yet your style will never merely imitative of theirs.”¹³

“There has been no time in the history of Christianity when books have not been supremely important for the growth and preservation of the church. . . . Books are a vehicle for expressing biblical culture where they are not the norm.”¹⁴

Richard Baxter read a book by Richard Sibbes, one of the choicest of the Puritan writers, and was greatly blessed by it. Baxter then wrote his *Call to the Unconverted*, which deeply influenced Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This brought the young William Wilberforce to serious thoughts of eternity. Wilberforce, English statesman and foe of slavery, wrote his *Practical Book of Christianity*, which fired the soul of Leigh Richmond. Richmond, in turn, wrote *The Dairyman’s Daughter*, a book that brought thousands to the Lord, helping Thomas Chalmers the great preacher, among others.¹⁵

Books Can Be Used for Evangelistic Purposes

In his journal John Wesley tells of his conversion: “In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate where one was reading Luther’s preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. I felt my heart strangely warmed: About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Samuel Johnson says of his conversion, “I took up William Law’s ‘Serious Call,’ expecting to find it a dull book, and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me, and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest about religion after I became capable of rational inquiry.”¹⁶

“How many souls may be converted by what some men are privileged to *write and print*. . . . I value good books for the good they may do to men’s souls. . . . The other day, my soul was gladdened exceedingly by an invitation from a pious woman to go and see her. She told me she had been ten years on her bed, and had not been able to stir from it. ‘Nine years,’ she said, ‘I was dark, and blind, and unthinking; but my husband brought me one of your sermons. I read it, and God blessed it to the opening of my eyes. He converted my soul by it.’”¹⁷

Books Stimulate the Mind

“With half-an-hour’s reading every night as a steady practice, the busiest man can get a fair education.”¹⁸

“The mind can atrophy, like the muscles, if it is not used. Atrophy of the mental muscles is the penalty that we pay for not taking mental exercise.”¹⁹

Books Can Be Given as Gifts

Thomas à Kempis stated, “If he shall not lose his reward, who gives a cup of cold water to his thirsty neighbor, what will not be the reward of those who by putting good books into the hands of those neighbors open to them the fountains of eternal life?”²⁰

Books Are a Lasting Value

“The habit of reading . . . is your passport to the greatest, the purest, and the most perfect pleasures that God has prepared for His creatures. . . . It lasts when other pleasures fade.”²¹

My friend, you will face many obstacles to reading—a lack of finances, interruptions, answering e-mails and phone calls, social engagements, the temptation to laziness, entertainment, and many other dangers. By the grace of God all of these obstacles must be overcome.

In Paul’s dying days, he desired his coat to warm his body, his books to occupy his mind, and his Bible to feed his soul. What about you? ☞☞

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting & Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon, 1876), 14.

² David Brookman, *Basic Books for the Minister’s Library* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1986), xiv.

³ Cyril J. Barber, *The Minister’s Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 231.

⁴ Mark Twain in Cyril J. Barber, *100+ Best Books* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 15.

⁵ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 102.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Daniel Webster quoted in *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 151, Winter 1995 (Pensacola, FL), 17.

⁸ David Brookman, *Basic Books for the Minister’s Library* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1986), xiv.

⁹ Cyril J. Barber, *The Minister’s Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 15.

¹⁰ Marjory Bonar, ed., *Andrew H. Bonar: Diary and Life* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 168.

¹¹ Source unknown.

¹² Drawn from an article printed in the *Banner of Truth* (Issue 11, June 1958). Richard Baxter, *Advice on Reading*, www.puritansermons.com/baxter/baxter30.htm.

¹³ Austin Phelps, *Men and Books* (New York: Scribner, 1891), 105.

¹⁴ Mark Lau Branson, *The Reader’s Guide to the Best Evangelical Books* (Philadelphia: Harper and Row, 1982), xv.

¹⁵ Ernest C. Reisinger, *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 151, Winter 1995 (Pensacola, FL), 18.

¹⁶ F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1926).

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Early Years* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 392.

¹⁸ Sir William Osler in Cyril J. Barber, *100+ Best Books* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 10.

¹⁹ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 345.

²⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Read Any Good Books?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 18.

²¹ Anthony Trollope in Cyril J. Barber, *100+ Best Books* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 58.

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Unity in a Baptist Church?

Some have said, “Baptist churches multiply by division!” Such an observation must not be taken lightly, for it was our Savior’s prayer that His disciples be models of divine unity reflecting the very tri-unity of the Godhead (John 17:22). The absence of unity in the church requires prayerful, Scriptural attention, for disunity is dishonoring to God.

The 133rd Psalm is a song in praise of unity. It begins with the wonderful words, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (As the father of two daughters and three sons, I’ve often said that the 133rd is my favorite psalm.) In this “Song of Degrees,” which was meant to be sung by Israelites during their pilgrimage feasts, David describes unity with two very powerful word-pictures.

■ First, the psalmist says that unity “is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard” (v. 2). At the anointing of the high priest the fragrance of the oil filled the air with unequalled sweetness. Even so, the unity of the saints is an undeniable fragrance of greater value than clean buildings, ecclesiastical furniture, and grand marketing schemes.

■ In verse 3 David provides a second word-picture comparing unity to “the dew of Hermon . . . that descended upon the mountains of Zion.” As the ice upon great Mt. Hermon melted, it watered the plains, and they became fruitful. Likewise, as the ice of hostility melts in the hearts of God’s people, there will be fruitfulness.

Psalm 133 teaches us that unity is the pungent fragrance of faith that makes fruitfulness possible.

Because our great High Priest prayed for unity and the psalmist shows unity to be a very powerful commodity, every believer ought to take seriously the often neglected portion of the typical church covenant in which we promise to “strive to sustain the unity of the saints.” While real Christian unity exists only where there is doctrinal harmony (Phil. 1:27) and fervent prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:1), unity thrives where Spirit-led, Scripturally-guided congregational church government is practiced.

Church government is a matter of great controversy in our generation. There are churches using business models and marketing schemes to impact their communities. Other churches appear to be personality-driven fiefdoms that prosper while the lord (note the small “I”) is present to direct

the vassals. There are churches governed from the top-down under Roman rule and Episcopalian oligarchies, and there are others driven from the bottom-up by democratic forums lacking Biblical foundation—which appear to be nothing more than social clubs. Questions regarding elder government, the role of deacons, autocratic pastors, and parliamentary procedures give ongoing evidence of contemporary ecclesiastical confusion. I would like to suggest that *the New Testament represents a beautiful balance of power between the pastor and the people*. When this balance is understood and respected, the fragrance of fruitful unity can become the norm, not the exception (even in Baptist churches).

In Hebrews 13:7 and 17 believers are clearly instructed to follow the faith of their spiritual leaders by demonstrating consistent obedience and loving submission. Faithful leaders “watch for [the] souls” of those who follow them and will one day “give account” to the Lord for each soul that they have influenced (James 3:1). Spiritual leaders in the local church are to be respected for their work’s sake (1 Thess. 5:12, 13). Where there is no respect for the spiritual leaders in the local church (both pastors and deacons—1 Tim. 3:1–13; Phil. 1:1), there can be no hope of sustaining spiritual unity. Just as there can be no hope of harmony in a home where the husband and father is not respected, there can be no hope of unity in the congregation where those in positions of spiritual leadership are not revered. Most believers are well versed in this concept. Sadly, some are subjected to strong messages asserting that the authority of spiritual leaders should be respected even when the character of the “spiritual leader” is suspect. We must be clear, “bishops” (pastors and elders) must maintain a “blamelessness” (1 Tim. 3:1, 2) or be brought before the flock and admonished for their failures (1 Tim. 5:19, 20). Congregational unity cannot be sustained where there is no pastoral integrity.

