

# FOUNDERS JOURNAL

FROM FOUNDERS MINISTRIES | SPRING 2018 | ISSUE 120

## RACE & RACISM: BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES





# FOUNDERS

M I N I S T R I E S

[wwwFOUNDERS.org](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org)

Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

---

The Founders Journal is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer and fall). The journal and other resources are made available by the generous investment of our supporters.

You can support the work of Founders Ministries by giving online at:

[FOUNDERS.org/give/](http://FOUNDERS.org/give/)

Or by sending a donation by check to:

Founders Ministries  
PO Box 150931  
Cape Coral, FL 33915

Please send all inquiries and correspondence for the Founders Journal to:

[officeadmin@FOUNDERS.org](mailto:officeadmin@FOUNDERS.org)

Or contact us by phone at 888-525-1689.

Visit our [web site](#) for an online archive of past issues of the Founders Journal.

# CONTENTS

## **Introduction: Title**

TOM NETTLES

Page 4

## **Every?**

REAGAN MARSH

PAGE 6

## **Race and Racism in the Bible**

TOBY JENNINGS

PAGE 10

## **Reformed by the Word: One Church's Journey**

SCOTT LEE

PAGE 25

## **“The Good is oft interr'd with Their Bones ?**

TOM NETTLES

PAGE 35

## **Book Review**

*For The Vindication of the Truth: A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith*

by James Renihan

REVIEWED BY TOM NETTLES

Page 46

## **Book Review**

*Thundering The Word: The Awakening Ministry of George Whitefield*

by Kurt Smith

REVIEWED BY TOM NETTLES

Page 51



TOM NETTLES

# Introduction

## Race and Racism: Biblical and Historic Perspectives

---

We begin with a poetic presentation of the History of Redemption by Reagan Marsh entitled “Every.” As a true poet, Reagan does not give a title to each division. But, as a more prosaic person looking for explanations, I have described the purpose of each division. To honor the poet, I have not included these in the form as it appears here, but for those who want to take hints (it might be more edifying and even fun to figure it out for yourself) I give my surmise of the content here. The divisions begin with Creation and Decrees. The second division concerns the place of Adam as covenant head of humanity in his innocence, his test of positive obedience, and his fall. The third division emphasizes the results of the fall on humanity. The fourth division depicts Jesus as the covenant head of his elect. The fifth division gives a dramatic picture of the resurrection. The sixth division outlines the graces received through the death, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus the Christ. Division seven gives a dramatic picture of final judgment. The eighth division gives snapshots of Christ and one another in heaven.

An article by Toby Jennings (*Athanasius redivivus at large*) deals with the ever-important and also immediately relevant topic of “Race and Racism in the Bible.” Toby’s description of the article says, “The essay first addresses notions of race and then biblical ideas about justice.” He shows that the Bible regards humanity as “a single race of created beings descendent from a singular progenitor . . . beautifully diversified, as designed, into a multitudinous tapestry of mishpachowt—families (Rev 5:9; 7:9).” He gives a brief but helpful narrative of some of the

moorings of racism in modern times and shows that racism is both irrational and immoral. Jennings gives a profound exposition of God's law as the unwavering standard of justice and the foundation by which judgment will come to all individuals. He shows how concepts of justice, even in the context of needed mercy, assume the unchanging nature of the law. He looks at the biblical doctrine of the cross and justification as the most unwavering manifestation of justice and questions as to whether a case can be built for the idea of "social justice."

"Reformed by the Word: One Church's Journey" by Scott Lee, pastor of Rockport Baptist Church in Arnold MO, gives an honest narrative of the difficulties involved in bringing Bible-based reformation to a church. He gives from his heart, his diary, his knowledge of Scripture, and his love for truth a poignant story of how reformation came and how it continues to move forward in Arnold, MO.

An article on John A. Broadus, "The Good is Oft Interred with Their Bones," offers an opinion by Tom Nettles on the legitimacy of the proposal to retire the "Broadus gavel."

