

March/April 2014 • \$3.95

FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Baptist Distinctives

Biblical Authority

Regenerate Church Membership

Individual Soul Liberty

Two Ordinances and Two Offices

Autonomy of the Local Church

Separation of Church and State

The Priesthood of the Believer

Coming June 10-12, 2014
FBFI Annual Fellowship
Faith Baptist Church, Taylors, SC

Baptist Distinctives



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We would like to thank Dr. Mike Sproul for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

Clearly, there are some Fundamentalists who are not Baptist, and there are many Baptists who are not Fundamentalists. But by its name and nature the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International (FBFI) is both Fundamental and Baptist. Consequently, the following words appear in the FBFI Statement of Purpose:

We purpose, in the Spirit of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to the glory of God, to militantly promote historic Fundamentalism and to promote our historic **Baptist distinctives**, while maintaining ecclesiastical, personal and civil (church and state) separation—all in the spirit of a godly, spirit-filled aggressiveness.

To advance that purpose, this issue of *FrontLine* presents a series of articles on the subject of "Baptist Distinctives." On the one hand, Baptists tend to have a clear meaning in mind when they use the term "Baptist distinctives." On the other hand, even among Fundamental Baptists, it is not unusual to hear the objection, "I don't like to call separation of church and state a Baptist distinctive, because many others believe in separation of church and state." However, it would be very unusual to hear an objection to calling baptism by immersion a Baptist distinctive. Why tolerate the term on one point and not the other?

Perhaps the word "distinctive" is not as clear to others as we might think. One meaning is "characteristic," and that is probably the sense in which we use it with reference to doctrines or convictions we have in common with non-Baptists. In contrast, the word "distinction" is commonly used to mean "distinguishing from others." But to use "distinction" would be a pointless distinction itself, since the words are used interchangeably. Even if there was a technical distinction, it is a bit late in Baptist history to quibble over it.

Still, the underlying point is valid. Of course, we do not believe that no group but our own believes one or more of these distinctives. We do, however, believe them. The cluster of convictions we call "Baptist distinctives" are, as stated in our Purpose, "historic Baptist distinctives," and we have the right and responsibility to call them that as we promote them. Naturally, others have the right to object, and we have the responsibility to be charitable; after all, as Baptists, we believe in soul liberty.

John C. Vaughn

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Mail Bag & News from All Over

Let me first of all thank you for exposing your subscribers to our ministry here in Marysvale, Utah. The work of the FBFI and *FrontLine* magazine has been such an encouraging and stabilizing force in our world.

Secondly, thank you for sending the contact information of this woman who may be interested in helping in the women's ministry here. I will give the contact info to the lady in charge of this aspect of Eagle's Nest Baptist Ministries. Blessings on you all.

*Pastor Jonathan Edwards
Marysvale, UT*

I am Samuel Akande, the young adults' pastor of Faith Baptist Church, Oyo State, Nigeria. We are [an] Independent Baptist Church. Our church has a quarterly Christian magazine ministry and I came across an article on your website titled "Modesty—A Lost Cause?" I have read through this article and found out that it will be a blessing to our young ladies here at the church and even in Nigeria.

I will please like to ask for your permission to reprint this article in our quarterly magazine. The name of the magazine is called *Eye Opener Magazine*, and we got the name from Psalm 119:18.

It will be a great blessing if we are granted the permission to do so. Thank you and May God bless you is my prayer.

*Samuel Akande
Faith Baptist Church
NIGERIA*

I attend Cornerstone Baptist Church in Scarborough, Maine.

Recently I have been prayerfully considering volunteering with the local Trauma Intervention Program (TIP—see <http://www.tipnational.org/>). TIP partners with first responder agencies and emergency rooms to provide immediate short-term emotional and logistical support to those who have experienced traumatic events.

This sounds similar to part of the role Jeremy Van Delinder fills as a fire department chaplain (as mentioned in the January/February *FrontLine*). I thought it might be helpful to talk with Pastor Van Delinder, or one of the police chaplains, about their experience in this more narrow role to get a better sense of what it might look like in practice.

If that would work out, would you be kind enough to pass my contact information on to someone (or theirs on to me)?

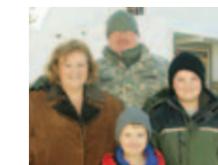
*Christine Smith
Scarborough, ME*

Continued on page 35

Bruce Hamilton's father, Hugh, accepted the pastoral call to **Hamilton Acres Baptist Church, Fairbanks, Alaska**, after Bruce's twelve-year-old brother passed away after a brief five-month battle with leukemia.



Pastor Hugh led the church for the next thirty years, retiring in 1998. The church offered the pastoral position to Hugh's son, Bruce, and he and his wife, Lena, received a unanimous vote from the church in March 1998. Hamilton Acres Baptist Church has a school ministry, youth camp ministry (Camp Challenge), counseling ministry, and an outreach to law enforcement personnel in the Fairbanks area.



FBFI CH (MAJ) Brian Palmer and his family serve at Fort Greely, Alaska. As Garrison chaplain, Brian is responsible for the chapel and all religious programs conducted in it, as well as for providing chaplain/pastoral support to the soldiers, contractors, and civilian employees who keep Ft. Greely running in support of the Missile Defense mission operated at the post.

He and his chaplain assistant, family, and the active National Guard Chaplain assigned to the 49th Missile Defense Battalion there at Ft. Greely provide worship services, Sunday school, Bible studies, and other programs for men, women, couples, and families. There is a spiritual darkness there unlike any they have witnessed since entering the military in 2002.

FBFI Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Michael Marshall went to be with the Lord on February 15 after more than a 17-month battle with pancreatic cancer. He continued to serve the Lord faithfully throughout his illness.



John and Gini Mincy live in Taylors, South Carolina. Dr. Mincy retired after 37 years, having planted three churches, one in Singapore and two in California. He now serves

as a missionary/Bible teacher and travels worldwide teaching the Bible. Recently, both of them have been teaching in India and in Singapore and are already anticipating returning to India next year. They will be teaching and helping to organize a five-day evangelistic outreach sponsored by South India Baptist Bible College in conjunction with local churches.

God's Work through His People

A History of Baptist Principles

Mike Sproul

As Baptists we are a part of His story. I believe that the core of Baptist beliefs that will be enunciated in this issue by the faculty of International Baptist College and Seminary are the closest to the New Testament Church as is possible today. That makes us “primitivists.” We believe the model of the primitive church is the best model for us to follow. Some may counter that a belief system like that is “narrow-minded,” and to that I plead guilty.

Obviously, some parts of our theology are less important than others. If you compare the deity of Christ to forms of church government, you will certainly see a difference in importance. However, congregational church government was the primary motivator behind the Pilgrims' coming to America. They thought it important enough to die for. While the Pilgrims weren't Baptists, they had in common with Baptist thought congregational government. They created a congregational civil government instead of an episcopal or “King”-oriented church government with the Mayflower Compact. That was revolutionary in and of itself. I do accept that each of the Baptist Distinctives that we believe is important, and while some hold to some, none hold to all except for Baptists. These distinctives have remade the civil governments worldwide over the past five hundred years. (*The World's Debt to Baptists* by John Porter is a classic on this discussion.)

A study of the principles that bind Baptists together is an encouragement, but it also ties me to Christ and His mission for us. As Armitage states, Baptists are not “an organization, but . . . a people, traced by their vital principles and gospel practices”¹ These principles that we expound in these pages, I believe, have been held, “by individual men and scattered companies, but never in unbroken continuity by any sect as such.”² However, this belief of “kinship” with dissenting groups does not move us to successionism, for Baptists do not need such authority, as Armitage forcefully argues: “The very attempt to trace an unbroken line of persons duly baptized upon their personal trust in Christ, or of ministers ordained by lineal descent from the apostles or of churches organized upon these principles, and adhering to the New Testament in all things, is in itself an attempt to erect a bulwark of error. . . . The idea is the very life of Catholicism.”³

When I went to college and seminary the common view of men in the different branches of independent Baptists was that Baptists need not have a successionist view of our

history because it couldn't be proven and it is Catholic and Reformed to demand such an authority trail. As Biblical Christians our sole source for faith and practice is the Word of God. We don't gain authority from earthly connections unbroken back to the apostles but rather from a Spirit connection through rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

I had professor after professor in my younger years teach me that we did have kinship, spiritually, with other separatist groups who differed with the state church from the time of Constantine forward. In fact, Dr. Pickering, in his book *Biblical Separation*,⁴ takes his whole first four chapters to show commonality with our views of separation to many of these dissenting groups.

“Always Protesting”

However, today, the common position is that Baptists are just another group born out of the Protestant Reformation. As my mother always said, “Baptists never protested with Luther because we have always been protesting.” That was the view of Spurgeon. By that she didn't mean there was a link-to-link succession, but she was expounding the common view of Baptists from the '40s through the '90s that we had a spiritual kinship with many dissenter groups through the ages. Armitage, as well as many others, held this view, and he was the greatest of the Baptist historians for a three-hundred-year period of time.

I think the disagreement, which may seem a nuance but appears foundational for us who are separatists, is really about definitions. I don't consider pacifism as a core issue for a Baptist. Yet I have been repeatedly told I cannot identify with Grebel of Zurich in his debate with Zwingli over infant baptism because he was a pacifist. I reject such a notion. I am fine with identifying with a pacifist, even though I am not one myself. Pacifism is not a core belief of Baptists. (In fact, Leland, a leading Baptist colonial pastor, identifies a Baptist church in Virginia that was pacifist, but he still claimed them as a Baptist church.)⁵ So I have no problem claiming some Swiss and German Anabaptists as “kin” to me. Many independent Baptists today would not want to claim them because they aren't “exactly like us.” I reject such a notion.

Those who disagree with me will point to some views in these different dissenting groups that modern Baptists would strongly disagree with as the reason to reject any “kinship.” First of all, these groups were often hunted to extermination, and often the only records we have of their beliefs are from their enemies. The Catholic priest I just served with in Kyrgyzstan for several months would, if asked pointedly, readily assert that I did not believe in com-

munion. Of course, I do, but not his view of communion, as I hold to a symbolic view and he to a literal-presence view. If he wrote that and I was not allowed a chance at explanation, the reader could conclude I was a heretic. That's the power of writing history. You can make your opponent say whatever you want him to say.

Secondly, these groups had limited access to books, information, study helps, and so on. I am amazed—considering the level of illiteracy common in these ages and lack of Bibles for the common man—that many of these groups were able to articulate anything close to Biblical doctrine in the face of the black night of the Middle Ages in both the East and West. These groups should generally be applauded for admirable attempts to return a most corrupted dominant church to a primitive standard that aligned itself with the New Testament with their few and meager tools for study and research. In many cases they sealed their attempt at reformation with their blood. Rather than recoiling from them, we should applaud them and appreciate their efforts. Their sacrifice reminds us and our young people that it always is costly to plead for primitivism.

I believe we lose a very rich heritage of the dissenting movement, which allows us to explain to our college and seminary students that “we have always protested,” when we cut these groups completely from our “family tree.” To a young man in the ministry, our constant “protesting” can seem unnecessary and irrelevant, but when he can see that it is tied to a stream of protesting against the evils of the dominant church of the day, then he better understands that he is swimming in a stream of protest that isn't new.⁶

The Kinship of Biblical Separation

When we tell our young people that they are simply a different Protestant sect because we draw the line too sharply on what it means to have “spiritual kinship,” it is only natural that they drift away from a distinctively separatist Baptist position into the Reformed movement. This was Pickering's whole point in his book *Biblical Separation*. He started his case for Biblical separation based on “kinship” with numerous dissenter groups from AD 300 to 1600. This “kinship” was the view of both Dr. Clearwaters and Dr. Weniger, who founded separatist Baptist seminaries where my father attended. As my father told me, it was sitting at the feet of Drs. Clearwaters, Weniger, and Dollar that he learned he wasn't a Protestant, but a Baptist.

We lose much that is foundational to our Baptist life and thought when we divorce ourselves from the dissenters who stretched across 1300 years. We leave our young men with

a sense that separatism is a new thing and not really that important when we draw the noose so tightly regarding the definition on what it means to be in the spiritual lineage of Baptists. This view of kinship with dissenting groups was the common view among independent Baptist thinkers only thirty years ago, and now it has been nearly completely abandoned, while at the same time some young men drift away wondering if it is worth the cost to be a separatist Baptist. I believe we have pulled out the historical foundation for our understanding of Scripture from our young men and women.

I will close with one more quote from the dean of Baptist historians, Thomas Armitage: “Obscure communities, as the Cathari of the Novatians, the Paulicians, the Albigenses, and the Waldenses, maintained the ancient faith in comparative purity from the beginning of the fourth century down to the Reformation. These and other sects held one or more distinctives, but none of them were thorough Baptists, through and through.”⁷

Men and women through all ages have died as dissenters for these distinctives. We do a disservice to our physical and spiritual children if we do not pass on these principles for them to learn. “Modern-day separatists can rejoice that they do not walk alone. Others have paid a price in days gone by for the truth of God. An examination of the witness of such groups of believers reminds us again that the principle of separation, with its corollary, that believer's church, brings upon its adherents tremendous opposition.”⁸ In these pages, we hope to pass on an appreciation for these vital principles and thankfulness for those who fought to secure them for us.

Mike Sproul, BA, MDiv, DMin, is chairman of the board and adjunct professor at International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.



¹ Armitage, Thomas, *A History of the Baptists Traced by their Vital Principles and Practices from the Time of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to the Year 1886*, Volume 1, 1980 (Watertown, WI: Maranatha Baptist Press), vii.

² Armitage, iii.

³ Armitage, 2.

⁴ Pickering, Ernest, *Biblical Separation: The Struggle for a Pure Church* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press).

⁵ Leland, John. *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland including some events in His Life, 1845*, reprinted 1986 (Dayton, OH: Church History Research and Archives), 103.

⁶ Pickering, 140.

⁷ Armitage, 9.

⁸ Pickering, 40.

Biblical Authority



Many who know me believe I have always been a Baptist. Though I grew up attending an independent Baptist Church, served on its pastoral staff, and even began pastoring a Baptist Church while in seminary, it was reading the stories of Baptist history that burned the Baptist convictions of my predecessors into my heart. I became a Baptist through the testimonies of men such as the early Anabaptist leader Balthasar Hubmaier who was tortured and burned at the stake as a heretic. His crime was that he dared to argue against Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli that “in all disputes concerning faith and religion, the Scripture alone, proceeding from the mouth of God, ought to be our level and rule.”¹ Hubmaier further stated that “the true heretics were those who wickedly oppose the Holy Scriptures and these inquisitors who condemned and executed any who chose the Bible over the church.”²

Torbet in his *History of the Baptists* declares that Baptists have opposed traditionalism by “their constant witness to the supremacy of the Scriptures as the all-sufficient and sole norm for faith and practice in the Christian life.”³ Early Baptist confessions of faith boldly proclaim the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice.

The premise of Baptist belief in Biblical authority as sole rule of faith and practice is actually quite simple. It is founded on 2 Timothy 3:16, which reads, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” For Baptists, if the Scripture is “God-breathed” and therefore infallible, then there is no higher authority to claim than the Scriptures.

Other professing Christian churches may claim to esteem Biblical authority but often bestow similar authority to the church, tradition, creed, reason, or experience. Roman Catholicism has in its dogma decreed that the Scriptures are subject to the interpretation of the church. “Episcopalians believe in a hermeneutical method commonly called ‘the three-legged stool.’ Episcopalians believe that the ‘three legs on the stool’ (Scripture, tradition and reason) carry equal weight and authority.”⁴

Many in the Reformed tradition have put great weight upon creeds and logical conclusions which may be deduced from those creeds. In *Baptists and the Bible* Bush and Nettles state, “The non-creedal stance of Baptists

and their radical commitment to the normative truth of Scripture led writers of the *Second London Confession* (1677) to designate Scripture as the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge.”⁵ This is compared to the Westminster Confession, which describes the whole counsel of God as that which is “either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.”⁶ Bush and Nettles point out as an example that although infant baptism may be deduced by some from Bible teachings on the covenants and circumcision, Baptists would teach that these commands to Israel to circumcise their male children do not correspond to a command to the church to baptize their infants. Therefore, infant baptism is not commanded in Scripture, and since the Bible is our authority, such practices should be rejected.⁷

Baptists have also opposed teachings by Quakers who give authority to what they describe as an “inner light” gleaned from periods of “waiting on the Lord,” and modern-day Charismatics who place experience and “leading of the Holy Spirit” on an equal plane with Biblical authority. Both of these subjective experiences are rejected by Baptists who understand the supremacy of Biblical authority.