Just as the congregation is to honor the spiritual leader (1 Tim. 5:17), the spiritual leader is to show respect to the congregation. Pastors (elders and bishops) are not to act as “lords” over “God’s heritage” but serve rather as examples (1 Pet. 5:1–3). Even the apostolic pastors who were used of the Spirit to give instruction to the churches in the pages of God’s Word allowed the Spirit of God to lead through congregational church government. There are at least six decisions that are to be made corporately and democratically by New Testament congregations. Let’s take a moment to review them:

■ Discipline of church members requires congregational consent.

The pastor alone, or in consultation with an official board, does not have the authority to mete out church discipline. The authority of church discipline resides within the congregation. In Matthew 18 our Lord said, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (vv. 15–17).

The apostle Paul clearly respected the authority of the assembled congregation to practice discipline. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul addresses the entire congregation (not the pastoral staff or the deacons) when he declares, “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles” (v. 1). The Spirit’s instruction to the church in Corinth is very clear. “When ye are gathered together . . . deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (vv. 4, 5). As the New Testament reader arrives in 2 Corinthians 2, it becomes clear that the instructions of 1 Corinthians 5 were respected by the Corinthian congregation, for in 2 Corinthians 2:6 it is noted that their work was a “punishment . . . inflicted of many” (literally “by the majority”).

Church discipline is to be practiced by Biblically obedient, spiritually sensitive congregations. The pastor has no power to execute discipline. Such power resides within the congregation and is to be taken very seriously, for when it is exercised, the wayward are literally made unto us as “heathen” (Matt. 18:17) with the expectation that Satan will buffet them (1 Cor. 5:5).

■ Deacon selection requires congregational consent.

In the early verses of Acts 6 the multiplication of ministerial responsibilities was answered by the dividing of ministerial duties. As the widows complained because they were neglected, the apostolic pastors of the church of Jerusalem did not allow their plight to be unanswered. Instead the apostles suggested that the congregation “look” for those qualified to serve the needs of the Grecian widows (v. 3). Acts 6:5 specifically tells us that “the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose [a Greek word meaning “to elect”]” the men who would serve as the first deacons of the “First Church.” While the apostles enjoyed the capacity to prophesy and perform confirming miracles, they did not take to themselves the task of selecting servants within the local assembly. They respected the Spirit-led congregation’s ability to select the right men for the task at hand.

During the time I served as pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in Concord, New Hampshire, we rewrote our church constitution to take the selection of deacons out of the hands of a “Nominating Committee”; instead, the congregation would select the deacons by simply placing names on blank ballots that were distributed on election night. The congregation was reminded of the character traits set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 for those who would serve as deacons. After Biblical instruction was given, the members of the congregation were asked to simply list on their blank ballots the names of those who they felt were best qualified to serve. The congregation always demonstrated Spirit-guided wisdom in their selection, and there was never any reason to suspect that I, as their pastor, influenced the election for some personal advantage.

■ Dissemination of the gospel through missionary endeavor requires congregational consent.

In Acts 13 the church at Antioch becomes the first missionary-sending church. As the Spirit of God moved within the congregation (Acts 13:1-3), Barnabas and Saul were “separated” for the work God wanted them to do. At the conclusion of their missionary journey the workers demonstrated their accountability to the congregation by returning and rehearsing the wonderful works that God had done (Acts 14:26, 27).

While pastors and deacons should certainly be involved in praying for, preparing and presenting missionary candidates, it remains the responsibility of the congregation to disseminate the gospel message through the sending of democratically chosen missionaries.

■ Deciding who the elders (pastors or bishops) should be requires congregational consent.

As the congregationally-sent missionaries were reviewing the work that had been accomplished (Acts 14), they made certain that it would be perpetuated by ordaining “elders” in “every church” (v. 23). The word translated “ordained” in Acts 14:23 is a very picturesque Greek word, *cheiroteneo*. *Cheiroteneo* is a composite of two words, *cheir*, meaning “hand,” and *teino*, meaning “to stretch.” The verse is literally picturing the stretching of hands within a congregation as a vote was cast. (Note that this same word *cheiroteneo* is translated as “chosen” in 2 Corinthians 8:19 to describe a congregational election of a man who would be given the responsibility of distributing collected funds. In 2 Corinthians 8:19 *cheiroteneo* is translated “chosen.”)

The New Testament allows the congregation to select its own leaders. Both deacons and pastors were elected by the congregation. Pastors and deacons were not chosen by the apostles but rather by Spirit-led democracies (see Acts 6 and 14). Encountering this truth caused the congregation that I led in New Hampshire to make yet another change to our constitution. Instead of the senior pastor selecting those who would serve as assistant pastors, the senior pastor now introduces all candidates for pastoral offices within the assembly. The congregation voices its pleasure through a democratic vote.

■ Doctrinal statements require congregational consent.

In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts a council is called because of a dispute brought into the church by Jewish believers who taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation. As the apostles worked with the churches to clarify the doctrine of salvation, they respected democratic church government. Acts 15:3 tells us that the representatives of the church were “sent” under the authority of the church in Antioch. (This same word for “sent” is used in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 to describe how God will send a strong delusion upon those who will believe a lie and in Mark 5:12 when the Savior sends the swine into the sea.) The “whole church” in Jerusalem was made aware of the doctrinal decision being rendered (see vv. 12 and 22).

Ultimately, the “whole church” sent “chosen” (elected) men back to Antioch with their verdict. While the apostle Paul would be the channel through which the Spirit of God would explain the doctrines of salvation in the great books of Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians, the great apostle submitted himself to the work of the democratic council of the church when a doctrinal statement for the assembly was being hammered out.

While pastors are given extraordinary gifts as teachers (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2), they must respect the congregation’s authority to review, revise, and release doctrinal statements.

■ Dispersing funds requires congregational consent.

Every member of the Corinthian church was to bring an offering for the collection on “the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 16:2). The offering received was to be carried exclusively by the member who had been “approved” (1 Cor. 16:3). The “approval,” or selection, of the treasurer was clearly the task of the entire congregation (see 2 Cor. 8:19, 23). These verses may well make a case for the congregational election of a church treasurer and certainly present an argument for the congregational oversight of the church’s finances. In 2 Corinthians 8:20, 21 the apostle Paul, through personal example, provides counsel for pastors who would handle church finances wisely. Simply stated, Paul kept his hands off of the church’s money in order to avoid blame and provide an honest testimony before God and man.

It would appear that the some of the weightiest decisions that the church makes are not to be made by a committee or by the pastor but by the democratic work of the congregation. The New Testament presents a beautiful balance of power. While the spiritual leaders of the congregation are to be held in high regard by the flock, the democratic government of the congregation is to be respected by those who serve as spiritual leaders.

The deacons of the church that I served in New Hampshire served communion to the congregation. I fondly remember being overwhelmed often as these godly servants moved toward the communion table to assist me as I led the united assembly in remembering the Lord’s sacrifice for our sins. My respect for our congregation was deep and genuine. Many times the congregation’s Spirit-led wisdom was demonstrated through the difficulties of church discipline. This dear democracy had voiced its opinion through the selection of these dear godly deacons and even by selecting me to be their spiritual leader. Yes, we had discussed difficult doctrinal themes and published them in our constitution for all to consider, and we had carefully considered where we would send our offerings and which missionaries should be supported. But through it all, God brought unity. Unity in a Baptist church! It’s not an oxymoron; it’s our Savior’s plan so that we can know that “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

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On Sacraments

A few things recently have caused me to realize that many Baptists may be almost entirely unaware of the nature of sacramental viewpoints and thus are unconcerned about the dangers of such paganistic, heretical ideas imposed on portions of Scripture. These comments are not intended to correct non-Baptists but to get God's people to have greater respect for the simple, clear message of the Word of God. Speaking out against misrepresentation is, in my mind, an important part of earnestly contending for the faith (Jude 3).