This issue of the Founders Journal closes with reviews of two books on the verge of publication. They should be of special interest to our readers. One book is authored by Jim Renihan, President of IRBS Theological Seminary, on the First London Confession. The second is a new biography of George Whitefield by Kurt Smith, pastor of Providence Reformed Baptist Church in ReMAP, AL on Pine Mountain.



REAGAN MARSH

# Every?

---

Every hair? Numbered.

Every tear? Counted.

Every day? Ordained.

Every race? Marked-out.

Every saint? Chosen.

Every history? Written.

Every providence? Governed.

Every decree? Unchallenged.

Every circumstance? Subjected.

Every ruler? Appointed.

Every purpose? Certain.

Every pain? Measured.

Every trial? Specified.

Every cell? Submissive.

Every atom? Obedient.

Every detail? Designed.

Every person? Represented.

Every opportunity? Afforded.

Every advantage? Present.  
Every word? Required.  
Every suggestion? Believed.  
Every temptation? Embraced.  
Every word? Disregarded.  
Every peace? Forfeited.  
Every fellowship? Broken.  
Every man? Infected.  
Every soul? Estranged.  
Every one? Included.

Every situation? Worsened.  
Every abomination? Celebrated.  
Every rebellion? Pursued.  
Every lawlessness? Paraded.  
Every desire? Perverse.  
Every denial? Championed.  
Every hope? Deferred.

Every saint? Represented.  
Every promise? Kept.  
Every law? Satisfied.  
Every demand? Achieved.  
Every word? Accomplished.  
Every temptation? Repulsed.  
Every obedience? Perfected.  
Every requirement? Fulfilled.  
Every son? Substituted.  
Every judgment? Propitiated.

Every sorrow? Felt.  
Every agony? Known.  
Every sin? Carried.

Every shame? Experienced.  
Every penalty? Endured.  
Every drop? Required.

Every day? Foretold.  
Every precaution? Useless.  
Every soldier? Gone.  
Every gravecloth? Empty.  
Every witness? Sure.  
Every record? Verified.  
Every detail? Precious.

Every saint? Purchased.  
Every penitent? Forgiven.  
Every son? Redeemed.  
Every believer? Justified.  
Every grace? Secured.  
Every guilt? Removed.  
Every blessing? Bestowed.  
Every obedience? Prepared.  
Every aid? Given.  
Every blood-bought? Sealed.  
Every warrior? Upheld.  
Every counsel? Provided.  
Every adopted? Beloved.  
Every mercy? Sure.

Every secret? Uncovered.  
Every motive? Unveiled.  
Every deed? Judged.  
Every obedience? Remembered.  
Every service? Rewarded.  
Every evil? Vindicated.

Every glory? Beheld.  
Every knee? Bowed.  
Every tongue? Confessed.

Every beauty? Radiant.  
Every attribute? Displayed.  
Every perfection? Majestic.  
Every shadow? Dispelled.  
Every saint? Perfected.  
Every brother? Welcomed.  
Every tear? Wiped.  
Every praise? Expressed.  
Every fellowship? Restored.  
Every longing? Fulfilled.  
**These are our comforts.**

---

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Reagan Marsh serves as Pastor-Teacher of Rocky Face Baptist Church in Rocky Face, GA. He is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY and has served in gospel ministry since 1998.



TOBY JENNINGS

# Race and Racism in the Bible

---

## TOPIC DEFINITION

The term “race” has been ambiguously employed since the inception of the word. It is employed only four times (in the biological rather than competitive sense) in the ESV—each referring to God’s covenant people. Racism entails heredity-based hatred “without cause” (Matt 5:22) of image bearers of God.

## ABSTRACT

“Race and Racism in the Bible” culls the Scriptures for instruction for righteous and abundant life amid the community of ethnically diverse beings that comprise the human race. The essay first addresses notions of race and then biblical ideas about justice.