Baptists have historically paid a great price for not conforming to the accepted teachings of their times because those teachings were not in accord with Scripture. Our Baptist fathers faced scorn, rejection, imprisonment, and even death to defend the authority of Scripture. May we not take lightly what our forefathers have sacrificed greatly to defend.

Larry Ball is the general director for International Baptist Missions and serves as adjunct professor at International Baptist College and Seminary.



¹ Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, the Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York, 1905), 59, as quoted by Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1950), 513.

² Theologicalmatters.com//2013/03/291.

³ Torbet, 513.

⁴ Norman R. Stanton, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2005), 19.

⁵ Russ L. Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999), 356.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



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Regenerate Church Membership

Regenerate church membership is a Baptist distinctive that can be traced back to the Book of Acts. It certainly was practiced by the early New Testament Church. We believe it was sustained during the Dark Ages by different groups outside the Catholic Church and then became especially prominent in the 1700s when Anabaptists in Switzerland, such as Hubmaier, Blaurock, and Manz, lost their lives for teaching and practicing regenerate church membership and believer's baptism. The Baptists in New England had the same convictions and strongly disagreed with the Half-Way Covenant of Stoddard. (The opposition to that "covenant" is exactly what cost Stoddard's famous grandson, Jonathan Edwards, his pulpit when he eventually opposed it.) The Baptists were driven from Massachusetts for their beliefs or punished with imprisonment. (Great reading on this subject can be found in Isaac Backus's *History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*.)

The Half-Way Covenant

The Half-Way Covenant was a form of church membership created in New England in 1662. It was promoted in particular by the Reverend Solomon Stoddard. Full membership in the Puritan church required a profession of salvation, and only persons in full membership could have their children baptized. This worked well in the first generation, but in the second and third generations few of the adults professed salvation. They were known as half-covenanters, because they were church members as a result of their baptism but could not vote or take communion without a profession and proof of salvation. The church was rapidly becoming a mixed multitude. Something had to be done.

Seventeen ministers from Massachusetts and Connecticut met and established the Half-Way Covenant, which said that a person could be a voting member of the church and community simply by being baptized. No longer was a profession of salvation necessary. That perpetuated a mixed multitude and totally abdicated their earlier position of regenerate church membership.

Numerous churches and pastors disagreed, and the Half-Way Covenant battle raged for over one hundred

years until Jonathan Edwards, the grandson of Stoddard, and Evangelist George Whitefield were mightily used in the 1730s to revive the doctrine of the new birth and its logical companion, regenerate church membership, in the Great Awakening.

Four Ways of Salvation?

An understanding for the necessity of regenerate church membership can be helped by a brief discussion of the "Four Ways of Salvation" presently taught and believed in professing Christendom.

The first way that some people believe in is salvation by *works and/or morality*—people who claim to be on their way to Heaven because they try to keep the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, or the Golden Rule. Seldom can they name the Ten Commandments. How can they keep them if they do not know what they are? This belief is typified by the man I met on a bus from Detroit to Pittsburgh who told me there are many ways to Heaven, which he illustrated by saying that planes, cars, trucks, and so on, were going to Pittsburgh that night. They were all going to the same destination but via different ways. I assured him that he was right about horizontal travel but terribly wrong about vertical transportation. He failed to consider John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Second, there are millions of Americans who believe in *organizational salvation*. They believe Heaven can be attained by being a member of a church, denomination, or a lodge. Their hope of reaching Heaven is based on their membership. How tragic! They have no Scriptural basis to claim salvation, but somehow they believe their membership gives them a free pass to Heaven. In my many years as a full-time evangelist I encountered hundreds who believed in organizational salvation.

Third, there are those who believe salvation is obtained through the *sacraments*. Catholicism teaches that at infant sprinkling the child enters Christ, and when you take your first communion, Christ enters you. And, if that is not sufficient, you can have the "last rites" as death is nearing to keep you from Hell and maybe even Purgatory. But you cannot know for sure until you die. Likewise, Episcopalian and some Lutheran doctrines are very similar to Catholic

beliefs. I saw a Lutheran pastor on Minneapolis TV sprinkle quadruplets and say, "I do now regenerate thee."

I attended a musical concert in a Lutheran church some years ago. I looked through the introductory pages of the hymnal and discovered the following: "We believe your sins are washed away at the time you are sprinkled." What the Catholics, Episcopalians, and some Lutherans have in common is baptismal regeneration. Closely associated with them is the Church of Christ, which has the right mode of baptism—that is, by immersion. But they teach and believe that the blood of Christ is somehow contacted through the water. A Church of Christ pastor told me that if a person called upon God to save him at the altar but died before he reached the baptismal tank, he was doomed to Hell. That is baptismal regeneration pure and simple.

Fourth is the *Scriptural* method of salvation by grace through faith as succinctly taught in Ephesians 2:8, 9. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The New Birth and the Local Body

The first three ways have a world of confusion about salvation which leads to varied beliefs as to who is eligible to join the church of the living God. We use the term "regenerate" to describe who may identify himself with a local body of Baptist believers. The Greek term for "regenerate" is *paligenesia*, which means new birth, reproduction, re-creation (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*). Paul writes, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of *regeneration*, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

We see that the term "regenerate" is appropriate, but what about "church membership"? Note the following verses describing the results of Pentecost. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). In Acts 2:41 it mentions 3000 saved. By verse 47 they are adding to the church (*ecclesia*, "called-out ones") daily. *Let me emphasize that they were adding to the local church (called-out ones) at Jerusalem*. Obviously, unbelievers were not being added to the local church. The very meaning of "church" proves that.

Furthermore, the local church is a spiritual body. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Paul is writing to a local church and teaching them Spirit baptism, not water baptism. That makes them worlds apart from the unbelievers in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 1:1–9 Paul highlights what the believers in Corinth have in contradistinction with unbelievers. He says, "them that are sanctified in Christ," "called to be saints," "peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," "for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ," and "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

Continuing on with the church at Corinth, Paul writes to them about Biblical separation. And in so doing emphasizes *five huge differences* between believers and unbelievers.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [Satan]? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel [unbeliever]? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor. 6:14–16).

Does this passage teach that believers and unbelievers should be yoked together in a Bible-believing Baptist church? If you answer no, then you are proving my point of regenerate church membership.

In reality, there are numerous lists in the New Testament telling of what the believer has in Christ as opposed to what the unbeliever has outside of Christ. Therefore, those who are part of Christ's spiritual body are eligible to join the physical body—that is, a Bible-believing local church, and hence the name of this article, "Regenerate Church Membership."



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Individual Soul Liberty

“In case you hadn’t noticed, it has somehow become uncool to sound like you know what you are talking about,” bemoans the modern poet Taylor Mali. His performance of his poem entitled, “Totally Like Whatever, You Know?” is worth the search on YouTube.¹ Taylor Mali is by no means a Christian—in fact, he is a committed secular humanist—but if you watch his performance, I am sure that you will find yourself in ready agreement with much of what he says. Mali is picking up on our society’s total commitment to determined and dogmatic relativism. In fact, he accuses the generation of being “aggressively inarticulate.”

The approach that Mali critiques comes packaged in terms such as “openness,” “multiculturalism,” and “tolerance.” As Christians we tend to see the obvious contradictions in these approaches. Common sense teaches that the statement “there are absolutely no absolutes” is self-defeating, yet this mood has effectively become the common sense of our society. This has so affected us that writing an article calling Christians to tolerance is likely to be immediately perceived as a call to accept unbiblical and morally bankrupt practices as “okay.”

Society has managed to make clear divisions in its perception of truth. For instance, there are few people who think that gravity is true for some and not true for others, and yet these same people are willing to accept competing truth claims in the realm of values and religion. Tolerance has come to mean a disavowal of truth claims and an acceptance of moral relativism. Let me state clearly—this has never been the true meaning of tolerance. Tolerance used to mean that real differences were allowed to coexist and to be vigorously debated. I’d wager that if you met Taylor Mali and engaged him with the claims of Christianity, you’d get a real conversation—a good debate. The new “tolerance” has insulated our world from those real engagements with the truth claims of the Bible. When you engage someone who buys into the new “tolerance,” the conversation can be very amenable, but it will inevitably end with something like this: “What’s true for you is true for you, and I am glad that it works for you, but it’s not for me.”

Our Baptist heritage has a rich tradition of the right approach to tolerance; in fact it is one of our distinctives—**individual soul liberty**. Roger Williams, the founder of the Rhode Island colony and an early American Baptist, captured this well in his tractate “A Plea for Religious Liberty.” In this pamphlet Williams defines the doctrine for us:

It is the will and command of God that (since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus) a permission of the most

paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or antichristian consciences and worships, be granted to all men in all nations and countries; and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, to wit, the sword of God’s Spirit, the Word of God.²

Roger Williams was committed to what others of his time were not: a confidence in the Word of God and the Spirit of God to convert the sinner. He understood that men were only truly changed by the regeneration of their hearts and that you could not form a civil society that would alone bring people to a right standing before God. This was the approach that both Protestants and Catholics had taken. In Europe the church and state were inextricably linked, but here in the New World, Williams would distinguish himself from the Protestant denominations and the Puritans because he understood that he was not establishing a kingdom but rather a place where one could have a different faith without the fear of losing life or limb. Williams also understood that this kind of society would be the best for true gospel promulgation. He wrote,

It is as necessary, yea more honorable, godly, and Christian, to fight the fight of faith, with religious and spiritual artillery, and to contend earnestly for the faith of Jesus, once delivered to the saints against all opposers, and the gates of earth and hell, men or devils, yea against Paul himself, or an angel from heaven, if he bring any other faith or doctrine.³

As is evident, Williams was not by any means backing off the claims of Christianity; rather, he was expressing his confidence in those claims to accomplish their divinely designed work.

As Baptists in twenty-first-century America, no lesson could be more relevant. The truth is, and has ever been, that political action and social engagement will never provide the final answer to societies’ needs. We must be about the task of gospel engagement. True Christian tolerance is a commitment to God’s Word and Spirit *alone* to overcome the vain philosophies of this world. The application of true tolerance is not just that I live next to my neighbors peaceably but that I engage them with the truth.

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¹ This poem is acceptable, but some of his other work includes objectionable material.

² <http://www.constitution.org/bcp/religlib.htm>

³ Ibid.

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Nathan Mestler

Two Ordinances



When President Barack Obama declared during his second inaugural address that America's journey to "liberty and justice for all" would not be complete until the law recognized gay marriage,¹ the conclusion that America was a post-Christian nation hastened to settle in my mind in a more decided way. I had often thought that God would lead me to the mission field; after all I had grown up in Kenya, the son of American missionaries, and had learned a deep love for missionary endeavor. My youth had been filled with the stories of American and British missionaries leaving their respective bastions of Christianity to forge new beachheads of Christian faith in previously pagan domains. C. T. Studd and Adoniram Judson still have a special place among my personal "hall of faith" heroes, but as I listened to the president I recognized that God had taught me missions not for Africa, but for America.

It is in that frame of mind that I come to the topic at hand—Baptist distinctives. The Baptist distinctives were crafted and are often discussed in contrast to other denominations and expressions of Christian practice. As Baptists in twenty-first century America, we must recognize that the America where we minister is increasingly ignorant of this religious milieu. When we consider our Baptist convictions against a post-Christian backdrop, we will see that the faith of our fathers could hardly be more relevant to the world we find ourselves in. The task at hand is to communicate Baptist convictions as an authentic expression of Biblical faith to a world starved of spiritual solutions and searching for a satisfying Savior.

The Ordinance of Baptism

As a kid, I had the profound experience of seeing several converted Muslims follow the example of our Lord into the baptismal waters. All of the baptisms were conducted outside and were well attended by the church and had an audience from the community as well. Their step of convinced faith helped me to realize the importance of my own baptism. When I was baptized, I joined a church that I had grown up in and that my world centered around. It was the next and logical and expected step for me to take. That does not mean that my choice was devoid of faith and obedience—it just lacked the thoughtful significance of my converted Muslim brethren. For them the choice to be publicly baptized was about not only what they were joining

but also what they were forsaking. Up to the point of baptism, their families reserved hope that they might come to their senses; after the baptism, their families declared them dead and in one instance even held a mock funeral. For these men baptism was an event that marked a new epoch and a new public identity.

I think that those experiences on the mission field illustrate the right way for us to think and talk about baptism in a post-Christian America, and they more closely resemble the significance that baptism would have had when Paul addressed the topic to the Romans roughly fifty years after Christ's birth. The church in Rome had gone through tumultuous change in the preceding years. In AD 49 the Jewish community had divided over Christian claims. This dispute was so intense and disruptive to the city that the emperor took the drastic step of expelling all of the Jews from the city for five years.² This could hardly have done much for Jew, Christian, and Gentile relations. The Gentiles of the city were fed up with the Jews as a whole; Jewish Christians were blamed for the whole incident by the larger Jewish community. The Christian church in Rome, composed of Jews and Gentiles, must have seemed a monstrous amalgamation in its day and an easy target for ridicule and persecution! Who would join that club?

Yet Paul unabashedly rehearses the baptism ceremony for his audience and inextricably links it to salvation. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3, 4). We must appreciate what Paul has done here. Paul cannot be misunderstood to be teaching that baptism is a *condition* of salvation—the preceding five chapters would be denuded of their meaning if this were so. On the other hand, Paul is doing nothing in these verses if not elevating baptism to a level of deep, deep importance. For Paul, baptism is part of the ordinary complex of events that occur when someone is saved. So while baptism is not necessary for salvation, saved people are baptized people. In the days of the composition of Romans the person who accepted the truth claims of Christianity but refused to be baptized would be like the married man today who refused to wear his wedding ring. The ring does not make him married, but a refusal to wear the ring would draw his commitment into question. Is an uncommitted Christian a Christian at all? So

baptism, then, is properly understood as the first act of the committed Christian life.

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper

It is at this point that we must turn our attention to the Lord's Supper, for this ordinance starts where baptism has left off—as the continuing act of that same committed life. The Lord's own words established this memorial: "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Paul adds that this commemoration is a time of spiritual renewal and is to continue until the time of Christ's coming (1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord's Supper, then, envelopes the whole scope of the Christian's life. This celebration of the Christian life is wondrous in its conception. It is at the same time so simple that even a small child can perceive its symbol and so imbued with meaning that an adult could get lost in meditation on its importance. It transports us (often with great emotion) back to the time when our desperate need for the Savior first dawned on us; it causes us to reflect on our continued and desperate need for the Spirit as we contemplate the vagaries of our own sinful hearts; and it refreshes us with the assurance that Christ the King is returning and that our sojourn as strangers and foreigners here will be short lived.

When I was a kid in Africa, there were certainly times when I was acutely reminded that I was not a native African (my red hair and freckles sometimes contributed to this) and that I had been reared in a different culture. Every July 4th a good number of American missionaries would gather together and do distinctly American things, like eating hot dogs and playing softball. These times

were refreshing. It was good to celebrate those things and to be around people who knew and appreciated where I was from and what I enjoyed, who spoke my dialect and shared my tastes. In this post-Christian America, the Lord's Supper can have that role in the believer's life. It can be the time when we corporately celebrate who we are and what makes us distinct as Christians. It can be the time when we take courage in our future hope and renew our Christ-centered commitment.

As Baptists, we have done well decrying the sacramental nature of the ordinances but have at times diminished their sacredness. Yet I think that the natural progress of coming events will bring their deeper significance back to the fore. As Biblical Christianity is increasingly marginalized by a secular and relativistic culture, the considered choice of baptism and the continual commemoration of communion will not be thought of as merely "acts of symbolic obedience" but rather as essential practices of the truly committed Christian life.

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¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>

² The Roman historian Suetonius records a dispute among Jews because of "Chrestus." Many historians believe this is a reference to Christ and appears to have Biblical corroboration in Acts 18:1, 2.





Two Offices

Pastor and Deacon

Historically, Baptists have been a back-to-the-Bible people. Whatever the Bible says is so. We believe that the Bible is our only source of faith and practice. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). That is the ultimate conclusion to the faith issue. But what about practice? That is, how do we do church? Let us understand that the word *ecclesia* (church) appears some 106 times in the New Testament. Approximately one hundred times it is referring to a local church. Paul’s missionary trips, his letters to pastors and churches, and John’s letters to the seven churches of Revelation convey God’s strong emphasis on the local church. Baptists believe that every local church is independent from every other church body and organization and therefore is answerable only to God, Christ being the Chief Shepherd.