My handy little dictionary is a good starting point. The simplest definition: a sacrament is something regarded as possessing a sacred character or a mysterious significance. The definition that's important for us, though, is this: *a visible object or action which supposedly confers grace or divine life on those who receive it.* Then follows an indication of how widespread these pagan-magic notions are throughout cultural Christianity (i.e., almost all non-Baptists): "The sacraments of the Protestant Churches are baptism and the Lord's Supper." "The sacraments of the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, matrimony, penance, holy orders, and extreme unction."

A general meaning is also included: "a sign, token, or symbol." Some Christians may admittedly use the word as identifying only a symbol. Most Baptists, however, use "ordination" with reference to our performance of the commands of Jesus to do such "in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24).

In the eyes of most non-Baptists, the distinctive that makes Baptists different is that they immerse whereas most other Christians sprinkle for what they call "baptism." To be more correct, Greek Catholics still immerse because that's what the word that's used in Scripture means. The Greek word for "sprinkle" is never used of that which was introduced by John the Immerser and commanded of His followers by the promised Messiah. Sprinkling is unquestionably done either from a pagan influence or out of convenience. But that's totally aside from the matter at hand. Treating the act as something mysterious or magical is surely in God's eyes much more serious than employing a non-Biblical form.

Over fifty years ago, Dr. George Carlson, in a national address to fellow Baptists, commented on the paucity of Baptist publishers and the overwhelming number of publishers putting out books by sacramentalist-defending authors. He predicted that in coming decades, because Baptists will buy these books that flood the market, that there would be serious doctrinal damage among Baptists. The situation is perhaps worse today than he imagined when he made this prediction. The so-called "consensus of scholarship" is overwhelmingly sacramentalist. A Baptist position, to such scholars, seems unworthy even of mention. In my estimation, facts are merely ignored by

many of them, and the official clichés are cited as final, authoritative, and even as unopposed.

One observation concerning recent decades seems valid. Pastors have majored on preaching the positive message, endeavoring to win the lost and build up believers in the faith, and have totally neglected to inform those venturing forth into the fields of life that there are snakes out there that appear to be just sticks. We don't want to be charged with attacking the beliefs of the church down the street. We are afraid of having the reputation of being just negative. We thus fail to point out the differing language and radically differing beliefs of non-Baptists. This is not to say that all Baptists are correct or that only Baptists are Biblical—but to emphasize that Baptists of the past have paid a dear price for the distinct doctrines that many now fail to promote even among our own people.

I'm saying that some 90 percent or more of so-called Christians have a fictitious, unfounded faith in the "magic of the moistened finger" rather than a true faith in the living Lord. I wonder at times about the question of Jesus, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). It's as though Satan is winning some of his most clever battles within the cultural church.

Certain things may be considered sacred because humans have dedicated them to be used to honor God. A structure so dedicated to function as a church is no different from any other building. If we treat it differently, it is out of our respect for God, not because the building is infused with some "electric-like, spiritual jolt." The bread of communion remains bread. It is not changed in any way by anyone, not even by God. The mice which nibble at it are not offending God nor are they bound for Heaven. The humans who eat of it may be benefited slightly physically, but they are not changed or better in the sight of God because of something spiritual within the bread or even by the act of taking it.

There is no hint of sacramental enablement as part of God's work in Scripture. To the contrary, Scripture is strongly against such mystical notions. To endeavor to invest certain commanded actions in church life with supposed divine automatic benefit is surely of pagan origin. To carry over the notion of "means of grace" because ancestors did not see the danger of such a concept is inexcusable. God is either the completely independent Being of the Scripture, or He is limited or controlled to some extent by actions of men. Any who speak of "sacraments" seriously misrepresent God and the work of God.

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Dr. Mark Minnick, BJU Seminary faculty and pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C.

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When God Says "Yes"

Linda Turner

"I don't believe in prayer," nine-year-old Annette piped up loudly. Shiny red hair framed a lovely face and piercing green eyes. She was pretty, athletic, and intelligent. She was also angry, rebellious, and obnoxious.

It was July of 1969, and I was just out of high school. My first experience as a camp counselor had quickly become a challenge I was not prepared for. Most of the counselors and the campers were from the same church, not mine, and filled up three of the girls' cabins, leaving me the lone counselor, "Aunt Linda," for nine giggly strangers and the sullen Annette.

I first encountered Annette's anger Monday night. I had carefully prepared my devotion from Psalm 121 for that first night. Nine girls of different sizes squirmed excitedly before me on the bottom bunks. Their Bibles were on their laps or in their hands. Though I knew she had one at camp, Annette didn't bring her Bible with her.

"Let's pray first," I said.

"I don't believe in prayer," Annette interrupted.

"Prayer is talking with God," I said. "The Bible is God's Book, and we need to ask Him to help us understand it."

"I don't believe in God." Annette folded her arms in front of her and looked straight into my eyes.

Why does she have to be in my cabin? I silently complained to God. *Can't You arrange for her to be in someone else's cabin? At least there are two counselors for all the other cabins.*

"I love her," He replied.

Nine girls and I bowed our heads and asked God to help us understand and obey His Bible . . . to help us know He loves us . . . to help us please Him. When we opened our eyes, Annette was still looking at me defiantly.

I can't do this, Lord, I silently prayed.

"Show her I love her," God answered, so we turned to John chapter 3 instead of Psalm 121. Another short prayer and it was "lights out" except for. . . .

"Aunt Linda?"

"Yes."

"I don't like the dark."

"We're supposed to turn the lights out and go to sleep, Annette."

"I don't want to."

"Go to sleep, Annette."

A little later, "Aunt Linda, I need a drink of water."

She was keeping everyone awake. We compromised and left one set of lights on.

The next day and night didn't go any better. Annette wanted to be first all the time. She did all kinds of things to get attention and had several fights with the other kids. During crafts, she broke one of the girls' ceramic plaques, while managing to spill paint on another girl. She was a powerful swimmer and had greatly enjoyed making fun of her counselor, who clung to the side of the pool practicing putting her head under the chlorinated water. Worst of all, no one in our cabin was getting enough sleep.

Wednesday found my prayers turning into, *Okay Lord, if she has to be in my cabin at least help me love her, because I can't on my own. I don't even like her.*

July 24th came on a Thursday that year. Most of my girls and I were ready to join the other campers walking up the hill toward the main building and the swimming pool. Annette ran up to us in a panic. "I can't find my swimsuit!"

"Didn't you hang it on the line like you were supposed to?"

"I can't find it. My mom's gonna kill me when she finds out I lost it!"

"I'll help you find it." I sent the other girls with one of the counselors from the cabin next door. Inside I prayed fervently that we would find the swimsuit soon and I would not be late for my swim practice. We didn't, and we looked lots of places.

Finally, I said, "I think we need to pray."

"Don't believe in prayer."

"OK, I'll pray, but you must listen. People can pray silently inside themselves and God hears and answers them." I went on in a firm voice, "But I want you to know when we find it that God answered my prayer." So, I prayed aloud. Annette bowed her head.

We look again, but still can't find the bright yellow swimsuit.

Why, Lord?

I want her to know that I love her," He replied.

Oh.

"Annette, God answers prayer in many ways. Sometimes He wants us to wait until the time is right. I think God hasn't answered 'yes' because He wants you to ask Him to help you find your swimsuit."