The human race, as constituted and diversely propagated, is natural. Racism, as a rebellious corruption of nature, is unnatural. The first two sections therefore address these ideas. Biblical and contemporary terminology pertaining to race and ethnicity is then surveyed followed by a brief presentation of the Bible’s voice against racism. Legitimate and illegitimate divisions of the human race are then noted.

In the second half, the biblical injunction to “do justice” is examined through the lens of both Old and New Testament terms meaning justice and the concept’s relationship to God’s law. Because racism categorically opposes biblical instruction regarding impartiality in judgment as a concept intrinsic to justice, biblical commands concerning impartiality

are surveyed next. Concluding reflections are preceded by a brief reflection on notions of social justice.

## **RACE AND RACISM IN THE BIBLE**

The fruit of systematic theology is the application of torah—God’s instruction for abundant life—in the contemporary setting. While race and racism may not reasonably rise to the level of a systematic theological locus, the contemporary setting certainly warrants addressing these matters with wisdom from God. Prayerful, dove-like innocence coupled with serpent-contesting wisdom in discourse with such matters is to be commended. People of good will and faith disagree in this discussion, but they should do so with grace, humility, moral and intellectual integrity, and mutual dignity.

### **THE NATURAL: RACE**

#### **Human Origin and Propagation**

The Bible’s opening chapter heralds God’s proclamation,

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen 1:26).

The race of beings designed and created to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,” uniquely imaging the universe’s Creator is humanity. From this “one” human seed the sovereign Creator “made . . . every nation [ethnos] of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). From the offspring of this “Adam’s” (adam, man; Gen 1:26–27; 2:7) descendant Noah “the nations [hagowyim] spread abroad on the earth after the flood” (Gen 10:32). The human family, then, is a single race of created beings descendent from a singular progenitor.[1]

This Hebrew term *goy* may be translated “nation” or “people,” indicating families or groups of human beings of relatively close genealogical descent and/or corporate union (cf. *mishpachah*, family; Gen 10:5, 32; 12:3 where the “clans of the sons of Noah” are the same as the “families [synonymous with “nations”] of the earth” that will be blessed in Abraham’s *zera*, offspring; Gen 22:18; 28:14; cf. Gal 3:16). Similarly, the term *zera* is translated “seed,” “offspring,” “descendant,” or “posterity” yet is translated “race” only once in Ezra 9:2 in reference to Yahweh’s “holy” covenant people (ESV, NASB, NIV; cf. Zech

9:6 NASB). A synonym, *am*, is translated “people” or “nation” in reference to a group of people related by heredity and/or locality (Deut 7:6; 14:2; Esther 10:3).

The New Testament’s comparative term, translated “nation” or “Gentile” (i.e., any non-Jewish human; cf. Hellénis, “Greek”), is *ethnos* (Matt 28:19; Acts 17:26; cf. Rom 1:16–17)—the adjectival form being *ethnikos*, from which derive the English terms “ethnic” and “ethnicity.” The term is translated “race” only twice in the New Testament (Acts 7:19; 1 Peter 2:9; and is interpolated but not in the original text of Rom 9:5). This distinction between Jew and Gentile is the only differentiation of the human race of any consequence made by the New Testament. Consistent with the whole of Scripture’s impartial redemptive message, this consequence portends a distinction of a people’s covenant relation to God rather than one of heredity.

### **Words Have Meaning . . . Usually**

As language transitions over time, sometimes words contract a detrimental rather than an informative denotation. The word “race”—even where it is rendered in English translations of the Bible—is unhelpfully understood when employed in terms of bifurcation of the homogeneous race of God’s image bearers. While the generations of Adam (and Noah) have been compelled by their Creator to disperse his image all over the globe (Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7; 11:8–9), those commonly descended beings remain a single race—beautifully diversified, as designed, into a multitudinous tapestry of *mishpachot*—families (Rev 5:9; 7:9). No metamorphosis sundered human nature; no breach that warrants the *hamas* (“violence”; Gen 6:11, 13) humans have leveled against one another since Genesis.