We also believe that every local church should be self-governing, self supporting, and self-propagating. The area of self-governance is of immense importance. Many religious groups within professing Christendom have several levels of ecclesiastical oversight and supervision. This form of religious domination and control evolved over hundreds of years until it ultimately became their accepted tradition. For instance, Roman Catholicism has the papacy with the pope being designated as the vicar of Christ on earth. He is assisted by a College of Cardinals. Eventually their numerous layers of authority finally come down to the local Catholic priest, who is said to have the divine authority to forgive sins.

Their practices totally disagree with Biblical ecclesiology, that is, the doctrine of the local church as seen in the Scriptures. Over the centuries Catholics have developed a hierarchy that has no basis in the New Testament. That is not what Christ meant when He said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18).

Roman Catholicism’s Effect on Protestantism

Roman Catholicism has also impacted other groups within Protestantism. We admire men such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, who came out of the Catholic Church at the

risk of their lives. However, they came only part way out and carried with them “Catholic baggage.” Consequently, we have Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Nazarenes, and so on, who have a contrived hierarchy not found in the Word. The word “bishop” is a Scriptural term describing the pastor of a local church. But when that term is used to describe one who has authority to dictate and enforce the choosing of a pastor from outside the local church, then those who define the term that way have added to the Word of God. There are no archbishops, synods, or creeds in the Bible. We Baptists publish a doctrinal statement that reveals what we believe the Bible teaches.

Nor are Baptists Protestants. Protestantism started in the 1500s with a protest against Catholicism. The protestors came out of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, we Baptists can trace our roots back to those small groups from AD 300 onward who held many of our Baptist distinctives. We did not come *out* of Rome like the Reformers. We came *through* the Reformation, and those we have a spiritual kinship with—such as our Anabaptist brothers, men such as Hubmaier, Manz, Blaurock, and so on—were hounded by the Reformers and ultimately gave their lives in defense of regenerate church membership and believer’s baptism. (Never forget that John Calvin had Servetus put to death for his beliefs.)

Local, Independent, Regenerated

It is imperative that we understand the true nature of the local church; that is, it is an independent body of regenerated believers baptized by immersion after salvation with two major offices—pastor and deacon—of which the pastor is the ultimate local church authority under the headship of Christ.

There may be an independent Baptist church association where a local Baptist church can join for different endeavors. But the local church remains totally independent and reserves the right to vote out of the organization at their pleasure. Or there may be a fellowship of Baptist ministers, such as Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International, where individuals join together by signing a doctrinal statement. There are numerous purposes for a fellowship that can promote evangelism, missions, church planting, godly living, and so forth. Their fellowshiping sharpens,

encourages, and challenges other of like precious faith. But there are no entangling alliances.

These thoughts lead us to discuss the Biblical nature of the pastoral office. “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). The apostles and prophets helped start the New Testament Church and gave it the Scriptures. But when the canon was completed they were no longer needed. The evangelists, such as Philip, were traveling from place to place and preaching the good news and planting churches, but always itinerant. They were vitally important to the local church but were not seen as those operating the local church, and it is the same today. The phrase “pastors and teachers” is seen by many as referring to the pastoral gift with an emphasis on pastors.

The Office of Pastor

“The pastoral office is described by five different Greek words, each signifying a peculiar aspect of the office and a particular duty of the pastor. (1) *Presbyteros* or elder: The president of a deliberative assembly which figure was the local church particularly in the aspect of conducting its business” (Dr. R. V. Clearwaters) (1 Tim. 5:17). (2) *Episcopos* or bishop: A superintendent or an overseer of a working force (Phil. 1:1). (3) *Poimen*: A shepherd of the flock (1 Pet. 5:2, 4). (4) *Kerux*: A preacher to the congregation (2 Tim. 1:11). (5) *Didaskalos*: A teacher of the church (Eph. 4:11).

The preceding was the job description. First Timothy 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9 constitute the Scriptural qualifications for a pastor. We shall put both sets together with no duplication. They are:

- Blameless
- Husband of one wife
- Vigilant
- Sober
- Good behavior
- Given to hospitality
- Apt to teach
- Not given to wine
- No striker
- Not greedy of filthy lucre
- Patient
- Not a brawler
- Not covetous
- One that ruleth well his own house
- Not a novice
- A good report of them which are without
- Faithful children not accused of riot or unruly
- Not self-willed
- Not soon angry
- A lover of hospitality
- A lover of good men
- Just, temperate
- Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught

The Office of Deacon

The second office is that of deacon. The Greek word for deacons is *diakonos*. It means “to be a servant,” “to minister to one.” However, all believers have a responsibility to serve. Christ set the supreme example of servitude by dying for lost sinners. His earthly ministry was encapsulated by washing the disciples’ feet.

When the church in Jerusalem exploded in numbers, certain needs arose in the church. The Greek widows were

being overlooked in the daily ministration (*diakonia*). So the twelve called the multitude of disciples and said they should not leave the Word of God and serve tables. They instructed the multitude of disciples to choose seven servants (deacons). These were to be special men. They were to be servants full of faith and the Holy Spirit. The disciples prayed for them and laid their hands on them, signifying their approval. Stephen is the first deacon named, and being filled with grace and power he did many signs and wonders among the people. And before Acts 7 is concluded, Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr.

Please note that by the time Paul writes the book of Philippians, he is linking pastors and deacons together and by so doing is giving Scriptural proof to the Baptist conviction that there are two offices in a New Testament church: pastors and deacons. “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). Also, Paul writes to Timothy, “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the *office of a deacon* being found blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10). Again, “For they that have used the *office of a deacon* well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). No archbishops, synods, or ecclesiastical hierarchy is mentioned in Paul’s letters to the church at Philippi or to Timothy—or anywhere else in Scripture.

But further description of the character and job description of deacons is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. After giving the character and job description of pastors in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, he links pastors and deacons together in verse 8 by a word that can be translated “similarly” or “likewise.” Obviously, there are many ways in which pastors and deacons are to have the same qualities and are named in both lists in 1 Timothy 3.

Here then is God’s additional list for deacons (1 Tim. 3:8–10):

- Grave (dignity, gravity)
- Not double tongued
- Not given to much wine
- Not greedy of filthy lucre
- Hold faith in a pure conscience
- Let these also first be proved (not a novice)
- Blameless
- Husband of one wife
- Ruling their children and their own houses well

Please observe that God has a *list of standards for both the pastors and deacons* as each fills the particular office to which God has called him.

We accept only two offices for the church. Various committees can be formed for specific tasks, but the two offices of the church are always local offices, and they are only pastor and deacon. Any other office is extra-Biblical and therefore should be rejected.

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Autonomy of the Local Church

Autonomy is the right of self-government. As applied to a local church, autonomy is the freedom from interference or control from an outside authority as to its beliefs and governance. In practical terms autonomy means that a church is independent financially, is able to choose its own leadership, and determines its own covenants and doctrine. This concept of local church autonomy needs to be fully understood in an age where it is threatened from many sides.

The autonomy of the local church is grounded in the early history of the church. The local church in Acts 6:3-6 selected men to assist the apostles in caring for the needs of its own members. It was the local church in Antioch that sent out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-3) and to whom Paul and Barnabas reported upon their return (Acts 14:26-28). It is to the local church that Christ assigned the responsibility of discipline (Matt. 18:17) and to whom Paul admonished to confront a sinning brother (1 Cor. 5:1-13). It was this same local body of believers who resisted the pressure of government and religious authority manifested in the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in the name of Christ.

There are two major misconceptions regarding local church autonomy. The first mistaken belief is that autonomy leads to a lack of unity in doctrine. The accusation is that without a central church or denomination to define doctrine, the individual churches will stray into a multitude of beliefs and practices. Baptists have answered that the "very absence of any established creed is in itself the cause of our unity." The Bible is our authority and the "nearer the opinions of men approach to its teachings, the nearer they approach to each other's. Here is a solid and definite basis of unity."*

The second major misconception is that local church autonomy means that like-minded churches cannot work or fellowship together. This is a charge not based in reality. Historically, Baptist churches have been eager to work together with those of like-precious faith to advance the gospel and to encourage one another. Baptists have been quick to form fellowships and associations for the strengthening of the cause of Christ.

Several dangers threaten local church autonomy in these modern times. One surprising danger comes out of the megachurch movement with its multiple campuses beaming in the sermon of the "superstar" pastor to its Sunday morning star-struck crowd. One example is the Mars Hill Church based near Seattle, which describes itself on its website as follows:

As a large church that meets in multiple locations and states, Mars Hill is governed by a body of executive elders who are first among equals on the eldership team. The executive elder team comprises three elders who oversee the vision, preaching, and teaching of the church, the operations of the church, and the ministries of the church, respectively.

The website lists the church as meeting in eleven locations in the State of Washington and one location each in California, Oregon, New Mexico, and Arizona, for a total of fifteen campuses spread over 1400 miles. One is left to wonder if we as Baptists have failed to teach the autonomy of the local church as we should to a generation that is so quick to abandon it for the megachurch pastor 1400 miles away.

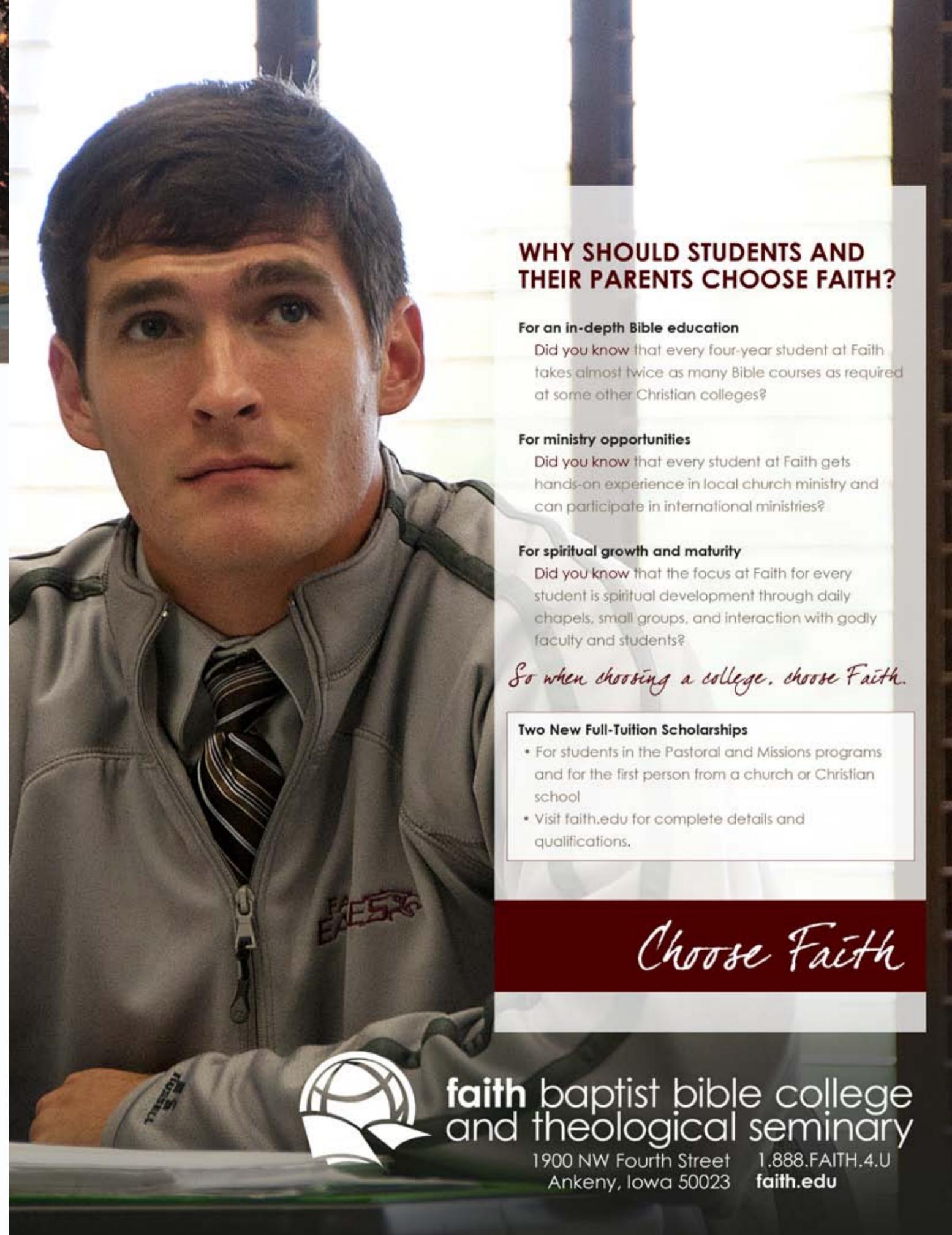
One young pastor told me proudly of how he had led his small but self-supporting church to come under the leadership of a slightly larger church 2500 miles away. His reasoning was that the wisdom and accountability to the other church somehow protected his and the smaller church's testimony. I must have looked befuddled (I was) as I tried to understand how electing a man who lived 2500 miles away to serve on his board gave him and his church more accountability.

Living in a time when abandoning the Baptist name is popular, we should not be surprised that many of the clear Baptist distinctives are being thrown out as well. Baptist churches need to be careful to explain, defend, and practice local church autonomy for the sake of this generation and those to follow.

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* Wayland, Francis. *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Watertown, WI: Baptist Heritage Press, 1988), 15.



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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

He Then Must Be . . .

The qualifications for a minister which are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 have alternately convicted, discouraged, inspired, or revived me for over forty years now. So I've kept an eye out for really substantive treatments of them. But it's been disappointing and often puzzling to observe that despite all of the teaching and preaching about the ministry otherwise, there seems to have been comparatively little that has magnified these benchmarks. One would think, for instance, that they would be repeatedly highlighted at conferences for preachers. Or that they would be the subjects of provocative preliminary chapters in books on the ministry. But this seems seldom to be the case.¹ Is this because we assume that the qualifications are primarily for our scrutiny *before* we enter the ministry? That they have no recurring or growing message *throughout* our ministries?

Actually, it would seem that long ministry experience would make the qualifications increasingly compelling to us. Our ever-expanding knowledge of the world and its cultures, our broadening acquaintance with people of every sort of temperament and in every kind of circumstance, our own safekeeping through *many dangers, toils, and snares*, and most of all, our deepening experience of our own total and despicable depravity apart from the grace of God—all these vivid experiences have an effect upon preachers akin to that of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Our eyes are opened wider and wider, and our own nakedness is exposed more and more the longer we are in ministry. You would think, therefore, that we ought to concentrate, not less, but much more upon the wise standards for exercising ourselves to *have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward*

men (Acts 24:16), providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men (2 Cor. 8:21), and by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor. 4:2).

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

For several years I've whittled away at a project of collecting good material illuminating these qualifications. These in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are not the only requirements for ministry, of course. Additional necessary characteristics are embedded singly or in small clusters throughout the New Testament. But these are the ones inscripturated in the Pastorals as the minimum. They therefore have been central in my study.

What I'd like to do is share some of what has been instructive to me in a short series that explores these qualifications exegetically, illustratively, and inspirationally. I feel as though I'm doing so prematurely, in that I've simply not had the opportunity to research historical sources (journals, biographies, and sermons in particular) nearly as much as I would have liked. Nevertheless, I trust that these articles will make at least a token contribution toward challenging us to increasingly magnify our commitment to *giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed (2 Cor. 6:3).*

Every Preacher Is Unique

Although the Scriptural qualifications are the common standard for all ministers, it needs to be clarified at the outset that there are other respects in which preachers are entirely at liberty to differ from one another. By God's design, we are unlike one another in many lawful ways; appearance, ability, intelligence, vigor, sympathy, and so on.

For instance, note what the Scottish preacher Alexander Gammie observed in his series of sketches, *Preachers I Have Heard*. Of John G. Paton (missionary to the New Hebrides), he wrote that he *conveyed a sense of calm composure. He appeared to have come out of some inner sanctuary, with an aroma about him of things that are*

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sacred and beautiful and uplifting. James Chalmers (missionary in New Guinea), on the other hand, was a full-flooded man of magnificent physique, all aglow with strength and energy. There was never a more perfect embodiment of the muscular Christian.

Joseph Parker, of London's City Temple, was rough-hewn . . . boisterous, sometimes perhaps bombastic, but he had drama, he had passion. By contrast, John Henry Jowett was fastidious about his personal appearance . . . immaculate in his dress . . . and did not allow himself to be irresistibly carried away.