"But I did pray," Annette was almost crying now. "He didn't answer. That's why I'm here." She sniffed,

Continued on page 32

When a leader demands blind obedience, followers would be wise to take a peek. —Unknown

Authoritarianism was the first departure from New Testament simplicity. The “spiritual” eldership of the churches took to themselves an overruling authority that is absent from the Scriptures. From this developed a structured hierarchy. —Jack Hoad

Originally the teachers and the people conjointly administered the affairs of the New Testament church. —John T. Christian

The bishops of Rome claimed to have the supremacy over the other churches from time to time. . . . Many point to 440 A.D. as the time that the apostate churches of the west generally admitted Rome’s supremacy. —Edward H. Overbey

Roger Williams had offended not only Salem but all of Massachusetts Bay by asserting that the Congregational churches of New England must separate themselves completely from the impure, bishop-ridden Church of England. —Edwin S. Gaustad

From the domination of autocratic religious hierarchies, O Lord, deliver us all. —S. E. Anderson

As apostasy deepened an exaggerated notion of the value of formal oneness came to prevail, until schism was reckoned the deadliest of sins a Christian could commit. The preservation of outward unity thus becoming the paramount consideration, it followed that whatever error a majority in the church might come to hold, the minority must accept it, rather than be guilty of this deadly sin of schism. —H. C. Vedder

We have a Calvinistic creed, a Popish liturgy, and an Arminian clergy. —William Pitt, *Prior’s Life of Burke*

It has been seen that their [the Baptists’] idea, the true archetypal idea, of the church, was the grand cause of the separation of the Baptists, as individuals and communities, from all the various forms of ecclesiastical arrangement adopted by the reformers and their successors. —Edward B. Underhill

The right of the people to elect their [church] officers has been invaded by great personages and magistrates and by the rich and strong. . . . But now this privilege is restored and maintained in the baptized churches, where none are elected messengers, bishops or deacons without the free choice of the brotherhood where such elections were made. —Thomas Grantham

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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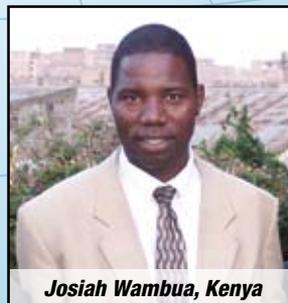
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Boasting of God's Church Plant

Editor's Note: Norway Baptist Church held its first public service in September 2004. You may visit the church online at <http://www.norwaybaptist.com>.

God has done many wonderful things at Norway Baptist Church, which is located in Norway, Michigan, a small community in the Upper Peninsula. Norway boasts a population of just under three thousand people. Church planting experts (which we are not!) might say that a town that size isn't large enough for a new church plant. But since the town offers a McDonald's and a Subway restaurant, there is probably room for a Bible-preaching church as well! In fact, current growth in the church would indicate that the town was indeed large enough for Norway Baptist Church (NBC).

In fall 2003 God burdened the hearts of several faculty and staff families at Northland Baptist Bible College (about thirty minutes away in Dunbar, Wisconsin) to humbly pray about their role in a Norway church plant. Independently of each other, these families sensed an overwhelming responsibility to reach the Norway community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, they prayed, selected leadership, purchased a building, and planted a church.

From the very beginning God's hand of provision has been obvious at NBC. Our church building came with a fully furnished 150-seat auditorium, several small classrooms, a fellowship area, a small kitchen, and a wonderful price tag of only \$45,000 (a price available only in the

Upper Peninsula)! God also graciously provided new hymnals through the generosity of several believers. One Sunday as we gathered together, we were blessed with our first core family before the doors even opened to the public. This family noticed the cars parked outside the church and promptly investigated what was going on inside. In fact, it is because of this family's testimony that many of our contacts, converts, and members have come.

God has blessed abundantly over the last four years. On any given Sunday many of God's people rejoice in what the Lord is doing in their lives. For example, Tom, a man who regularly worships at NBC, was converted a few years ago and now reads through the Bible at a feverish pace (he is currently on his fifth reading!). Another man, Jerry, didn't know how to read. After he turned to Christ, however, he enrolled in classes so he could learn to read his Bible. Betty, a disabled woman, always attends the morning service with a heart to worship the Lord. She turned to Christ at her husband's funeral and faithfully serves the Lord. Another man, Rich, was saved and discipled at our church;

unfortunately, he recently passed away from a heart attack. But because of the wonderful grace of God, we know we will someday see Rich again at our eternal destination. Furthermore, several families who have joined our church left the grips of false teaching and unsound church backgrounds.

God has graciously sent us a full-time pastor in Pastor Mark Markham. He and his family came to NBC in June 2004, and he became our pastor the following year. At the beginning of 2008, NBC agreed to provide full financial support for him and his family. We are so grateful for our pastor. He emphasizes the sovereign grace of our God through powerful expository preaching each week.

As we look to the future, our corporate desire is to continue the work of the Great Commission by reaching our community and investing in world missions. As we squeeze into our crowded little church building, we boast of the great work God has done in our midst. To God be all the glory!

Brent Belford serves as assistant pastor at Norway Baptist Church and on the Bible faculty at Northland Baptist Bible College.



Jerry Sivnksty

The Lord's Presence for His People

In Psalm 16:11 we read, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy." It is the second phrase of this verse we are going to examine as it applies to the Lord's people. In Exodus 33, Moses prayed for the Lord's presence. He said in verse 13, "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people." Then in verse 14 the Lord answered, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

What a statement from the Lord to Moses! But Moses was not satisfied. In the next verse he said to the Lord, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." Moses recognized his total dependence on the Lord and craved His presence. Moses' desire was so great that he wanted to actually see the Lord with his own eyes. But the Lord said in Exodus 33:20, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." Although the Lord couldn't allow Moses to see His face, He did allow him to see a part of His glory. God said in verses 22-23, "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

Why couldn't Moses, and why can't we, see the Lord's face here on earth? Because humanity cannot look upon Deity and live! But in Heaven we shall see the Lord's face. Revelation 22:4 declares, "And they shall see his face."

Many people say, "If I could only see the Lord, then I would believe in Him." But the truth is, they still would not believe in Him. This is illustrated in Luke 16, when the rich man died and went to Hell. In verses

27-31 he pleaded with Abraham,

I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him [Lazarus] to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Mankind must believe what the Lord says in His Word, because it alone is the absolute truth! When God told Moses, "My presence shall go with thee," He meant exactly what He said. The same is true for those of us who are saved. Since we cannot see the Lord, we must believe His Word and acknowledge His presence in our lives.

I will never forget how fearful I was when I left my parents in West Virginia to go to Bob Jones University to prepare for the ministry. As I was driving up the old dirt road, I cried out to the Lord, "You have to be with me!" An unusual peace and calm filled my soul that I cannot express in words. The truth of God's Word became a reality to me that night. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

When my father, a Christian who loved the Lord, passed away, I was comforted by the awesome surrounding presence of the Lord. I stood by my father's casket and witnessed to coal miners who had worked with him. The peace, comfort, and presence of

the Lord were overwhelming; the truth of Psalm 16:11 is real! First Corinthians 6:19 says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" We are indwelt by the very Spirit of God Himself; therefore, we will always be in His presence. In Matthew 28:20 Christ said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Since He clearly promises that He will always be with us, why should we allow anxiety and despair to rob us of the wonderful truth of His presence? I encourage those who read this article to memorize Psalm 16:11 and meditate upon the reality of His presence.

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1 THESSALONIANS—HOLINESS AND

The port city of Thessalonica (modern Salonica or Thessaloniki) was located at the intersection of two major Roman roads—the Egnatian Way, running east and west across the breadth of northern Greece (from the Adriatic Sea to the Bosphorus), and another running north and south from the Aegean Sea to the Danube River. Remnants of the Via Egnatia and of the old city have been uncovered and can still be seen. Its port location on the Aegean Sea made Thessalonica an important gateway into Greece and a city of prominence and wealth with an estimated population of about 200,000.

Biblical-Historical Background

The year was A.D. 50. Paul (with Silas and Timothy)—having just been whipped, jailed, and released in Philippi (Acts 16)—followed the Egnatian Way south and west, stopping in Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1) before arriving in Thessalonica (about seventy-five miles from Philippi). For three successive Sabbaths Paul preached persuasively in the city’s synagogue and saw some Jews, many Greeks, and a number of the city’s prominent women converted (Acts 17:2–4).