George Mattheson's voice was strong and powerful, at times somewhat harsh rather than melodious, whereas F. B. Meyer spoke quietly, persuasively, serenely, in silver tones. But D. M. McIntyre (son-in-law to Andrew Bonar), had a voice of only a few notes. . . . He might be described as a master of the monotone, and he proved how even a monotone could become melodious and appealing.

I think that we would all acknowledge that these differences between preachers are not only entirely acceptable, but vital factors to their appeal and effectiveness. John Flavel, a widely regarded seventeenth-century English Puritan, noted quaintly,

There is not a greater, or more pleasant variety of qualities, smells, and colours, among the herbs and flowers with which the earth is variegated and decked, for the delight and service of men, than there is in the gifts and abilities of ministers, for the use and service of the church.²

This is so undeniable, that Philips Brooks included "personality" as one of just two factors in his famous definition of preaching. *Preaching*, he wrote, *has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of these can it spare and still be preaching.*³

Brooks overstates personality's significance somewhat (certainly by comparison to the element of truth), but he nevertheless pinpoints something attestable by the Bible itself. When you survey various preachers in Biblical history—Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Amos, Peter, Paul—each was unique. And don't we find that it was this differing manhood which, at least in part, predisposes us to hear them with unvarying interest? Undoubtedly.

There's a fatal loss to preaching when men surrender to some sort of vague pressure to imitate one another's styles or mimic one another's personalities. Spurgeon warned the students in his pastors' college, *Yet have I one fear, and it is this: you may fall into a foolish imitation of some admired minister, and this will to some extent put you off from the right track.* There were at least a few devotees hearing him that day who presumed that his counsel cautioned against their imitating anyone else—except, of course, their beloved pastor. Surely they might copy him. But Spurgeon continued with characteristic good humor: *A rumor is current that there are one or two young Spurgeons about. . . . If any of you become mere copyists of me I shall regard you as thorns in the flesh, and rank you among those whom Paul says "we suffer gladly."*⁴

Be yourself, the great preacher advised, *even if you should be ungainly and awkward, be yourself. Your own clothes, though they be homespun, will fit you better than another man's, though made of the best broadcloth.*

Let's not minimize who and what we are uniquely, and who has made us such. From time to time we need to encourage one another to be content with God's individual plan for each of our lives. When a young G. Campbell Morgan confided to R. W. Dale of Birmingham that he felt keenly his inadequacy for pastoring due to his never having been schooled in the universities like nearly all other preachers, the older man wisely replied, *Never say that you are untrained. God has many ways of training men.*⁵

When we preachers embrace this kind of counsel and content ourselves with our individualities it frees us. Just as importantly, it frees our people also. They too need be loosed from any narrow notion that all preachers must be alike. To them God says liberatingly, *All things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas . . . all are yours* (1 Cor. 3:21, 22). Not all are chosen, like Peter, for the Savior's innermost circle. Nor are all given the genius of a Paul or the oratory of an Apollos. And who is responsible for these differences? They are *as the Lord gave to every man* (1 Cor. 3:5).

But All Preachers Must Be . . .

But having settled that certain differences between our persons are acceptable and attractive, we must turn now to our solemn responsibility for certain common standards. There are respects in which all ministers must be alike: *A bishop then must be . . .* (1 Tim. 3:2). But before launching into the discussion of these, a clarification is necessary.

I mentioned at the outset that I've occasionally been discouraged by these qualifications. Sometimes greatly discouraged. Over thirty years ago I penned some lines in the margin of my Bible from Alexander Whyte's sermon, "Timothy as a Young Minister," which have helped me through despondency.

Well might Timothy, and well may every living minister today, lay down these two terrible Epistles, and say over them—"Who is sufficient for these things?" For no mere man is sufficient for such high things as these. No mortal man is sufficient for such a holy ministry as that. But then no mere and mortal man is expected to be sufficient. You must not go away and suppose that the arch-Apostle himself was sufficient for the half of the charges he laid, almost with a curse on Timothy. Paul, you may be sure, threw down his pen again and again in the composition of these two pastoral Epistles, and betook himself to his knees and to the blood of Christ before he could finish what he had begun to write.⁶

I think that what Whyte is getting at is that the qualifications aren't primarily for measuring our blamelessness before God. *If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand* (Ps. 130:3)? None of us are

personally qualified under God's searching, thrice-holy eye. This shattering realization reduced Isaiah to wailing, *Woe is me!*, and Peter to crying, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.* It throws you and me down on the floor of our studies in despair. But thank the Lord for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us from all unrighteousness. *All of it! Hallelujah!*

But what, then, is the point of the qualifications? Surely, not faultlessness before God, but before people. It is before them that our lives must verify all our drastic sayings.

There's a story concerning Francis of Assisi which I want to relate without, of course, implying complacency toward Roman Catholic theology. But it is told that on one occasion Francis invited a younger novice to accompany him to a town in order that they might preach. Upon arrival, they began to walk the streets. But Francis never stopped to speak a single word. Finally, when they had trekked through every neighborhood, Francis signified that their mission was accomplished. *But I thought we were going to preach*, the younger man protested. *We have preached*, the wise old monk replied. *We were observed as we walked. They marked us as we went. It was thus we preached.*⁷

Yes, it is thus that we preach, and thus that we are solemnly required to be unimpeachably qualified when we enter the pulpit. There is an innermost sanctum where the God of glory dwells. No one can nor dare to stand upon his feet in that holy place. But there are precincts of priests and courts for women and Gentiles through which those with the sacred anointing must pass on their way to preach and to pray, and in these courts, men of God must be able to stand up and be scrutinized. A preacher's business is first of all to be an example of the believers (1 Tim. 4:12). *A given sermon is the preacher to date*, observed the old Methodist, William Quayle. *A great life, telling a great truth, ought to be a definition of a preacher at his message*, he continued, and then asked, *Preacher, what are you doing? Are you getting up a sermon?* And his answer, Quayle said, ought to be, *Rather, I am, by God's grace, constructing a man.* *Working on your sermon, brother?* "No, working on the preacher."⁸ *First a saint and then a scholar*, was Whitefield's way of putting it. Not to make us deserving before God. But to make us credible with people. Surely, this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.

Implied Qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1)

In beginning any reassessment of our ongoing capability for ministry, we mustn't hastily overlook the fact that the premier passage listing the qualifications explicitly is first introduced in terms that imply at least two others. You may infer them from the expression, *desireth a good work*. The issues of personal desire and commitment to work have to be occasionally reevaluated. Let's turn our attention to these.

I am conscious of no distractions in the shape of any competitors for my strength and allegiance. I have

had but one passion, and I have lived for it.—John Henry Jowett⁹

First Timothy 3:1 employs not merely one, but two terms for the desire which is characteristic of a man qualified for ministry. The first, in the opening words, *desire the office of a bishop*, is (transliterated) *orego*. It connotes being on the stretch, as in stretching out our hands to get hold of something.

Very illustratively for our study, it occurs a second time in 6:10, where it is translated *coveted after*. Some have *coveted after* money. They love money. They will to be rich (6:9). They're stretched out after it.

Yes, it is thus that we preach, and thus that we are solemnly required to be unimpeachably qualified when we enter the pulpit. There is an innermost sanctum where the God of glory dwells. No one can nor dare to stand upon his feet in that holy place.

The only other NT occurrence of *orego* is in Hebrews 11:16, where it is for the second time translated *desire*. In that passage it describes the archetypal pilgrims, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah, who *desire a better country, that is, an heavenly*. God's covenant people enjoyed many earthly blessings, but their real stretch, their emotional bent, was toward Heaven.

These other two passages, then, provide wonderful images for men reexamining their qualification for ministry. We've all known greedy people. And we've all observed saintly people, perhaps particularly during the last days of a terminal illness, whose only longing was to go home to glory. Is there in us, either as young men attempting to know our calling, or as older men needing to reevaluate ours, a *desire* amounting to those kinds of intense passions?

Passion doesn't overstate what we ought to feel. The second term for a minister's necessary desire is exactly our word for it. *Desireth a good work* is more literally *is passionate for a good work*. The qualified man has set his *thumos* (passion) upon it, a word which connotes warmth. He is heated up over the ministry. It's his hot pursuit.

There is, of course, such a thing as fleshly, worldly ambition for ministry. This is why any discussion of this matter of desire must include the parallel passage in 1 Peter 5:2, which forbids taking the oversight of God's flock *for filthy lucre*, or by implication, any unworthy motive. It was a divine judgment upon Eli's house that his remaining lineage would crouch for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, pleading with God's anointed, *Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread* (1 Sam. 2:36).

Brothers, we all know firsthand the hard, pressing realities of financial needs. They are genuine. But if a man enters or remains in ministry simply in order to draw a paycheck, he will prove to be divinely disciplined, if not divinely cursed, and a withering blight upon his church. Better to live in a shack or on a back bayou than to drift listlessly along in a calling for which we no longer have any heart.

The ministry is to be our passion! It is a good, in fact, the very best of offices. It is inexcusable to treat it as though it were commonplace, undeserving of our stretched-out desire and glowing warmth.

We all experience times when our spirits are spent. There is such a thing as an excusable season of despondency. A numb heart and a paralyzed hand may be the understandable consequences of being overworked, too often opposed, underappreciated, physically fatigued, or emotionally shaken. Spurgeon has a chapter in his *Lectures to My Students* entitled, “The Minister’s Fainting Fits.” John Henry Jowett wrote to a friend, *You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky.*¹⁰ But for qualified men these are occasional dispositions, not perpetual conditions.

Cotton Mather wrote to the despondent minister, *O star fallen and choked in the dust, arise and shine, and let thy light come, and the glory of the Lord be risen upon thee!*¹¹ Fire up your heart! A qualified minister is a minister who really *desires* to be doing the Lord’s work. Desire is requisite. Warm passion is vital. An eager, stretched-out spirit is essential.

I would have laziness held to be the one unpardonable sin in all our students and in all our ministers.—Alexander Whyte¹²

A second qualification is implied in the word *work*. A man considering the possibility of his being called by the Holy Spirit into the ministry should know passionate desire for the office, but then he ought to winnow his desire with the searching question as to whether he is prepared to work. For that is precisely what the ministry is. Acts 13:2, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.* Acts 15:38, John Mark did not go *with them to the work*. First Thessalonians 5:13, *Esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.* First Corinthians 16:10, *Timothy . . . worketh the work of the Lord.* First Timothy 4:5, *Do the work of an evangelist.* John Newton observed, *O it is a most busy life.*¹³

I don’t recall ever hearing candidates for ordination questioned about their work habits, but perhaps it would be a favor to them to raise the issue. Few of them, unless perhaps they’ve been raised in the home of a conscientious pastor or missionary, can have any conception of the unrelenting demands that will be made upon

their time and the unrelieved weight that will descend upon their spirits shortly after they enter the ministry.

This winter a mature man, a man of many years in Christian work, but a man who has only relatively recently entered full-time pastoring, remarked to me that in the fall he had taken a week to go hunting to West and that to his dismay he had discovered that it took fully the first four or five days that he was away before he finally had the sense of being free from the stress of his ministry. This isn’t an uncommon experience among preachers. I can say sincerely that I have been given a truly wonderful and responsive people to whom to preach and among whom to pastor, yet I can recall times when, as our family has been returning from a week away for a short vacation, I’ve felt almost ill over the tightening of my stomach in anticipation of the problems to be taken back up. Chrysostom was not far afield when he remarked that the ministry is *A burden too heavy for an angel’s shoulders.*¹⁴

So it is imperative that we face this issue forthrightly. Are we prepared to really work? *I did this day receive as much honour and work, as ever I shall be able to know what do with,* reflected Philip Henry (father of the famous commentator, Matthew) in his journal on the evening after his ordination. *Lord Jesus, proportion supplies accordingly,* he concluded.¹⁵

Does that not sound like the requisite outlook of a man truly qualified? ☞

¹ Two notable exceptions are John MacArthur’s excellent chapter “The Character of a Pastor” in *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* and Alexander Strauch’s chapter “Qualified Leadership” in his *Biblical Eldership*.

² John Flavel, “The Character of a True Evangelical Pastor,” *The Works of John Flavel*, VI, 574.

³ *Lectures on Preaching*, 5.

⁴ *Lectures to My Students*, 302–303.

⁵ Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word*, 78.

⁶ *Bible Characters: Stephen to Timothy*, V, 303–304.

⁷ James Stewart, *Heralds of God*, 190.

⁸ *The Pastor-Preacher*, 29, 31, 32.

⁹ *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, 9.

¹⁰ John Henry Jowett, Arthur Porritt, 290.

¹¹ *Manuductio ad Ministerium, The Angels Preparing to Sound the Trumpets*, 5.

¹² *The Life of Alexander Whyte, D. D.*, G. F. Barbour, 282.

¹³ *Miscellaneous Thoughts and enquiries on an important subject* (available as part of *The Complete Works of John Newton* at www.johnnewton.org).

¹⁴ John Trapp, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, V, 640.

¹⁵ *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, J. B. Williams, 38.

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Bring . . . the Books

Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*

Several years ago during a graduate school program in which I was enrolled, the name Richard Baxter kept surfacing in class lectures. As I recall, one professor described him as “the pastor of pastors.” Hearing my teachers refer to Baxter with such admiration, I felt it would be wise to familiarize myself with this important figure of church history, and especially his most well-known book, *The Reformed Pastor*. I should add here that even though Richard Baxter (1615–91) was a Puritan, the word *Reformed* in the title has nothing to do with Reformed Theology but with the need for pastors to reform their ways. (A more apt title might be “The Revived Pastor.”)

In his preface Baxter reveals how the book came into existence: “the Lord had awakened His ministers” in Baxter’s county of Worcestershire and the surrounding areas to their neglect of thoroughly “catechizing and privately instructing all those in their parishes.” After considering the gravity of their negligence and the eternal work they were undertaking, “they judged it improper to enter upon the work without solemnly humbling their souls before the Lord. They therefore agreed to meet together at Worcester on December 4, 1655, to join in humiliation and earnest prayer to God for the pardon of their sins, for His special assistance in the work they had undertaken.”

Baxter and others were asked to preach at the meeting. In preparation, Baxter wrote a treatise which, using today’s publishing methods, would fill a book of nearly 700 pages! (Most editions of *The Reformed Pastor* are abridged.) Although he would have opportunity to preach only two sermons representing the most pertinent portions of his writing, he had determined to reserve the rest for another time. As it turned out, his health kept him from attending the meeting at all. Others, therefore, requested that he publish the material, recognizing its significance and urgency.

The book is an earnest plea for pastors to conscientiously fulfill the mandate of Acts 20:28: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Chapters 1 through 4 address the first command (“Take heed . . . unto yourselves”), and chapters 5 through 8 address the second (“Take heed . . . to all the flock”).

Amid the many topics Baxter addresses, he fervently and repeatedly impresses upon the reader two primary subjects in both sections of the book. The first is that of reviving the Biblical practice of church discipline. The second is the pastor’s faithful attention to *privately* teach each family in his church.

Upon first consideration one may think, “Baxter must have pastored a very small church.” However, the conscience cannot be salved quite so easily! Baxter pas-

tored a church of 800 families! Over the course of a year he met with each family one time. Every Monday and Tuesday Baxter scheduled an appointment with one family each hour of the day. If a father were of poor means and had to miss work in order to keep his family’s appointment, Baxter would personally reimburse him for the wages he had lost.

One would think Baxter’s conscience would be freed after such effort to meet the needs of his people, but he wrote: “What a shame it is that we are able to speak to a man only once a year about the condition of his soul!” He saw “the catechizing of families in private” as “the most likely means to promote the conversion of souls.”

Baxter found that meeting with his families helped his preaching, giving him a better understanding of his people, even though at times, because of his pressed preparations, he went into the pulpit “delivering the message of God in a manner sometimes raw . . . and unsuitable to its dignity.” One wonders if his rawness might surpass our dignity!

The first four chapters are rich in exhortation challenging the pastor to a more disciplined private life. One of the greatest benefits of this book to the reader, however, is Baxter’s example of sacrificial love for his people. He described himself as a “dying man preaching to dying men.” “Be careful to take some special pains with your heart before you go before the congregation. . . . Seek to have the life of God seep into you.” Maintaining this level of love-motivated ministry is truly astounding, considering the fact that Baxter suffered from pain and sickness most of his life.

Though reformed in his theology (albeit a four-point Calvinist, and therefore theologically at odds with some of his Reformed brethren), Baxter believed ministers should unite over “necessary truths.” “Do not lay too much stress on those controversies that are ultimately resolved into philosophical uncertainties (as is the case with certain unprofitable controversies about free-will, the manner of the Spirit’s operation of grace, the divine decrees, pre-determination, etc).” How insightful!

Each pastor will have to decide for himself how to personally apply the searching admonitions of this book, but I believe you will be the better for having gone through the process. At the very least, this book argues that we need to know our flock. *The Reformed Pastor* will likely prick the conscience of the most circumspect of leaders. Enjoy the pricks! ☞

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

First Corinthians 14 is the conclusion of three chapters dealing with the “things of the Spirit” (12:1, 2). Although the Lord desires that His churches should not be ignorant concerning the purpose and function of spiritual gifts (12:4–6), perplexity persists among the people of God. Perhaps there is no greater confusion than over the gift of tongues. This article will attempt to show that the New Testament gift of tongues, as authentic languages for the edification of the church, was understood by the speaker. This is in contrast to the modern conception of incomprehensible, ecstatic speech unknown to the hearer and the speaker.

Edification

The Corinthian church seemed to think that spiritual giftedness was to be displayed in the church for personal, spiritual exaltation. Paul corrected this by stating that “all things [were to] be done unto edifying”; that is, being built up in Christ (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul had already likened the church to a building of which a minister of Christ was to “take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (3:10–15). He had exhorted the church at Corinth that the cruciform, or the cross-shaped, love of Christ edifies the brethren (8:1; 12:31). He had admonished them not to build up a brother to destruction through the carnal, careless exercise of one’s liberties (8:10). He had explained that something may be lawful in practice but unedifying (10:23). Paul, in the context of spiritual giftedness, spoke of the necessity of building up the church in 1 Corinthians 14 more than any other chapter in the New Testament (14:3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 14, 19, 23, and 26). Therefore, a proper understanding of edification is necessary to the unfolding of chapter 14.

In 14:4, the gifts of tongues and of prophecy do not differ concerning edification except for the object of the edification. The gift of tongues builds up the speaker. The gift of prophecy builds up the hearer. Both edify. However, in the context of a church gathering, prophecy is the greater gift because the congregation understands the meaning of the language being spoken unto edification, exhortation, and comfort (14:3). The church receives edification because it is in a known language to the hearers (14:9). It is in this matter that the fruit of edification occurs by the Spirit of God. Edification does not bypass the mind. This is indisputable.

The perplexity begins to dissolve when we apply these same truths to the gift of tongues. With this gift, the church is not being built up because the hearers do not understand the spoken language, except it be interpreted (14:5). There can be no fruitfulness of edification if the hearer does not understand what has been spoken.

Yet, our verse states that the early church believer

exercising the gift of tongues does edify (14:4). He edifies himself! How? A believer possessing and exercising the Biblical gift of tongues understands what he is saying. There can be no edification apart from understanding. When the Lord bestowed this gift to the Corinthian church, some were exercising the gift of tongues by speaking in a genuine language to the congregation. Such people were being edified because they understood what they were saying. The church was not being edified because they did not understand the meaning of the language. The spiritual bestowal of the gift of tongues was not just the supernatural ability to speak a language previously unknown to the speaker, but it was also the ability to understand this previously unknown language.

Unknown

The King James translators added the English word “unknown” for clarity. An overwhelming majority of believers understands its meaning as “unknown to the speaker.” This brings into the issue the interpretation of and the exercise of gibberish speech, so-called “languages of angels,” trancelike communications, laughing revivals, etc. This is all attributed to the Spirit of God. However, the exegesis of this chapter clearly defines its meaning to be unknown to the hearer. Again, the individual who *speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself*. There is no edification unless the speaker understands what he is saying.

Paul again writes that when he prays *in an unknown tongue*, he has understanding. However, because the hearers do not know the meaning of his language, his *understanding is unfruitful* in the lives of the hearers. The speaker knows what he is praying, singing, or giving thanks about (14:14–17). He is being edified. However, for the hearers to be edified, they must understand in their own language what Paul is praying, singing, or giving thanks about.

The Scriptural truth that the speaker in an unknown tongue understands what he is saying illumines the whole chapter and dismisses the confusion. Clarity and light drive away the perplexity, error, mysticism, and other absurdities by those claiming to possess these revelatory gifts today. There is no ecstasy associated with New Testament gifting. The things of the Spirit do not bypass the mind. The cruciform love of Christ demands that spiritual giftedness be used for the edification of others (12:7). This clarity supports the Biblical understanding of cessationism and calls into question the modern cry for continuationism as seen in the various forms of the Charismatic movement. The modern expressions of this gift are alien to the New Testament. ☞

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

Merriam-Webster defines statistics as “a branch of mathematics dealing with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of masses of numerical data.” I define statistics as “boring, boring, boring!” When I hear a preacher quote statistics, questions arise in my mind. Where did he find those numbers? Are they really accurate? Is he telling the whole story or leaving out facts that may lead to completely different conclusions? Do those numbers have any practical value in my life?

But the statistics I have learned about Hispanics in our country and our ministry to them have made me feel neither bored nor cynical. They have made me think and moved me to act. Maybe they will also serve *not* to weary you but to cause you to awake to a great need!

A Burden for Hispanic Souls

Since I was a kid hearing my dad strum his guitar and sing “Rancho Grande,” since I fell in love with Mexican food at Ortega’s Restaurant in Memphis, I have been interested in Hispanic culture. (*Viva* tamales and enchiladas!) For the last few years my wife and I have had an increasing burden for reaching Hispanic souls in America. We have dabbled with learning the language, taken a course on understanding Hispanics, and worked with some Spanish-speaking churches.

While doing research on bilingual church planting, I have been moved by statistics about the increase in the Hispanic population in our country. Between 2000 and 2010, while the population of our country overall increased by only 9.7%, the Spanish-speaking population within our nation grew by 43%.

The Hispanic Mission Field Has Come to America!

There are at least 53 million Hispanics living in the United States. This is our largest ethnic or racial minority, totaling 17% of our population. The US ranks second in the world in total number of Hispanics. Only Mexico, with 112 million, has more Spanish speakers than we do. It is projected that in 2060 the Hispanic population of the United States will be 128.8 million, or 31% of our population.

Hispanic growth includes groups other than Mexicans. The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the US Census Bureau to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent, who may be of any race.

Any state is a great place to plant a bilingual church. Though the largest concentrations of Hispanics are in the Western states, the Hispanic population is

growing faster in the South and Midwest than in the West. The 2010 census revealed that 41% of Hispanics now live in the West and 36% in the South; 14% of the population in the Northeast and 9% of the population in the Midwest are Hispanic.

Between 2000 and 2010 every state saw an increase in Hispanic population. Eight southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—saw their Hispanic population double. Wherever you minister, there are Spanish-speaking people in your neighborhood, and their number is growing.

The Need for Bilingual Ministries

Hispanic churches planted in the USA need to be bilingual. Though parents and grandparents may favor Spanish, teens and children prefer English. This is true among many immigrant groups. A pastor recently told me of a Chaldean church in his neighborhood that expressed interest in merging their church with his English one. The Chaldean pastor said that they have added young families to the church, only to lose them when their children grew older and wanted to be part of an English-speaking congregation. “Perhaps,” he said, “if we merge with you, the bilingual needs of our families will be met, and families can continue to worship in the same place.”

This is also true in Spanish-speaking families. Your existing programs will attract children and teens from Spanish-speaking parents attending Spanish-language services within your own facilities.

Some of those folks have arrived in our country with what Daniel Sanchez, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, calls an “evangelical orientation.” He says, “The country of origin can influence gospel receptivity among Hispanics. If you take some of the Central American countries, like Guatemala, almost a third of the population of Guatemala is evangelical now. Puerto Rico also is almost one-third evangelical. So when they come to the States, they already have an evangelical orientation, and some of them are being instrumental in forming congregations. Second and third generation Hispanics are even more responsive to the Gospel message than the first generation. Children’s and youth ministries are extremely important. . . . Half of the Hispanic population is under 27 [years of age].”

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

Challenges

Latinos face unique challenges. As an example, they are disproportionately affected by HIV, accounting, sadly, for 20% of new HIV infections in the United States in 2009. Poverty, migration patterns, lower levels of education and literacy, lack of health insurance, fear of disclosure among undocumented immigrants, and language barriers add to Latino infection rates. This should move us to accelerate our efforts to reach souls, who may be on a short schedule and fast track to death. The fields are white, the laborers are few, and time is short. We need to win them now.

You can be a gospel-giving friend to Hispanics by getting to know them! Learning at least a little Spanish is helpful. Spanish is not the most difficult language to grasp, but it does offer some challenges.

A few companies learned this the hard way when they tried to translate their catchy English slogans directly into Spanish. General Motors discovered too late that “Nova” can be taken to mean “It doesn’t go” in Spanish (“No va.”). Coors encouraged its English-speaking customers to “Turn It Loose,” but the phrase in Spanish meant “Suffer from Diarrhea” (*American Demographics*, February 1992, p. 14).

Bill Irwin, a man who is blind, has a talking computer he uses to study the Bible. He’s had a few chuckles over some of the pronunciations. “For a long time,” Bill says, “the computer pronounced Holy Bible as ‘holly bible’ until I figured out how to modify it.” But there was one thing Bill couldn’t change. The computer uses the Spanish pronunciation for Jesus Christ—HEYsus Krist. “The programmer is Hispanic,” Bill told me with a smile, “and he made sure that HEYsus Krist cannot be altered. I like that. It reminds me that among the things in life that can be changed to suit my taste, one remains tamper-resistant—I can’t change Jesus” (Bill Howell, Lighthouse Community Church, sermoncentral.com).

I have discovered that if I simply try to speak a few words to a Hispanic in his native language, he is honored by my attempt. Even if I accidentally call him a barbecued pig, he just laughs and helps me stumble through the conversation. This seems to open his heart to my witness. *¿Hablas español?*

Aspects of Hispanic Culture

Relax and enjoy their laid-back time schedule. They often start scheduled activities such as church services from somewhat late to extremely late. While preaching in Puerto Rico, I asked the pastor what time he would pick us up for the Sunday morning church service. He replied, “The service starts at 9:30, so I’ll pick you up around 10:30.”

Appreciate their incredibly strong family (*la familia*) ties. The man of the family is the provider who works hard to bring home money, so it’s not considered wrong to come to America without family for the purpose of providing for those back home. While the man provides, the woman seems to do almost everything else—resulting in a matriarchal society. In ministry it is wise to first win the family’s grandma to yourself. If you earn her favor, the rest of the family is more likely to accept you and your message.

But according to the American Psychiatric Association, those strong family ties can also be a hindrance to Hispanics’ mental health. Rather than seeking medical help during a health crisis, they may rely on extended family, community, or traditional healers instead. Will you labor to introduce these needy Hispanics to the family of God?

Provide and enjoy their hospitality. Hispanics enjoy food as much as the rest of us. While preaching in Argentina we enjoyed *carne asada* (grilled meat, especially beef) at a church fellowship and discovered that just as Baptists seem to have a basic need for potluck suppers, a bridge of friendship with Hispanics can be built out of tacos, tamales, and tostados (but no tequila, *por favor!*). Sharing a meal in a Hispanic home can open the door to sharing the Word.

Do not be distracted by immigration issues. What is most important—practicing Republican conservatism or giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature? Surely we can do both. We must be careful not to excuse any subtle but real racism on the grounds of patriotism. Would you refuse to give the gospel to a prostitute, a drunkard, or an adulterer until he cleaned up his life? Of course not.

A Hispanic pastor of a very large church in California, who also planted and pastors a large church in Tijuana, said to us, “A Border Patrol agent who is a believer began attending our church. He understandably asked me not to tell anyone his occupation! But he assured me not to be concerned about the Patrol coming to arrest believers worshipping in churches. They are looking instead for illegals involved in drug trafficking and crime.” That pastor then continued, “Don’t focus on the immigration problem. Win souls to Christ and they will eventually grow in their desire to obey God and man.” I say amen to that!

Our Lord gave His own statistic in Matthew 9:37: “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.” That statistic should move us all to get the gospel wherever and whenever the Holy Spirit leads us to, to anyone we meet, regardless of skin color (it’s only pigment), culture, or language.

Millions of Hispanics in the USA, maybe around the corner from your house, are looking for forgiveness and love. Let the statistics speak to you. Ask God to call you to help reach Hispanic souls in the USA! ☞

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Separation of Church and State

Biblical people have always believed in the separation of church and state. Pastor John Leland of the Colonial period wrote, "Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for, is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest, to grant indulgence; whereas, all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans, and Christians. Test oaths, and established creeds, should be avoided as the worst of evils. A general assessment, (forcing all to pay some preacher,) amounts to an establishment; if government says I must pay somebody, it must next describe that somebody, his doctrine, and place of abode" (*The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland including some events in His Life* [New York: G. W. Wood, 1845; reprinted 1986 by Church History Research and Archives, Dayton, OH], 118).

Baptists do not believe the state should coerce in matter of spiritual judgment. The Biblical basis for this belief is shown in several texts.

We are not to call others "master." If the state coerces us through mandatory attendance or taxation to support beliefs we don't agree with, then we have a master other than Christ (Matt. 23:10).

The Spirit, not the state, is our teacher through the Word (John 8:32; 14:26; Gal. 5:1).

The primitive or early church did not know any power of the state except to punish and abuse, but when Satan saw he could not kill Christianity from the outside, he attempted to infiltrate from within.

Constantine, Caecilian, and Majorinus

In the early fourth century, fearing the invading tribes around the Roman Empire and needing the necessary civil unity to fight these invaders, the Emperor Constantine made allowance for Christianity and "baptized" his army as Christians.

As he solidified his rule, a burning religious issue developed in Africa among the churches. Caecilian, a pastor in Africa who had compromised his faith during the previous persecution under Diocletian, became the bishop of Carthage. Majorinus, whom the early dissenting group, the Donatists, favored, was deeply troubled by Caecilian's position as pastor of the church at Carthage. Sadly, the Donatists appealed to Constantine when, over their objections, Caecilian became pastor. In a series of meetings, the last being at the Synod of Milan (AD 316), in the presence of Constantine, Caecilian was approved as bishop. Constantine lent his imperial weight through the threat of banishment to those who did not accept the synod's decision.

For three hundred years the Church of Jesus Christ had flourished without government control or interference, save when it was being persecuted. The State had never decided theological questions and punished the losers. Now, with Satan's influence with Constantine, the story of Christianity would be written in blood and oppression as first Catholic and then later Protestant groups attempted to re-create an Old Testament theocracy for the New Testament era. Leland comments on this by saying, "The error of Constantine did not exist in his delivering the Christians from the bloody hands of Pagans. So far he was right. But his great error was giving the same fatal dagger,

which the Pagans had used, unto the Christians, who soon used it with as bloody hands" (p. 476).

Through the next 1300 years various dissenter groups pleaded for the state to desist from enforcing conformity in religious matters. Many gave their lives in Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, etc., in this cause. The culmination of this battle came when the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution became law. It was what the Baptists of America and other dissenting groups had pleaded for through the centuries.

Baptists and the "Free Exercise" Clause

However, the Constitution's Second Amendment was to separate the state from the church and never was intended to separate the moral teachings of the church from the body politic and civil government. Washington had Baptist and other denominational chaplains in the Army. The Colonial Senate opened in prayer from a pastor, and Ben Franklin famously asked for a day of prayer when the debates over the Constitution were especially rancorous.

Down to today, the "free exercise" clause of the Constitution, heavily supported by Baptists when written, is the Supreme Court's rationale for allowing and maintaining chaplains in the US military. The government would be depriving members of the military of their right for "free exercise" if they were deployed to a country in which their faith wasn't represented and yet provided them no access to a chaplain. Further, having only Reserve or civilian chaplains to be used only for deployments does not meet the military's need for constant moral guidance and support.

So our country's history, heavily indebted to Baptists on this point, underscores the principle that the state should never coerce religious litmus tests, but that the state should always be open to moral input and help from the church/synagogue/mosque and provide for the "free exercise" of religion for our military when outside the United States.

Baptists quickly acknowledge that every law is someone's morality. So to ask Baptists or anyone to cede their morality when they enter a voting booth would be the height of hypocrisy. Every vote is guided by a person's morality.

As more modern views of separation of church and state have crept into the discussion, those with no belief are attempting to turn this historic Baptist belief system on its head. They attempt to establish "no religion" as the state religion with evolution its sacrament and humanism its priest. But this has never been what Baptists have pleaded for or the framers of the Constitution intended.

Separation of church and state is a core Biblical belief of Baptists. We welcome many other faith traditions, especially among Protestants, that now espouse it.