There is some debate over just how long he stayed in Thessalonica. Some believe he must have remained there for some time. “The success of Paul’s labor among the Gentiles” (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9)—not to mention the level of instruction they obviously received during his stay (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1, 2, 11; 5:1, 2; 2 Thess. 2:5)—“indicates an extended ministry outside the synagogue. A stay of longer than 3 weeks would certainly have been required for the Philippians to collect and send two gifts to the apostle while he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16)” (Pfeiffer and Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, 458). Others believe (a) that the implication of Acts 17 (vv. 2, 10) is that his stay was short and abruptly aborted, (b) that the level of teaching in the Thessalonian epistles can be accounted for by assuming Paul was busily engaged in discipling his converts throughout the week as well, and (c) that Paul’s surprise at the Philippians’ repeated gifts to him in Thessalonica actually fit better if his stay was brief.

In any case, organized persecution soon surfaced. Goaded on by some of the unbelieving Jews, a mob of Thessalonians created unrest and assaulted the house of Jason, where Paul and company were staying (Acts 17:5). Not finding the apostles, they dragged Jason himself along with certain believers before the city magistrates or *politarchēs* (Acts 17:6–9). Jason and the other brethren posted a bond on the agreement that Paul would leave the

area. “Paul and Silas now seemed to be a liability to the young church; besides their lives were in danger” (Pfeiffer and Vos, 458). As a result of this persecution, the believers sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, about twenty-five miles southwest and off the main road, the Egnatian Way (Acts 17:10). “This is the reason that Paul felt he could not go back to Thessalonica, lest he cause Jason and other believers to lose their home and property”; but it is also “the reason we have two great epistles to this church that he could not visit” (Stewart Custer, *Witness to Christ: A Commentary on Acts*, 246).

Epistolary Background

The NT epistles are *occasional*—that is, they are occasioned or prompted by specific circumstances or events. Several factors contribute to our deciphering the circumstances that prompted this letter. Paul penned his first letter to the Thessalonians (a) shortly after his visit, aborted prematurely by persecution and opposition, (b) after a subsequent visit and report from Timothy (3:2, 6), (c) in lieu of other attempted personal visits from Paul (2:17, 18), and (d) in order to explain the circumstances of their departure, to affirm their love and concern for them, to encourage them in the face of their own persecution pressures, and to further instruct them in Christian faith and practice.

Outline

Chapter 1—Apostolic Assurance Regarding Their Profession and Possession

Paul’s blessing/thanksgiving for the Thessalonian believers blends seamlessly into the body of the letter. His statement in 1:4 raises a question: *How could Paul know their election?* Not because he was an apostle with an inside scoop or divine knowledge. He explains how he knew: *because of the evident and effectual power of the apostles’ ministry among them* (1:5), *because of the Thessalonians’ exemplary and ongoing loyalty to the Word in the face of persecution* (1:6, 7), and *because of the spread of their remarkable testimony of transformation* (1:8–10). Their strategic location both as a port and on the Egnatian Way that aided in the “sounding forth” of their testimony and megaphoned their Macedonia-wide example.

Chapter 2—Proofs of a Genuine Apostolic Ministry

Chapters 2–3 are autobiographical and descriptive, filling in the missing details of Acts 17:1–9 and painting color into Luke’s black-and-white narrative. But its contents also provide a pattern for evaluating an authentically apostolic and Biblical ministry. The character of a genuine apostolic

HOPE AMID HARD TIMES

ministry is a divine model for measuring any contemporary ministry, including our own.

■ *The Character of an Authentic Biblical Ministry: Bold and Persevering despite Opposition* (2:1, 2)

■ *The Motive of an Authentic Biblical Ministry: Pure and Guileless* (2:3, 4)

- It renounces error and any desire to lead astray.
- It denounces any morally impure motive (ambition, pride, greed).
- It rejects deceit—no gimmicks for baiting, trapping, or tricking prompted by any ulterior purposes.

■ *The Method of an Authentic Biblical Ministry* (2:5–12)

- *Negatively* (2:5, 6)
 - It eschews flattery—“slick eloquence” with a view to exploitation.
 - It abhors hypocrisy—cloaking greed.
 - It detests glory-seeking—abuse of authority.
- *Positively* (2:7–12)
 - It exercises a motherlike gentleness.
 - It displays affection.
 - It engages in selfless self-sacrifice.
 - It exhibits devout (toward God), righteous (toward others), blameless personal behavior.
 - It employs fatherlike encouragement and exhortation.

■ *The Effects/Results of an Authentic Biblical Ministry* (2:13–20)

- People respond in a way that indicates a conviction that it is God’s Word, not man’s (2:13).
- People imitate the perseverance other genuine believers in the face of persecution (2:14–16).
- The authentic minister rejoices over this kind of genuine response to the ministry (2:17–20).

Chapter 3—Autobiographical Testimony and Prayer

Chapters 4–5—Instruction

- On Sanctification—specifically, personal moral purity (4:1–8)
- On Testimony—mutual love and commendable behavior (4:9–12)
- On Eschatology (4:13–5:11)
 - Comfort regarding the dead in Christ (Rapture and Deliverance)
 - Reminder regarding the Day of the Lord (Second Coming and Judgment)

■ Miscellaneous Exhortations (5:12–22)

- Relationship to those who minister among them (12–13)
- Relationship to one another (14–15)
- Relationship to God (16–18)
- Relationship to prophesyings/proclamations/preaching (19–22)

■ 5:23–28—Conclusion

- Prayer and encouragement for sanctification (23–24)
- Request for prayer (25)
- Greetings (26)
- Command to read epistle to all the brethren (27)
- Benediction (28)

Keywords

One way of identifying Paul’s dominating burdens in writing is to note what he talks about the most. One way of quantifying this is to observe recurring words and topics.

■ **Suffering**—10x (various words)

- 1:6—affliction
- 2:2—suffered; shamefully treated; conflict
- 2:14—suffered
- 2:15—persecuted
- 3:3—afflictions
- 3:4—suffer tribulation
- 3:7—affliction; distress

■ (as/and) **ye know**—9x, emphasizes importance of Paul’s ministerial testimony

- 1:5
- 2:1, 2, 5, 11 (cf. also 2:9 “ye remember”; 2:10 “ye are witnesses”)
- 3:3, 4
- 4:2
- 5:2

■ **Word** (*logos*)—9x, emphasizes centerpiece of Paul’s ministry

- 1:5, 6, 8
- 2:5, 13 [3x]
- 4:15, 18

■ **Gospel**—6x

- 1:5
- 2:2, 4, 8, 9
- 3:2

Continued on page 38.

but I didn't have a handkerchief in my swimsuit to hand her. "My mom and dad got divorced." My heart went out to her as I finally began to understand why she had such a bad attitude. I touched her hand. "This weekend my mom and her boyfriend got married and went on their honeymoon. That's why I'm here for two weeks." She lowered her head. "Why does God let bad things happen?" Her voice, barely audible now, shook. "Why didn't He answer my prayers?"

"He gives people free will so they can choose to love and obey Him. Sometimes people choose sin and things that hurt themselves and others." I touched her hand again. "But God still cares. He loves your dad and your mom and her boyfriend. He loves you, Annette." I wrapped my arm around her shoulder. "The Bible says that God even cares when a sparrow falls."

So Annette prayed.

I prayed silently that God would open her physical eyes to find her swimming suit like Hagar's eyes were opened in Genesis chapter 21 to find a much needed well of water. I prayed her spiritual heart would be open to find the Savior like the woman at a well in John chapter four. Annette meant so much to me now. I loved her so.

"We've prayed. Now let's do our part and look one more time. I'll check the clothesline out back again. You can look in the cabin."

She came out to me, grinning, with her florescent yellow swimsuit in hand. "I looked in the shower room before, but this time I saw it!"

She had just finished receiving Christ as her Savior when the other girls came running into the cabin. Annette and I looked up from the Bible we shared together as we sat side-by-side on my bottom bunk.

"We have to change fast, Aunt Linda," the girls gasped as they got their clothes. "We have to hurry to eat." "They're having an early assembly." All of them seemed to speak at once. "Something important has happened!"

Yes, Lord, something important has happened all right!

When we got to the chapel there was a television set on the platform. At camp we were not to have radios or watch TV. We were supposed to "come apart" from everyday worldly things to be more open to God's leading. I wondered what had happened that was this special.

Later it was hard to believe that the Annette who volunteered to read the Bible verses for devotions that night was the same girl who had declared she did not believe in God on Monday night. After cabin devotions, we crawled into our bunkbeds. A familiar voice said, "Aunt Linda." There was almost an audible groan from the cabin.

"Yes, Annette."

"Does God sleep?"

"No, He doesn't," I replied remembering the devotion I couldn't give Monday night. "In Psalm 121 it says 'My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber.'"

Sometimes people ask me if I remember what I was doing July 20, 1969, the day when the lunar module of *Apollo 11* landed at the Sea of Tranquility and Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. Yes, I remember that two human beings walked on the moon and returned to earth again that July of 1969. Somehow, though, what matters more to me is that at the same time God was allowing those men to touch the moon, He was allowing me to touch a life.

Thursday, July 24, 1969, *Apollo 11* splashed down 812 nautical miles southwest of Hawaii with most of America and my whole camp watching on television sets. However, I especially remember it as the day Annette received Christ as her Savior, a day with many answered prayers and many miracles. I remember that night, too. God is not just good; He is excellent. That was the first night of camp Annette slept quietly with the light out.

Linda Turner and her husband own a dairy farm in Greenville, Pennsylvania. Linda teaches the teenage girls' Sunday school class at McDaniel's Corners Church.

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Social Engineering and the Stimulus Package

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial exception was voiced to a significant aspect of the stimulus package. At this writing, according to the House version of the economic stimulus package, \$87 billion is being earmarked for Medicaid help for states, focusing on a growth of "family planning services." Not only does this follow closely to the aggressive abortion promotion proposed by the left, but it also reclaims the failed philosophy that fewer children equates to stronger economic growth.

When questioned, Speaker Pelosi acknowledged that "the states are in terrible fiscal budget crises now, and part of what we do for children's health, education, and some of those elements are to help states meet their financial needs. One of those—one of the initiatives you mentioned, the contraception—will reduce costs to the states and to the federal government."

Economists are already predicting labor shortages in the years ahead for the United States. The philosophy has obviously failed Europe and Asia. With obvious evidence that this philosophy is a failing economic principle, the underlying principle is emerging—reproductive control at any and all stages of pre-birth development.

This article can be refer-

enced at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123302034881718073.1?mod=djemEditorialPage>.

Suit Regarding Religious Discrimination

The Alliance Defense Fund, representing a student known only as A. Q., is leading the charge against Lindenhurst Union Free School District. At the core of the case is the contention that the school encourages all kinds of extracurricular activities that meet during non-instructional hours on the school property. Religious groups, however, are given no such freedom. Schools are free to encourage students to explore homosexuality but not the Bible.

The complaint reads, "Defendants have denied a fair opportunity, have discriminated against, and have denied Plaintiff equal access to all school facilities, benefits, and privileges," because of the religious content of the speech and association at Bible Club meetings. In the end the case is based upon free speech and equal-access laws.

As similar case was heard and the state of Georgia. Child Evangelism Fellowship was successful in being granted the opportunity to equal access and was awarded not only court expenses but also all the overcharges that were assigned to them by the school system defendant.

This article can be referenced at <http://>

worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=88077.

Churches Protest Gay Marriage

Ohio voters approved a gay marriage ban on ballots in 2004. Reprisals against such an initiative have come from a most peculiar direction—churches. Pastors such as John Tamilio III of the Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ are refusing to sign the marriage licenses of the heterosexual couples they marry. This forces the couple to have a private civil ceremony to sanction their vows.

Such pastors believe their actions to be a "civil rights protest." The United Church of Christ, whose headquarters are in Cleveland, Ohio, adopted a resolution affirming gay marriage in their Atlanta meeting of 2006. This protest has been joined by at least five other UCC congregations. The UCC joins the ranks of the Unitarian Universalists, who had been similarly protesting for several years prior.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.zanesvilletimesrecorder.com/article/20090131/NEWS01/901310334>.

Isabella

Isabella Miller-Jenkins was born on April 16, 2002. She, like so many children, is caught in the ugly battle of a custody suit. What separates her from the others is that her birth mother (Lisa Miller) conceived her

through artificial insemination, but the other person seeking custody (Janet Jenkins) is attached to the birth mother through Vermont's sanctioning of civil unions.

Jenkins and Miller met in Virginia, and the child was conceived and birthed in Virginia. Their subsequent move to Vermont was an effort to find acceptance for their chosen lifestyle. However, as their relationship disintegrated, Miller moved back to Virginia with Isabella. During that time she found forgiveness through Jesus Christ. As her faith matured she wanted Isabella to have less contact with Janet Jenkins.

Now the courts are battling over the definition of a parent, who has jurisdiction (Vermont or Virginia—both with very different outlooks), and how to make those determinations.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/30/AR2007013001316.html> and at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/172554>.

There Is No God Who . . .

President Barack Obama made a stunning admission at the February 4th National Prayer breakfast in Washington, DC. During his speech the president attempted to demonstrate the diversities and similarities of the major world religions. As far as diversities are concerned he stated,

NOTABLE QUOTES

"Far too often, we see faith wielded as a tool to divide us from one another as an excuse for prejudice and intolerance. . . . There's no doubt that the very nature of faith means that some of our beliefs will never be the same."

But regarding the things that are similar among religions he stated, "No matter what we choose to believe, let us remember that there is no religion whose central tenet is hate." Later he stated, "There is no God who condones taking the life of an innocent human being. This much we know." With these statements he announced the formation of his office of faith-based and neighborhood partnerships.

Ironically, in his first week in office the president repealed the ban on funding overseas abortions, and his pro-abortion stance is clearly self-articulated on the White

Surely that man must be in an unhealthy state of soul who can think of all that Jesus suffered, and yet cling to the sins for which that suffering was undergone. It was sin that wove the crown of thorns; it was sin that pierced our Lord's hands and feet and side; it was sin that brought him to Gethsemane and Calvary; to the cross, and to the grave. Cold must our hearts be if we do not hate sin and labour to get rid of it, though we may have to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye in doing it.—J. C. Ryle

Certainly the trouble with many of our orthodox churches is that they are like great grain containers, full of unplanted wheat which becomes must and moldy, and befouled by the rats of envy and jealousy. If only each little grain had been rent asunder from its fellows, cast into the dark, wet earth, buried out of sight, and left alone to endure disintegration and death, what a harvest we would see!—L. E. Maxwell

No man can bear witness to himself and Christ at the same time.—Unknown

House website (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/statementofPresidentObamaonthe36thAnniversaryofRoevWade/). Perhaps he does not see the inconsistency with which he speaks.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/?pageId=88107>.

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Advisory Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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Pearson Johnson

The Missionary-Sending Congregation

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed. (Acts 13:1–4a)

I walked into a missions conference at a college not too long ago and upon introducing myself, I was asked, “What board or organization are you with?” I explained that I was a missions pastor at my church. “But who are you with?” I said again, “My church.” “Oh,” was the response. The person didn’t say it, but I could tell he was wondering, “Why would a church send a pastor to a missions conference at a school?” I answered the unasked question, telling him that I was there so that our church could be more effective at fulfilling our responsibility to send and support our missionaries. The local church is seen by many as just one of many parts of the missionary-sending process, not as the organism that is responsible to do so.