Christ taught that His Kingdom was of another world and therefore the state should never interfere in it, but He also taught that His children were to be light and salt to influence the state in a direction that would make the gospel's spread easier and allow for greater receptivity among those who hear His Word.

Michael D. Sproul, DMin, is chairman of the board and adjunct professor at International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.



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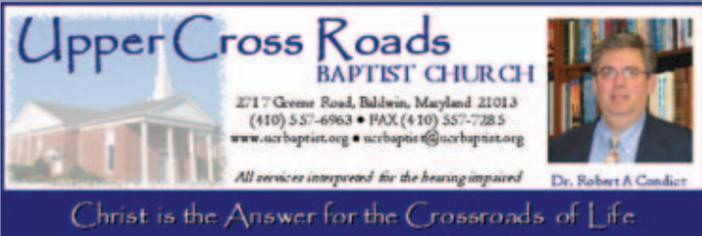
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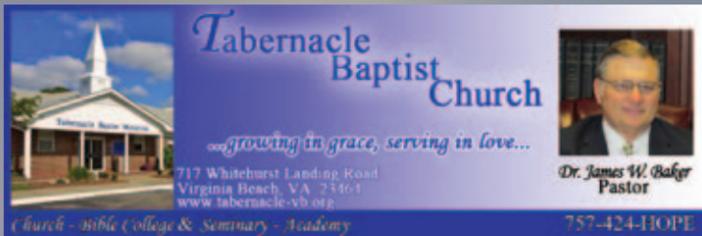
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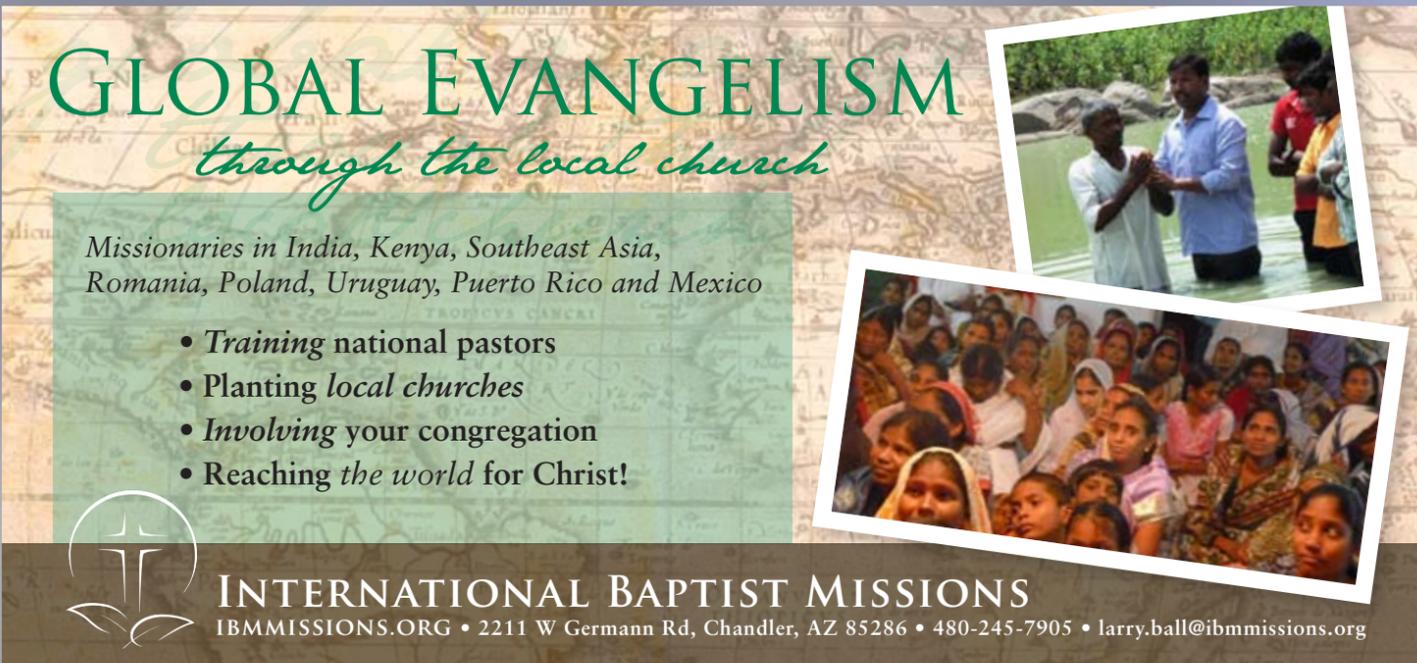
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It is blasphemy to teach that any kind of images can draw our souls to piety. —Balthasar Hubmaier

Heare O King . . . the King is mortall man and not God, therefore hath no power over ye immortall souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them.

—Thomas Helwys, to King James, 1612

I am verily persuaded the generality of preachers talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ; and the reason why congregations have been so dead is because they have dead men preaching to them. —George Whitefield

I believe that the true baptism of the gospel is a visible believer with his own consent being baptized in common water by dipping or, as it were, drowned to hold forth death, burial, resurrection, by a messenger of Jesus into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

—Obadiah Holmes

The Baptists were among the most strenuous supporters of liberty. —Howe's *Virginia Historical Collections*

[What was taught from the twelfth century on] are the distinctive teachings of Baptists today, and the men who held these truths from the twelfth century onward, under what various nicknames it pleased their persecutors to give them, were our spiritual ancestry, our brethren in the faith.

—Henry C. Vedder

There is a danger of being a church member and not being a child of God.

—Hugh T. Hall

It should be remembered that those dubbed "Anabaptists," or "Re-baptizers," were not in fact so, as infant christening is not baptism.

—G. A. Adams

The New Testament most emphatically excludes any movement, convention, council, association or alliance which seeks an amalgamation of churches in unbelief and heresy, utterly void of the essentials of Biblical fellowship.

—Wendell Zimmerman

The terms "visible church" and "invisible church" were but inventions of John Calvin to promote sacrilism and a regenerate church membership concurrently.

—David L. Cummins quoting Leonard Verduin

Our Lord ordered no marble pylon or stone temple to be raised to remind us of His birth, person or deeds. To remember Him, especially his death . . . He gave to His assembly this ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

—R.E.J. Brackstone

We are struck with the hypocrisy and treachery of the attacks on Christianity. . . . Is there no place to assail Christianity but a divinity school? . . . Is a theological seminary an appropriate place for a general massacre of Christian doctrines?

—W. E. Dowell quoting a Chicago newspaper in 1971

In this matter of separation, it is important to recognize the fact that separation *from* things will have no vital influence for God unless we are separated *unto someone*, and that one is Jesus Christ.

—Fred Howard

God's grace in the provision of spiritual life is never imparted to anyone by baptism or the observance of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the ordinances are not sacraments.

—James T. Jeremiah

A corrupted, non-authoritative, non-inerrant Bible soon leads to a corrupted theology.

—W. Wilbert Welch

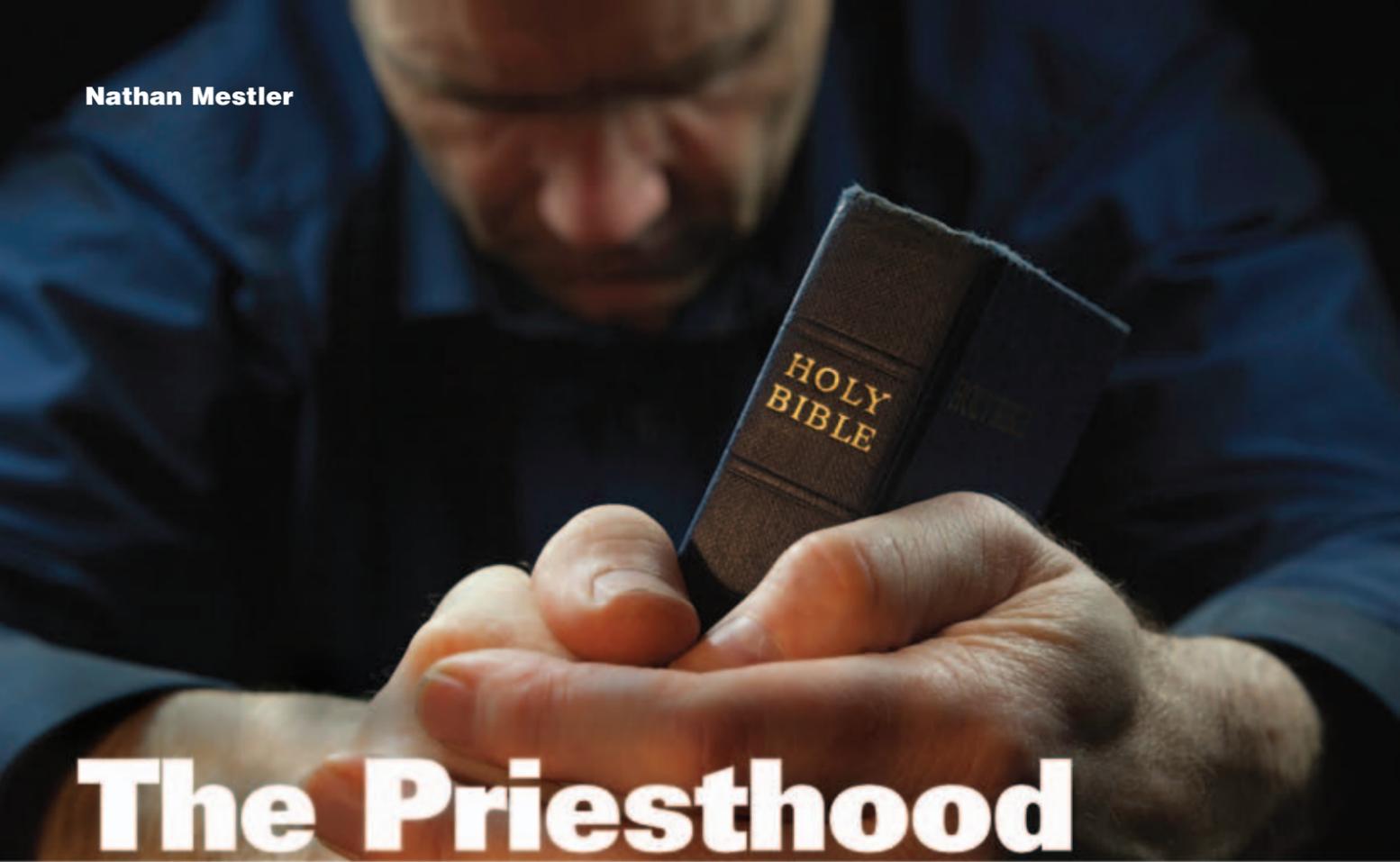
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The Priesthood of the Believer

The great Baptist belief in the priesthood of all believers is founded in the texts of the New Testament. It is declared that we have no mediator who stands between us and our God except “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5) and that through Christ we have bold access into the very throne room of God (Heb. 4:16)! What a wondrous truth—that I do not need any intermediary for the confession of my sins and the sustenance of my spiritual life. I am accountable to my family, church, and pastor, but in the end I stand alone and accountable before God. I am responsible to listen to the Spirit witness to me through the Word. As Baptists we have always been committed to personal Bible study and the cultivation of our own spiritual lives. Yet as wondrous and enriching as this doctrine has been to the life of the church, it has also been abused throughout Baptist history to allow for the acceptance and tolerance of heretic doctrines. One well-known example of this is the controversy that Charles Spurgeon faced toward the end of his ministry and life—the Down-Grade Controversy. An analysis of this controversy will be useful for our present day and give us guidance for the days that come ahead.

“The Down Grade”

In the late nineteenth century, two articles were published in Spurgeon’s own *The Sword and the Trowel* magazine. These articles, entitled “The Down Grade,” were written by Robert Shindler, a fellow Baptist pastor. In these two articles Shindler traced the history of large denominations in Great Britain and described how they had drifted away from the purity of the gospel and into heretical doctrines. He called this pattern of compromise “the down grade.” Shindler went on to illustrate that the same destructive pattern was evident in the Baptist Union of Spurgeon’s day. Shindler concluded his historical analysis with the following clarion warning:

These facts furnish a lesson for the present times, when, as in some cases, it is all too plainly apparent men are willing to forego the old for the sake of the new. But commonly it is found in theology that that which is true is not new, and that which is new is not true. . . . Oh that it might act as a warning to the unsettled and unsettling spirits of our own day!¹

Shindler warned that action needed to be taken. In one example of compromise Shindler offered the story of Philip Doddridge, a Puritan pastor, hymn writer, and principal of

the primary training academy for nonconformist pastors in the mid-eighteenth century. Doddridge’s error was significant because it was not doctrinal but was rather an error of practice. Shindler writes,

Doctor Doddridge was as sound as he was amiable. . . . His amiable disposition permitted him to do what men made of sterner stuff would not have done. He sometimes mingled in a fraternal manner, even exchanging pulpits, with men whose orthodoxy was called in question. It had its effect on many of the younger men, and served to lessen in the estimate of the people generally the growing, divergence of sentiment.²

“An Act of Treason”

In publishing these articles Spurgeon made his intentions clear and would go on to conclude on the action he felt he must take:

One thing is clear to us: we cannot be expected to meet in any Union which comprehends those whose teaching is upon fundamental points exactly the reverse of that which we hold dear. . . . To us it appears that there are many things upon which compromise is possible, but there are others in which it would be an act of treason to pretend to fellowship. With deep regret we abstain from assembling with those whom we dearly love and heartily respect, since it would involve us in a confederacy with those with whom we can have no communion in the Lord.³

As the controversy developed, the Union attempted to persuade Spurgeon to remain in association. Spurgeon suggested that the Union adopt a doctrinal statement. Spurgeon’s suggested statement avoided areas where genuine differences could be tolerated—such as Calvinism—but would have assured the Union of having a membership that was committed to the fundamentals of Christian faith. This suggestion was opposed on the grounds that other than baptism there should be no additional requirement for Baptist fellowship. In this response, Spurgeon’s opponents abused the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. They fell back to the position that Baptists were not creedal and had no creed but Christ. In these statements they revealed a misunderstanding and abuse of the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. Spurgeon saw through these thinly veiled objections. After the Baptist Union censured him, he responded with clarity,

The objection to a creed is a very pleasant way of concealing objection to discipline, and a desire for

latitudinarianism. What is wished for is a Union which will, like Noah’s Ark, afford shelter both for the clean and for the unclean, for creeping things and winged fowls. Every Union, unless it is a mere fiction, must be based upon certain principles. How can we unite except upon some great common truths?⁴

Spurgeon was not calling for the Baptist Union to have and use a creed the way that other denominations did; rather, he was calling the Union to a genuine unity based on core Biblical truths. As the days went on, Spurgeon would prove that his concerns were prophetic. In the year that followed the Baptist Union did indeed pass a “creed,” but not before they stated that the Union had no real interest in enforcing it and acknowledging that they were content to tolerate many in their association that interpreted the Bible differently.⁵ The Union used the idea of the priesthood of the believer to leave space for those who wanted to deny core Bible truths. Spurgeon understood that as a priest before God, he had a solemn responsibility to defend the truth of God. He understood that the priesthood of the believer could not be the grounds to justify compromised associations.

As the days advance in our post-Christian America, there will be a new times of division among those who claim evangelical faith. We are already seeing some in the evangelical world who are reinterpreting the Bible to allow for things like gay marriage. As these voices grow louder and more numerous there will be many who are going to argue that this is just a matter of

As the days advance in our post-Christian America, there will be a new times of division among those who claim evangelical faith. We are already seeing some in the evangelical world who are reinterpreting the Bible to allow for things like gay marriage.

differing opinions among friends and the “priesthood of the believer” argument will surface again. In these moments it will be important to look back to the days of Spurgeon and remember that our priesthood is not license to believe what we want but is rather a reminder of our obligation to get it right and to stand by the truth of God’s Word.

Nathan Mestler serves as professor of Theology and Bible Languages at International Baptist College and Seminary.



¹ http://www.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg01.htm

² Ibid.

³ http://www.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg05.htm

⁴ http://www.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg09.htm

⁵ <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/ebu1888.htm>

JUDGES: MAN'S FICKLENESS,

Much conventional thought on Judges has taken its thematic cue from the fourfold statement, "There was no king in Israel." The book, then, is alleged to be a preparation for the monarchy—explaining why it was necessary and preferable. This thematic emphasis, however, raises some questions. Why does this theme not appear until chapter 17, and then four times in near proximity, only in connection with the final two stories of the book? If monarchy was necessary and preferable, why was Samuel's (and God's) initial response to Israel's request for a king negative? How much better off spiritually, really, was Israel under kings rather than under judges? Does the context of the theme's first appearance suggest a different explanation?