In Acts 13, local churches are given a very clear example of how the Holy Spirit chooses people for missionary service. It is evident here that God the Holy Spirit is “the ultimate Agent in calling out missionaries.”¹ He gifts people for service. He confirms the missionary’s calling through the local congregation. He burdens the church for their sending. This is not an entirely mystical experience, however. The local congregation knew the men were qualified for missionary service because they had experienced their service firsthand. In summary, the Holy Spirit works through the congregation of the church to identify and send missionaries. The congregation is not just “a part” of the process. They are the main part of the process under the prompting of the Spirit.

Local congregations need to accept the responsibility that is theirs for approving and sending missionaries from their midst. Congregations must take time with their missionary so they can observe firsthand that the missionary

has a love for the Lord, a life of integrity, a level of doctrinal understanding, and giftedness for teaching and preaching God’s Word. When this responsibility is exercised, the church will be blessed in knowing they are ready to commission their missionary for service and can wholeheartedly recommend that other churches support him. I have had contact with a number of churches who are becoming proactive in their role as senders by providing internships for missionary candidates that last anywhere from three months to two years. This process takes money, but it also shows commitment. Many churches assume that mission boards are fulfilling the responsibility of fully evaluating candidates. The board should not have to do this. It is the local congregation’s duty.

The congregation’s responsibility does not stop with identifying and sending their missionaries. In Acts 14:26–28 we see the missionaries returning as well, to report to their sending church concerning all that God had done in and through them. We see here the example of the local church providing accountability and support for their returning missionaries. The local congregation not only sends the missionaries out, but they also support and supervise the work that is taking place. Mission boards can provide expertise when it comes to financial services, conflict management, and strategic planning on the field, but the local congregation bears the responsibility for personal accountability and overall ministry direction.

This issue of *FrontLine* addresses issues regarding congregational government. The congregation is responsible not only to govern the local church but also for its Great Commission ministry. The work of missions is definitely an every-member-of-the-congregation ministry. Local congregations send out, support, and supervise missionaries, and local congregations should enjoy the blessings that come with this responsibility for the glory of God!

Pearson Johnson is the pastor of Missions and Evangelism at Inter-City Baptist Church. You may e-mail him with questions or comments at pjohnson@intercity.org.

¹ See David Doran’s chapter “The Local Church’s Role in World Missions” in *For the Sake of His Name* (Student Global Impact, 2002), 163.

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A Chaplain Candidate's ROTC Experience

ROTC is the military's officer development training that operates through civilian colleges using military professors. After an ROTC cadet's junior year of college, he is sent to Fort Lewis, Washington, for LDAC (Leadership Development and Assessment Course, otherwise known as Officer Basic Training).

The cadets are placed in regiments of 300-to-400 and spend thirty-three days of intense training and testing in basic disciplines that will determine their future in the US Army. Needless to say, this is a very stressful month for the cadets. Included in the cadre (the training staff) is a regimental chaplain. Last summer the Lord provided an opportunity for me to be acting chaplain for an ROTC regiment.

We chaplain candidates do not get many opportunities to minister during our active duty time. We are there to observe and learn from chaplains. However, since cadets are not yet soldiers, chaplain candidates qualify to act as chaplains for LDAC.

I was both excited and nervous about ministering at LDAC. The potential impact on hundreds of future officers in the US Army was unlimited; however, this was my first experience as a chaplain, and I did not want to make any mistakes. I appreciated Dr. John Vaughn's advice. He said, "Seth, you know what the Word says, and you believe it. All you need to remember is do what it says and God will do the rest."

I reported to Chaplain (COL) Johnston's office in June. He handed me off to Sgt. Hutchison, who took me to the check-in building. I was shown where my room was; he handed me a cell phone, a set of truck keys, and a map and told me that the regimental commander would contact me for the first cadre meeting.

The next six weeks were, without a doubt, the most profitable time of

ministry I have ever experienced. I saw God do incredible things. Our regiment was the largest at LDAC, with just over 390 cadets. These cadets came from almost every state in the country and included fifteen British cadets who were part of a training exchange program.

The first blessing God gave after placing me with my regiment was my commanding officer. LTC Clark was a professing believer and told me, "Chaplain, I believe in what you are doing. You know what the rules are. As long as you stick to the rules and check things with my office, you can do whatever you want." He made his opinion clear to the rest of the cadre by saying this again publicly in front of the entire training staff. With the full support of my commanding officer, there were few doors that were not open to me. From there God's blessings only increased.

Acting on a suggestion from a chaplain who had served in a basic training battalion, I spent my days training with the cadets. Every evening I walked through the eight regimental barracks. This was a good time for getting to know the cadets and for reminding them that I would be in my office from eight to ten p.m. if anyone needed spiritual counseling.

Near the end of the first week's rigorous training, the cadets began to feel the stress. My office hours began fill. By the end of the second week there was a line of cadets outside my office wanting counseling every evening. As most of these cadets were not saved, I was able to share the gospel many times. I had opportunities to counsel in areas such as crises, marriage, suicide, rape, and racial issues. A professing atheist accepted Christ. It was wonderful to have cadets coming with questions of every type and to know where to find the answers.

On the second day of training, one of the female cadets received a call say-

ing that one of her closest friends had been raped and murdered the night before. Just before walking into the room to meet with her, I was told that she was the only Muslim cadet in the regiment! I thought, "Oh, great! A 'she' who worships Allah! What a way to start my chaplaincy career!" However, God is in control, and, when I left, she took a New Testament and allowed me to pray with her. Later in the training I was able to share the gospel with her, and she listened intently.

Over and over again God provided exactly the verses and words that a specific cadet needed. In one month I spent over seventy-five hours in counseling, preached six field services, was asked for and handed out over one hundred Bibles, gave the gospel countless times *and had the time of my life!* The Lord gave a strong testimony with both the cadets and cadre. I was reminded repeatedly that God is always good, all the time.

Because of modern technology, I have been able to keep in contact with over one hundred of the cadets from this summer. Perhaps one of the greatest blessings I received was an e-mail from a Christian cadet. He explained that before LDAC he had been seriously considering getting out of the military because he had not met any other believers. However, after attending the field services and meeting a number of other Christians, he had changed his mind and decided to stay in the Army. Another cadet who had received Christ let me know that he has gotten involved in a discipleship program and is attending a local church.

I take no credit for these testimonies. I made many mistakes. However, God never makes mistakes, and He worked through His Word.

Editor's Note: Seth Hamilton was awarded the LDAC Commander's Award for Excellence for his service as 11th Regiment's chaplain.

■ **Holiness/saints** (various forms)—8x

3:13 [2x]
4:3, 4, 7
5:23, 26, 27

■ **Christ's coming**—6x

1:10
2:19
3:13
4:15
5:2, 23

■ **Hope** (*elpis*)—4x, confident expectation because of Christ's coming

1:3
2:19
4:13
5:8

Eschatology in Thessalonians

The highly eschatological orientation of the Thessalonian epistles has been frequently noted.

■ Each chapter is punctuated with a closing reference to the coming of the Lord.

- 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:2, 23 (also 2 Thess. 2:1, 2, 8)

■ Paul includes several discussions of various aspects of that coming.

- 1 Thess. 4:13–18—rapture
- 1 Thess. 5:1–11—day of the Lord
- 2 Thess. 1:6–10—final judgment
- 2 Thess. 2:1–12—man of sin

Topical Emphases of Thessalonian Epistles

The Thessalonian Epistles encompass and elaborate on multiple themes:

1. *historical/autobiographical theme*, correlating Acts and Thessalonians
2. *ecclesiastical theme*, portraying a healthy, growing church
3. *pastoral theme*, exemplifying shepherding activities and attitudes
4. *eschatological theme*, emphasizing the church's future and hope
5. *missionary theme*, exemplifying gospel proclamation and church planting

Theme

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians reflects a bilevel burden, revolving around two central issues: confident Christian living amid suffering and genuine apostolic ministry. The anticipated event overshadowing and shaping both of these is the coming of Christ. The message that emerges from 1 Thessalonians, then, is twofold: (1) *a call to holy, hopeful life and ministry amid suffering in light of Christ's return*; (2) *a paradigm for an authentically apostolic ministry*.

The timeless applicability of the first part of the message is self-evident, but the second part is just as pertinent. Only a ministry that measures up to the same qualities, motives, methods, and priorities as Paul's apostolic example qualifies as an authentically Biblical ministry.

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Sandy Perry

Getting Behind the Lines through an Orderly Retreat

In every congregation there are roles that must be fulfilled that are truly “behind the lines.” Behind every pastor and deacon there is a wife who helps him in many unseen ways.

Every lady in the church, whether a wife or single lady, has a ministry as a part of the congregation. As our deacon chairman’s wife, one of my roles was to coordinate the annual ladies’ retreat. The lessons of serving in this role were more than I can number.

With our ladies’ retreats usually averaging between 175 and 200 ladies, the task of organizing one often seemed overwhelming and impossible. Being totally out of my comfort zone, I knew I had to prayerfully seek God’s help and guidance. As God first worked in my own heart, the planning could then overflow into the lives of those who would serve along side me, as well as those who would attend the retreat. God would remind me of the principles that I had heard preached from our pulpit many times, and He used those principles as guidelines for my preparation.

The Speaker and the Theme

First, I knew I should do all things to honor Him and strive for everything to illustrate some characteristic of Christ. Our speaker needed to be a godly woman with high standards and a blameless testimony who would share the truth of God’s Word and have a compassionate heart for ladies’ needs. As God would bring a speaker to mind, I sought the counsel of my husband and pastor before making commitments or definite plans. Once our speaker was chosen, I would consult with her about possible themes from God’s Word. I began searching for fun themes to exemplify the spiritual theme, such as “Journey of Life” with the idea of road trips and highway signs, or “Teach Me, O God” with a school-days theme. The choice of a

theme song or the special music for the retreat should blend with the spiritual theme to enable the ladies to go home with a “song in their hearts,” reminding them of the retreat’s message.

At this point, I would also find teachable ladies who, with their various talents, would be vital in planning the activities, music, fun time, and the optional afternoon workshops. This would enable God to develop in them abilities that would render them useful in many areas of serving the Lord.

God’s Word tells us that we should equip the saints and that older women should teach the younger women to serve God faithfully. Our pastor has taught us that we should always be striving to equip someone to assume our responsibility if and when God chooses to move us elsewhere; so God directed me to use this retreat committee to mentor and train younger women to develop gifts that would enable them to plan a future retreat, whether at our church or in another ministry. It has been exciting to see whom God chose to serve on the committee and to watch Him unite our hearts in creating ideas to find special ways to make our twenty-four-hour retreat a time of fun, fellowship, and fruitful teaching.

A Safe Haven

A retreat is a “time of withdrawal from one’s usual responsibilities; a content place of peace.” Finding ways to help people get away from the “cares of this world” and enjoy relaxing with a chuckle and the camaraderie and fellowship with other believers is something that must be included to make a retreat a “safe haven”! God teaches us that all things should be done carefully and appropriately, so as not to cause an offense to the Lord or to others. As a committee we conscientiously tried to consider every aspect of our fun-time activities so

that nothing done would be a stumbling block. To encourage fellowship among our ladies and help them reach out to others, we came up with unique ice breakers or games at meal time. Many new friendships were formed through these fun events.

Ladies have often shared with me things God used at a particular retreat to make important changes in their walk with the Lord, their marriages, or their goals in life. God often will use the “fun theme” as a reminder of the spiritual theme to help them recall what they have learned. Their testimonies have shown me the importance of using a variety of schedules, activities, or events to make each retreat unique and something to look forward to—a special event where God can work in their hearts.

Through all the planning, God reminded me that He wants all things to be done “decently and in order”—that I need to be well organized and make sure all details have been covered. To do this, I have found it helpful to have a detailed order of service to help those who will be overseeing the “front-and-center tasks” of welcoming, making introductions, leading the music, and so on. A well-thought-out format of the order of service is a testimony of our loving God, who has carefully made plans for our lives and cares about each detail.

God is always in control. He always gives us the authority to accept responsibility from Him. Sometimes we hold a position of authority in the church, and sometimes we simply serve under the authority of another. One of the most important truths that ladies can teach by example is that the rewards of service are not in our titles but in the service itself.

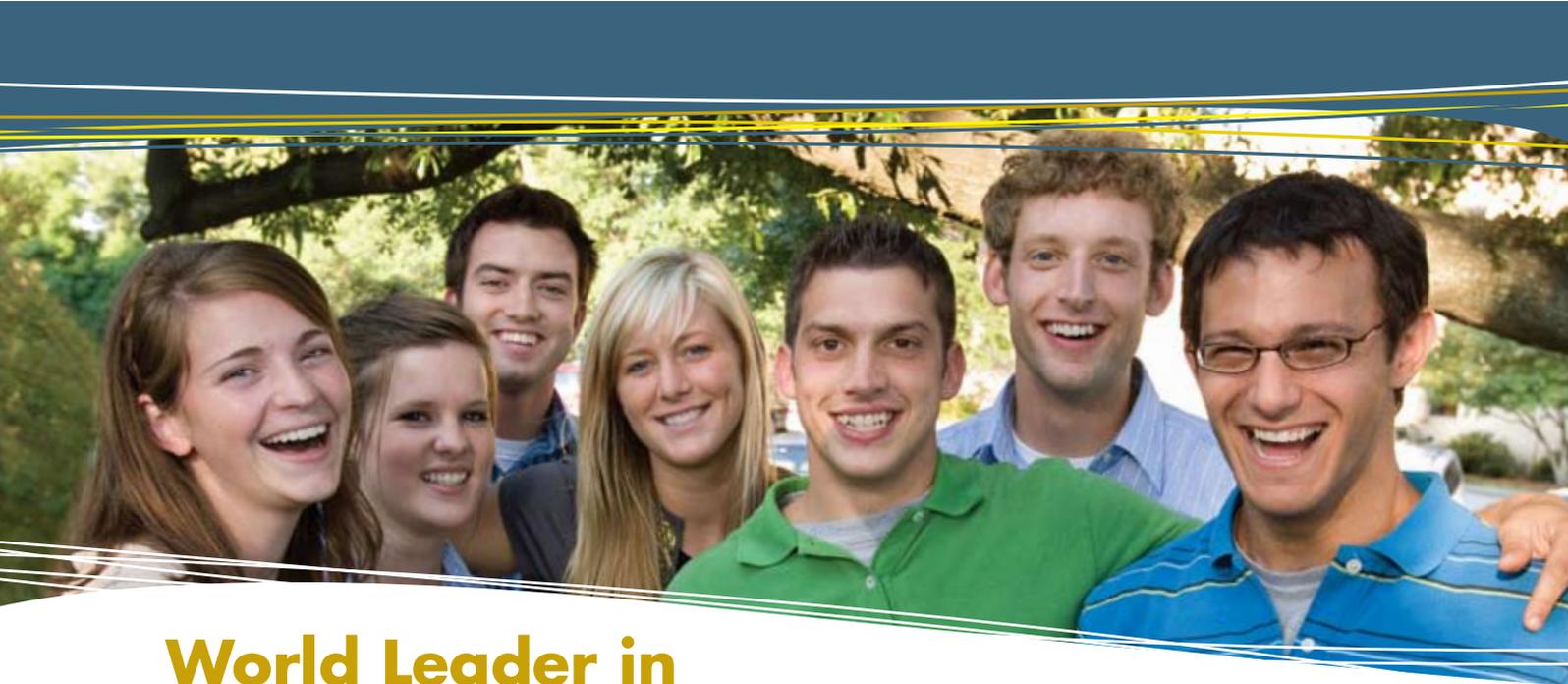
Sandy and her husband, Rob, are members of Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, where Rob was chairman of the deacon board for over fifteen years.

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