Commentator Daniel Block identifies the dominating concept of the book as "the Canaanization of Israelite society during the period of settlement" ("Judges," *New American Commentary*, 58). "The author's goal in exposing this problem is to wake up his own generation . . . to abandon all forms of paganism and return to Yahweh." Simultaneously, "the narrator also offers his readers a profound commentary on the grace of God."

This thesis is grounded in textual data. Note the references to the Canaanites—and what is said about them—in the book's prologue. Judah diligently and obediently attacked the Canaanites to drive them out of the land God had given Judah (1:1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 17). Why? *To prevent the surrounding culture from influencing His people in pagan practices, values, thought patterns, and religious idolatry* (Exod. 23; Josh. 23; Judg. 2). But Israel's solid start gives way to a shift. The widespread failure of Israel to destroy and drive out the Canaanites led to the ongoing presence and influence of a pagan worldliness in their midst (1:19b, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).

As a result, Israel did not change their surrounding culture; instead, their accommodation to the culture changed them until *they were indistinguishable from the very culture that they had been sent in to replace*. Much evangelical literature over the past two decades has bemoaned this very pattern in the modern church.

The ultimate evidence of this acculturation comes in the final two stories of the book—the willing paganism of a Levite priest (chs. 17–18) and the Sodomite behavior of Israelites in Gibeah (ch. 19). Close attention to the chronology, however, demonstrates that these two stories actually recount conditions not near the end of the era of the Judges, but remarkably early on in that era.

Judges contrasts man ("prone to wander") with a God who is loyal to His words (2:1, 15) and compassionate (2:18b; 10:16). Judges also exhorts the reader: first to avoid Israel's example because sin has disciplinary as well as natural consequences, and second to exalt the reliability of God's Word and embrace the loyalty of God to His people. Disciplinary chastisement is not a sign of hatred but of love, relationship, and commitment.

The end of Joshua records Israel's *official reply* to the covenant renewal. The book of Judges unveils Israel's *actual response*: habitual disobedience, defection, and desecration of her covenant obligations. This is not to be attributed merely to their lack of central leadership, however.

Judges is merely the beginning of a long lesson on the hopelessness of man living under law—no matter how good the law, how favored the people, or how gracious God's character. From Sinai (Exod. 20) to post-exilic Jerusalem (Neh. 13), the story of the OT is the story of what inevitably happens when internally fallen man lives under externally perfect law. What is needed is a new covenant that addresses that internal condition. From the beginning that new covenant was anticipated (Deut. 30:4–6); once its need was demonstrated repeatedly by Israel's dismal failures throughout every era of her history, that anticipation was renewed and the covenant described in detail by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Old Testament history is Old Covenant history—the story of the need for the New Testament, which is the inauguration of the New Covenant.

Judges sets the stage for a national solidarity under a unified monarchy. Though the downward spiritual spiral of the nation would be temporarily arrested under occasional godly leadership, monarchy was hardly a panacea to Israel's deeper, ingrained spiritual perversity. That would take longer and more radical measures to deal with.

The negative tone and dark hue of Judges is undeniable. Behind this dark scrim one glimpses the faithful presence and providence and preservation of God, who remains faithful. But faithful to *what*? The point is not so much that He is faithful to unfaithful people; that can lead to the presumption that unfaithfulness is bound to happen and that it's God's job to overlook it. God is not faithful to unfaithful people; He is faithful *to Himself, to His own nature, and to His own Word*—to His covenant obligations and promises (positive and negative)—*in spite of* unfaithful people. That God is loyal amid our unfaithfulness does not exempt us from all the misery and confusion that our unfaithfulness generates, as Judges displays—painfully, pointedly, and

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

repeatedly. God Himself expressly characterizes the era of the Judges as a period of *testing* (2:22, 23; 3:1–4) that "contrast[s] Israel's apostasy with Yahweh's faithfulness" (Robert Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books*, 122–23).

Theological Divisions

The book's theology revolves around two foci: the faithless nation and the faithful God.

Faithlessness of Israel

- They did not drive out inhabitants (*yarash*, Hifil, "did not dispossess," 10x in ch. 1).
- They forsook the Lord ('*azab*, 5x).
- They served other gods ('*abad*, 8x).
- They adopted the lifestyle and religious practices of surrounding pagans (8x, "did evil in the sight of the Lord").
- They abandoned God's moral law (chs. 17–21).
- They went from autocracy to anarchy; the fourfold "no king" theme is linked to religious confusion (17–18), moral degradation (19), and civil strife (20–21).

Faithfulness of God

- Divine presence and intervention
 - Angel of the Lord (2:1ff.; 6:11–27; 13:1ff.)
 - Spirit of the Lord (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)
- Divine discipline
 - "delivered/sold" to their enemies, 8x
- Divine deliverance
 - "delivered them out of the hand of their enemies" (*yasha'*, Hifil, 10x)

Content Divisions

The cyclical nature of Judges is universally recognized. But it is not just a repetitive circle; it is a downward spiral (Cundall, *Judges*, TOTC), a moral and spiritual vortex (2:19). It is a cycle that was long anticipated and warned against. (Take the time to read in sequence: Exodus 23:20–33; Joshua 23:3–16; Judges 2:1–23.)

Failures and Foreshadowings (1:1–3:6)

- Failure enunciated
 - Cycle foreshadowed—2:11–16 (2:17–19)
 - Sin, Slavery, Supplication, Salvation
 - Rebellion, Retribution, Repentance, Restoration

Cycles of [Israel's] Failure and [God's] Faithfulness (3:7–16:31)

1. Othniel vs. Mesopotamians (3:7–11)

2. Ehud and Shamgar vs. Moabites (3:12–31)
3. Deborah and Barak vs. Canaanites (4:1–5:31)
4. Gideon vs. Midianites (6:1–8:32)
 - [Abimelech's Premature Monarchy (8:33–9:57)]
5. Tola and Jair (10:1–5)
6. Jephthah vs. Ammonites (10:6–12:7)
7. Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8–15)
8. Samson vs. Philistines (13:1–16:31)

Appendix: Two Windows into an Era (17–21)

"Although these chapters do form an integral part of the book, they differ in character from everything that precedes them. Instead of carrying the history of the judges further, they shed a unique light on the whole period by presenting two stories that give an impression of Israel's condition at that time" (Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 453).

Judges: Heroes of Faith or Negative Role Models?

We understand the author of Hebrews 11 hailing Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses. They had their faults, to be sure, but we can allow for faults when the total narrative picture is a positive one. But when he adds Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, we begin to wonder if he's reading the same narratives we are reading. He seems to have unalloyed high regard for judges who laid out fleeces, followed rather than led, were notoriously lax womanizers, and made inexplicably foolish vows at the expense of others.

Should the Spirit-directed writer of the inspired text of Hebrews 11 be our hermeneutical, homiletical model for how we interpret and handle these narratives? Absolutely! *But that demands that we correctly understand what he is—and is not—doing with these narratives*. To see Hebrews 11 as a model of how to interpret the main point of such people and narratives is to misread it; that is not what the writer is doing. It is a "topical sermon" to make a specific point to a specific audience.

The writer of Hebrews employs all these characters with only one point in mind: *each is an example of someone who ventured out on the basis of faith in a word from God*. That's not to say that how they display faith exhausts the point of their respective narrative stories, nor even that their faith is the central characteristic of their lives or narratives. That is simply the point the writer of Hebrews wants to slice out of each example to illustrate his point, as he exhorts his readers to "hold fast their profession of faith" in the final word from God through Christ (1:1, 2; 12:25).

What's "Fundamental" to "Fundamentalism"?

David C. Innes

Basic Axioms Foundational to Fundamentalism (Part One)

All processes of thought, including those used in theology and Christian ministry, are ultimately based on axioms—self-evident, presuppositional truths.

The first and foremost axiom to Fundamentalists is that the Bible is the very Word of God. This axiom has enormous implications. It gives the Bible absolute authority in everything it affirms to be true. It renders the Bible inerrant and infallible. It makes the Bible the point of reference for everything that can be truly believed. The clear statements of Scripture become the exclusive standard by which all beliefs and practices are measured and evaluated. If the Bible actually is the very Word of God, nothing can be properly known and understood as to its true nature and character apart from its revelation.

Churches, religious organizations, religious movements, beliefs, methods—all must stand or fall under the Bible's scrutiny. Human opinions, feelings, actions, and, indeed, the definition of success itself must be placed in subjection to the teachings of God's Word. What God says about anything settles that issue with finality for all time and is rightly applicable to every culture and generation.

Because God is God, it should be obvious that He is more important and significant than man. The *Creator* must always take precedence over the *created*. The world about us (though man plays a very important part) is ultimately about God, not man. In the religious world, ministry itself is not ultimately about man but about God. Man was created for His plans, His purposes, His pleasures, His ways, and His works. Fundamentalism recognizes this most important relationship between God and man. Ministry is to be conducted foremost in God's way with His plans and purposes in mind. There is no higher goal in ministry than that of Biblical integrity—pleasing God.

Related to this, God's honor is to be regarded as more important than man's honor. The goal in ministry is to elevate the honor of God above everything else. What happens to man must always be subservient to how it reflects upon the honor of God. And God's ways are always superior to man's ways. Many regard Biblical commands concerning separation from unbelievers as an unnecessary hindrance to the work of the gospel. This directly implies that their personal concern for reaching the lost is really greater than God's. In their thinking, more people could be won to Christ by disobeying the Scriptures than by obeying them. Effective evangelism, then, would depend more upon man's methods than it would upon the blessing, power, and working of God.

God's love is greater than man's love. God's desire to reach the world with the gospel is infinitely greater than our own. God's concern for man's welfare far exceeds our own. The arrogance of those who deem their own wisdom and concern for man's benefit as superior to God's is blasphemous, to say the least.

Man is never benefited when God is dishonored. Man's greatest need is for God to be glorified in his life. The greatest blessing any man can experience comes when God is glorified. In the prayer our Lord taught His disciples, the first request is that God's name might be hallowed—glorified. The compromise of God's Word never results in the ultimate blessing of man. When the Word of God is compromised, the blessing of man is compromised.

We must realize that God's judgments are necessary for man's welfare. The most fearful judgment God can visit upon man is to abandon him to his own devices. God is never wrong or unkind. He is absolutely good and absolutely right in everything He does. Fundamentalism is based on confidence in the absolute and infinite integrity of God in everything He is and in everything He does.

It is never right to do wrong—for any reason or under any circumstance. There is never a right reason for doing a wrong thing. To seek to attach good motives to direct disobedience is a direct insult to God and to His Word. This implies that God is not able accomplish good things if we do that which is right—that if we compromise or cut corners, then He will be better able to accomplish His purposes through our disregarding His Word.

The Bible is clear: partial obedience (selective obedience) is direct disobedience. Partial obedience is a direct challenge to God's authority in the issue at hand. It questions both God's wisdom and God's integrity. It elevates human intentions and methods above God's. It directly implies that the job at hand can be better done by substituting human wisdom for God's wisdom. Every clear command of Scripture is given with God's full authority behind it. This *pick and choose* approach to God and His Word is totally unacceptable to Fundamentalists.

Dr. David C. Innes has served as senior pastor of Hamilton Square Baptist Church in San Francisco, California, since January of 1977.



Author's Note: *Much of this material, including the title of this article, has been borrowed from a number of sources over the years. Regrettably, I have lost track of them but wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to them.*

What God says about anything settles that issue with finality for all time . . .

Pro-Life Club Blocked

Student clubs are given the freedom to set up tables in the lunchroom, make displays, and hand out literature during the school day in Connecticut's Branford High School. That is, unless that club falls outside the realm of political correctness. Administrators from the Branford High School have not allowed the six-member High School Students for Life Club to set up their displays or models or to hand out literature even though other clubs are permitted to do so.

The Christian legal group Alliance Defending Freedom contacted the school and school district leadership, calling for an end to the discriminatory policies in the school. Support for the club has already been expressed by Michael Krause, chairman of the local board of education.

This article may be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/conn-high-school-blocks-pro-life-student-group-from-handing-out-information-115929/>.

All Religions Valid

The Canadian Supreme Court is preparing to hear argumentation from a case involving Loyola High School, a Catholic school in Quebec, regarding the content of a required course on religion and ethics. A 2008 law required the teaching of this course. Loyola complied. But they taught the course according to conscience. While they willingly taught the tenets of multiple religions, they could not affirm that all religions are equally

valid. Another provision of the law under question is whether or not teachers are allowed to share the tenets of their own faith.

Alliance Defense Fund's Senior Counsel Brett Harvey clarified the school's position: "The government should not require a Catholic school to tell its students that the Catholic faith is no more valid than a myriad of conflicting faith traditions."

This article may be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/canadian-catholic-school-being-pressured-to-teach-all-religions-are-equal-116042/>.

Dramatic Changes

It did not take long for changes to come with the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. At a recent event at Kadena Air Base, gay, lesbian, and straight service members "performed" in drag to raucous music. The event was held as a fundraiser to further the cause of the military's LGBT community.

Organizers of the event admitted that they did not believe the event would gain much traction, so they planned on only seventy-five participants. However, they sold four hundred tickets in just ten days. Tech. Sgt. Kristen Baker rejoiced in the fact that this show would leave its mark for civil rights: "Everything is just accepted. It really makes me proud to watch it. We are all brothers and sisters no matter what."

This article can be accessed at <http://www.stripes.com/news/gay-lesbian-troops-perform-in-drag-at-kadena-air-base-fundraiser-1.270747>.

Muslim Chaplains

Even though President Obama is announcing plans to reduce the size of the military, the hiring of Muslim chaplains is on the rise. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) has announced that the US is using their chaplains for military service again after a lull since 2001. ISNA is a US Muslim Brotherhood entity.

The reason this is so problematic is because ISNA and the US Muslim Brotherhood are undicted coconspirators in a terrorism-funding scheme that sent money from here to Hamas. The Canadian branch lost its charity status because of bookkeeping discrepancies and the funding of terrorism in Pakistan. Yet this is the group providing Muslim chaplains for our military.

Read more at <http://www.clarion-project.org/analysis/us-military-hires-chaplains-endorsed-brotherhood-entity>.

Like the World

The trends in premarital sex and extramarital cohabitation are not a part of unredeemed culture alone. According to the study entitled "2014 State of Dating in America," published by Christian Mingle and JDate, 61% of Christians indicate that sex before marriage was a legitimate option for them. A more permanent cohabitation was supported by 51% of Christians surveyed.

Peter Sprigg, senior fellow for policy studies at the Family Research Council, stated, "Christians are perhaps more influenced by

the culture than they are by the teachings of Scripture or the church."

There is a growing disillusionment with Biblical gender roles as well. And 34% indicated that they would marry someone outside their faith.

This article may be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-are-following-secular-trends-in-premarital-sex-cohabitation-outside-of-marriage-says-dating-site-survey-113373/>.

Speaker Protested

Mrs. Rosaria Butterfield is a former lesbian and tenured professor at Syracuse University whom God reached and brought to Himself. She is often protested at her speaking engagements.

Yet this story has a disappointing twist. One of those recent protests took place this February on the campus of Wheaton University. The protesters were students, students who agreed to a Community Covenant necessary for their admission to Wheaton. The covenant includes a willingness to uphold chastity among the unmarried and the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman. So the students in essence were protesting the very covenant they promised to uphold when they entered Wheaton.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.dennyburk.com/wheaton-students-protest-rosaria-butterfield/>.

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

Regional Fellowships

Doug Wright

Caribbean Region

Pastor Johnny Daniels and Calvary Baptist Tabernacle in Carolina, Puerto Rico, have made it their mission to be a blessing to FBFI members in the **Caribbean Regional Fellowship**. From October 26 through November 3, 2013, five guest speakers spoke on the theme "Taking the Ministries of the Local Church to the World" (Matt. 28:19, 20). Twenty national pastors coming from Grenada, Barbados, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Antigua attended the conference along with forty other guests. Not only were the meeting needs met, but several offerings were also given to national pastors. Throughout the fellowship the attendees expressed how much they were refreshed and encouraged to press on in as they serve the Lord.



Northern California Region

Pastor Tim Knauf and the people of Calvary Baptist Church of Marina hosted the 2013 **Northern California Regional Fellowship**. Dr. Bud Steadman, the executive director of Baptist World Missions, preached on the theme "The Baptist Deacon: Serving the Servants." Before joining Baptist World Mission, Dr. Steadman served as the senior pastor of Community Baptist Church in South Bend, Indiana. His successful thirteen-year ministry there and in previous ministries offered valuable insight. In addition to Dr. Steadman, the Shanks brothers from Community Baptist Church in San Luis Obispo, California, provided special music. A free book from Dr. Steadman and a wonderful "tri-tip lunch" (it is a California thing!) provided by the people of Calvary Baptist Church made for strong fellowship and encouragement. Several pastors new to California ministry were able to attend, and the Fellowship was especially encouraged to have several young pastors join them. The Northern California Fellowship is looking forward to their 2015 Fellowship hosted by Vacaville Bible Church.

Pastor Brent Snow
Cornerstone Baptist Church, Pleasant Hill, California

Rocky Mountain Region

The 2014 Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship was a blessing to all! With about seventy attendees coming from Colorado, Wyoming, and western Nebraska, it was held at Westside Baptist Church in Greeley, Colorado, pastored by Dan Unruh. Dr. David Beale and Dr. Fred Moritz shared the pulpit, each speaking three times.

The Fellowship opened Monday evening, January 27, with the theme "The Price of True Revival." Dr. Beale spoke from 2 Chronicles 28–31, "Hezekiah the Shepherd-King Speaks to End-Time Christianity," and Dr. Moritz spoke from Isaiah 57:15, "The God of Revival."

Tuesday morning the attendees were greeted by a wonderful breakfast lovingly served by the kind people of Westside Baptist. The morning was packed with four messages and yet there was ample time set aside for fellowship between each session. Dr. Moritz began at 8:00 with a message from Daniel 9 entitled "Daniel's Prayer for Revival." Dr. Beale had the next two sessions addressing one topic: "From Historic Roots to the Current Status of Fundamental Christianity and Conservative Evangelicalism: What We Must Know to Make Biblical Choices." Dr. Moritz then concluded the meeting with a message from 1 Timothy 6:12, "Fighting the Fight of the Faith."

We were all encouraged by the fervency of the preaching, the warmth of the fellowship, and the graciousness of the hospitality. We look forward to next year's regional meeting!

Pastor Ward Smith
Grace Baptist Church, Parker, Colorado



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As the journal of the FBFI, *FrontLine* Magazine provides a forum for God's people to reverently express a conservative Christian perspective on pertinent issues. In an effort to keep readers informed, quotes and references to many different individuals and organizations will appear. This does not imply the endorsement of the magazine or its board. Unsolicited manuscripts and artwork accepted for review.

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FrontLine Magazine

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FrontLine is launching a column about language. I have always loved language; I see it as one of God's most fascinating inventions. And for over ten years other people have paid me a salary to select English words, put them in some sort of intelligible order, and hit "print." So I have volunteered to write this column.

Language, of course, is also one of God's oldest inventions. Presumably, it has been part of the life of the Trinity for all eternity past. And it is important for this first column to start with God, because the rest of the columns intend to point to His glory through the wonders of divine and human language.

So whereas a legendary language columnist such as William Safire used his thirty years of weekly *New York Times* pieces to focus on English usage for its own sake, this column has a higher aim. I am convinced that men and women of the Word ought to be men and women of words. That is, understanding how language in general works is an essential skill for understanding the language of Scripture.

For our first example in this series, one of the most dramatic lines in Scripture is Elijah's challenge to the vacillating people of Israel during Ahab's reign: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21).

But I misread this famous line for twenty-five years because I failed to notice a little change that has happened in our language. We use the word "halt" in phrases like "grind to a halt" or in historical dramas: "Halt! Who goes there?"

"Halt" for us means "stop." But is that what Elijah meant? Had the people "stopped" midway between two opinions? A quick look at your concordance will reveal that "halt" never means "stop" in the Bible. All eleven times it shows up (in the English, of course), it's in contexts such as this: "It is better for thee to enter **halt** into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell" (Mark 9:45).

"To halt" means "to limp" or "be lame" (that's exactly what the Hebrew word behind it means). Elijah was using a powerful word picture: *How long are you going to hobble back and forth between Baal and Yahweh?*

Let me be perfectly clear: there was nothing wrong with the translators' choice to use "halt" in 1 Kings 18. I'm simply noting that, though we know we have to look up unfamiliar Bible words like "besom" or "chambering," Bible readers have to be alert to other, less obvious changes that have occurred in English.

Dr. Mark Ward serves as an author of Bible curriculum materials with BJU Press. He and his wife, Laura, have two children.





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Mail Bag (Continued from page 5)

Thanks for all your help with this issue [January/February 2014]; tremendous. It was a joy to see the articles come together and find their way into print. I'm glad there has been some good response.

*Steve Hankins
Dean, Bob Jones University Seminary
Greenville, SC*

I heard today that the Atlanta meeting has been cancelled. I was looking forward to being there. . . . A couple of items you listed in the agenda caught my interest. . . .

The issues in our Christian world today are as serious and weighty as the issues that Torrey and Dixon led others to raise and write about in *The Fundamentals* a century ago. The inerrancy debate is as prominent as it was then, and maybe it never has gone away. The reality of Hell, the historicity of Adam, the evolution debate, the debate on whether the revelatory gifts have ceased or continue, and the

atonement as penal substitution are only some of the theological issues being debated. Add to that the ethical issues of the evangelical conversation on alcohol, and the groundswell for accepting homosexuality as a legitimate alternate lifestyle, and there is a lot for us to stand for.

*Fred Moritz
Oldsmar, FL*

I was informed by the post commander at MSP Gaylord that they have finished my chaplaincy background investigation and are forwarding it to the State Police HQ for approval/denial as of Thursday, 20 February. Now we pray and wait to hear. . . .

Please know of all my gratitude to you, Dr. Vaughn, and anyone else who has taken part in this opportunity on my behalf.

*Dr. Dave Hansen
Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church
Roscommon, MI*

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Wanted: A Few Godly Men

An Interview with Chaplain Joe Willis

Later this year, CH (COL) Joe Willis will complete a long and illustrious military career. Nevertheless, his chaplaincy ministry will not only continue, it will expand. We have already begun a transition in FBFI chaplaincy that will involve Chaplain Willis more and more in the months and years ahead, if the Lord tarries His coming. His current international role with other chaplains at CENTCOM provides a natural stepping stone to a role with FBFI in which he can recruit, train, and help to manage an expanding cadre of chaplains like himself. The following interview will introduce our readers to what Chaplain Willis's responsibilities in the army involve. In addition, those who come to the Annual Fellowship in June will have the opportunity to hear him in person and to congratulate him on this new milestone.

FrontLine: Where do you currently work and what is your title?

Willis: Currently I work as the Deputy Command Chaplain assigned to the US Central Command Headquarters (USCENTCOM) in MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

FrontLine: What is USCENTCOM?

Willis: The US Central Command is one of the six geographic combatant commands in the Department of Defense arsenal. A combatant command (or COCOM) is a unified command that is composed of forces from at least two Military Departments and that has a continuing mission in peace and/or war. They are organized either on a geographical basis (known as "Area of Responsibility") or on a functional basis. This particular COCOM is in charge of the geographic region making up most of the countries in the Middle East and several of the southern countries which were formerly a part of the Soviet bloc or USSR. This command is also a joint command comprising of all five military services (Army, Air Force, etc.) and many coalition partner countries from all over the world (UK, Australia, Italy, France, etc.).

FrontLine: What level of command is this?

Willis: This command primarily functions at the strategic national or strategic theater level of war/control. This particular command is commanded by a four-star

general officer or flag officer, depending on the military service they represent. In laymen's terms, the boss of this command answers to three people: the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and the President of the United States. This command has been honored to have some of the greatest leaders in recent military history as the USCENTCOM Commander—men such as Schwarzkopf, Petraeus, Franks, and, currently, Lloyd Austin.

FrontLine: What do you personally do?

Willis: As the deputy command chaplain, my main responsibility is to provide coverage when the command chaplain is absent from the area or his post. Collectively, we chaplains in this command work at all three levels of war/control. At the strategic level, we work internationally with other countries in our Area of Responsibility that have chaplains or religious leaders in their national militaries. I personally have had the privilege of working and creating relationships with chaplains from all over the world. Many of these individuals are men of great renown and highly respected religious leaders in their respective countries. Operationally, we are responsible to work with our military services and coalition partners to make sure that we have the right mix of chaplains to meet the constitutional religious needs of all those in our area that desire to worship freely, wherever they may be located in the world. At the height of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom this number exceeded 500 chaplains and more than 500 chaplains' assistants or religious program specialists. But our fail-safe responsibility, like any other chaplain in the Department of Defense inventory, is to tactically take care of the servicemen and women that make up our headquarters staff. In other words, as clearly captured in the words of my former commander, General James Mattis, "Chaplain, take care of the lads." In the eyes of the American people who support and fund us to do this job, we are the ambassadors in providing for the free exercise of religion to the greatest commodity the world has ever known: the American Serviceman.

FrontLine: What are privileges in working at this level of command?

Willis: We chaplains have the opportunity to travel the world, preach the Word of God to our personnel in

foreign lands, and to be a part of the greatest military that the world has ever known. In the past several years here at USCENTCOM, my travels have allowed me to preach in embassies and churches in Pakistan, palaces in Iraq, chapels in Afghanistan, and in the deserts along the Nile in Egypt. I have walked in the land of Musa (or Moses) and the children of Israel as they passed by Petra and stood upon Mt. Nebo. I have stood in the Ur of the Chaldees and descended into the depths of the chambers of the great pyramids. On a daily basis I am a part of an organization where decisions are being made that affect the whole world. I am privileged to work on high-level projects that people watch on the national news weeks later. I am a part of history in the making! But my greatest privilege in the entire world is to see souls being impacted for God, souls who accept the glorious gospel of Jesus and who are being transformed daily into the image of our precious Lord and Savior.

FrontLine: What challenges do you face?

Willis: Many of the challenges we face are manpower related. With large budget cuts across the board federally, it is difficult to keep the number of chaplains that we need in order to meet all the daily tasks. Secondly, in our travels it is obvious that we here in the US are very compartmentalized in our thinking. We are constantly confronted with the premise of "separation of church and state." That may work well for us here in our coun-

try, where we have grown accustomed to such thinking, but is a foreign concept to many of those we work with. In our area of responsibility religion transcends and permeates into every aspect of life. Religion is a part of education, finances, employment, economics, etc. Therefore, when we as Americans build relationships with our foreign counterparts, they sometimes doubt the sincerity of our religious beliefs, since those beliefs don't seem to impact all the other areas of our lives. This concept is challenging to address at times.

FrontLine: What insight can you share as you come to the end of your military career?

Willis: Properly pass the baton to the next generation of those who will fill our ranks in the ministry of our churches and in the ministry of the chaplaincy. Secondly, I would remind our young men to stand firm in the faith and be willing to stand in the gap to proclaim the truth. My experience shows me that there are a lot of young servicemen and women out there who are hungry for the truth! We who have the truth must be prepared to carry that truth to the mission fields around the world. The Lord told us that the "fields . . . are white already to harvest," "but the labourers are few." It is my desire to fill the chaplain ranks with solid men who have a heart for the Lord and have a little sense of adventure as well. The Marines may be looking for "a few good men," but we here in FBFI are looking for a "few godly men"!



CH (COL) Joe Willis (left) receiving the 2014 Army Officer of the Year Award from Mayor Bob Buckhorn, Vice Admiral Mark Fox, and representatives of the Greater Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce.





Separation

We are living in an age where many Christians are being allured by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is a constant battle to avoid yielding to the appetites of the flesh! Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." The flesh craves to satisfy its desires; but the Holy Spirit battles against the flesh—no Christian is exempt from this conflict.

Yes, the flesh is attractive, and, yes, the flesh is enticing. But there is a high cost in yielding to it and not being separated from it. In the Scriptures we have a prime example of this in the life of Samson. This man's life was to be separated unto the Lord. The Scriptures declare that his life was to be used to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Before he was even born, the angel of the Lord said to his mother, "For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5). Notice, no razor would touch his hair—this is what God commanded. It was a visible sign of his life being separated unto the Lord. His separation would be his strength—and what strength this man had! Judges records several accounts of his physical power, including killing a lion with his bare hands and killing a thousand men with only the jawbone of a donkey.

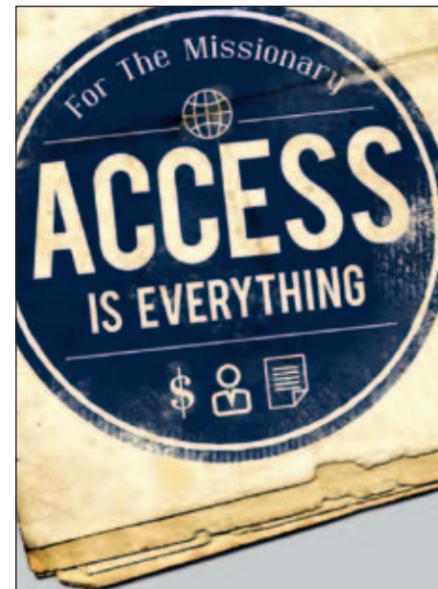
As long as Samson maintained the Nazarite vow, he had power. But he began a slow process of compromise that ended up destroying him. Samson had an affair with a harlot in the town of Gaza. Then he got involved with another woman named Delilah; this wicked woman enticed him to find the source of his strength. Slowly but steadily she hounded Samson until he shared his secret with her in Judges 16:17: "He told her all his heart, and said unto her. There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for

I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Delilah cut Samson's hair while he was asleep, and then turned him over to the Philistines. Not only did Samson lose his strength, he also lost his eyes and his freedom. Judges 16:21 says, "But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house." What a high cost he paid! This story ought to cause the Lord's people to weigh heavily the awful price of caving in to the world's standards.

Today, every age group of the Lord's people must stand strong in their separation for the Lord. Many are tired of the pressure and are caving in. I know a pastor who said, "I'm tired of fighting the music issue. I will lose the young people of the church if I do not loosen our standards." Others are voicing, "We must try new avenues of reaching people. We believe we must now entertain them." Others are stating, "We must create a casual atmosphere in our services." But Dr. Bob Jones Sr. said, "What you win them with is what you win them to." The child of God who embraces the world and its allurements will face the same consequences as Samson. First, he will lose his spiritual strength. Second, he will lose his spiritual sight. He will say things like, "I don't see anything wrong with this activity," etc. This is because he has lost all spiritual discernment and will become a defeated and disgraced person.

Stand strong for the Lord! Heed the admonition that the apostle Paul gave in 2 Cor. 6:17, 18: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

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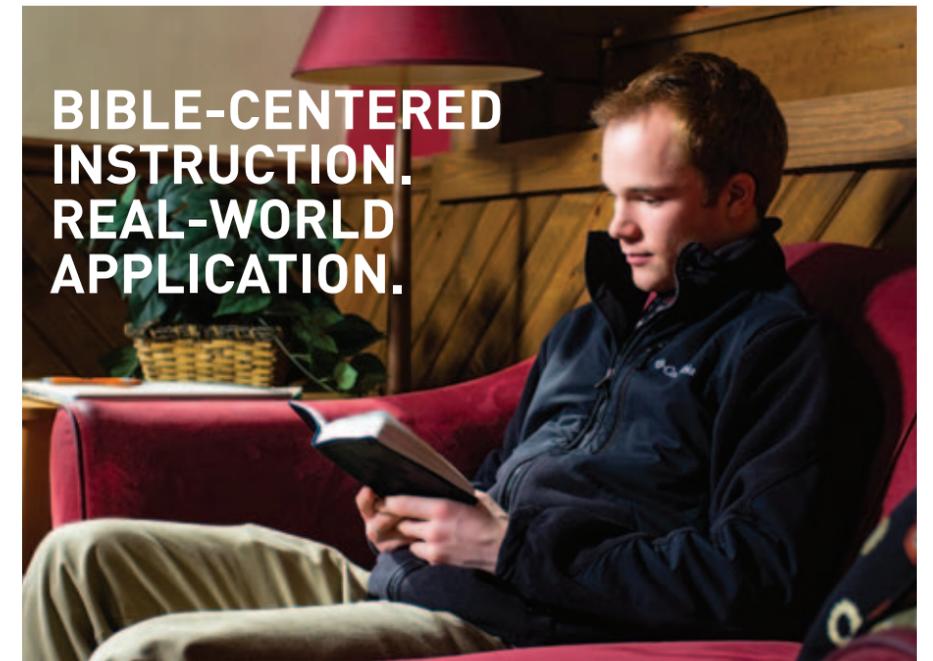
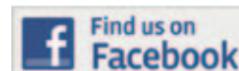
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