Etymologically, the term “race” originates from mid-sixteenth century Middle French where it was used to refer to “people of common descent.”[2] In contemporary parlance, “race” has assumed a rather ambiguous range of meanings—so ambiguous, in fact, that the *Encyclopædia Britannica* concludes, “Thus, race has never in the history of its use had a precise meaning” and “an increasing number of scholars and other educated people now believe that the concept of race has outlived its usefulness.”[3]

## **THE UNNATURAL: RACISM**

Biblically unwarranted, volitional hatred of God’s image bearers—for that is what racism is—is not unpardonable sin; but like all sin, this soul-necrotizing cancer cannot be divinely pardoned absent repentance and forsaking. Whether a person can even be simultaneously Christian and racist is certainly a debate not to be dismissed cavalierly. For

as the apostle John warns, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20; cf. 3:9–11; James 2:4).[4] Whether considering genealogical kin or simply another human being, no category other than sin can be reckoned for refusing the divine edict and humanity-flourishing privilege to love one another.

- No biblical, biological, or experiential warrant exists to regard as ontologically superior or inferior any particular lump of clay from among humanity’s whole. Any illusion of anthropological superiority is countered by precept after precept in Scripture.[5]
- No human exists whose nature is not descendent from Adam (Gen 10:32; Acts 17:26; Rom 5:12–14) and subsequently Noah (Gen 10:32–11:1, 8–9; cf. Deut 32:8).
- Subsequent to the Fall, God reckons “all flesh” indivisibly corrupt (Gen 6:12–13, 17; cf. Jer 25:29–33).
- God has a single undifferentiated torah—“instruction for [all] mankind” (2 Sam 7:19; though the majority simply suppress that torah; John 3:16–21, 36; Matt 7:12–14; Rom 1:18ff).
- In Christ—the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45; cf. Rom 5:15–19)—“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–29) such that “there is no distinction” (Rom 3:22; 10:12; cf. Acts 15:9; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Joel 2:28, 32; Acts 2:17, 21).
- All humanity is “one kind” or race of being (Gen 1:26–28; 5:3; 11:1; 1 Cor 15:39).

This cursory sampling of scriptural precept exposes racism not only for its folly but also for its ungodliness. Ever since Genesis 3, however, humanity has lived in rebellion to God’s good order for human coexistence to the degree that polarized hatred of neighbor appears to be the normal—though unnatural—predisposition of mankind. The good news is that the grace of Jesus Christ will eventually turn that world upside down (Acts 17:6–7; Rev 21:1–8).

## **Devolution to Racism**

God created the human race *ex enos pan ethnos*—“from one, every ethnicity” (Acts 17:26;

cf. Gen 1:26–28; 10:1–11:6). One should deduce from this revelatory truth that any notion of intra-racial superiority is fundamentally delusional.

**Division of the Race.** The Bible is not without making divisions among the human race. In fact, ever since the Fall (Gen 3), humanity’s Creator has made a distinction between faithful and faithless humanity (see Gen 3:15; Exod 8:23; 11:7). At God’s institution of the Abrahamic covenant, Jew and Gentile distinctions were prescribed (Gen 17:1–14; Exod 34:10; Deut 4:32–40; 7:3–14a; 12:29–32; 18:9; cf. Gal 3:16; 6:14–16; Neh 13:23–27). Again, this division of humanity is covenantal rather than ethnic, making a distinction between the holy/clean and the common/unclean, faithful humanity and faithless humanity (Lev 10:10; 11:44, 45, 47; 20:25; Ezek 22:26; 44:15–23). God’s redemptive plan never entailed ethnic discrimination (Gen 12:1–3; Ezek 16:3, 45; Acts 10:14, 28, 34–43). From the beginning, its purpose was inclusive of the chosen faithful from among all Noah’s offspring—i.e., all humanity, not merely Hebrew humanity (Gen 3:15; 18:18–19; Deut 4:5–7; 7:6–12; cf. Acts 26:23; Isa 56:3–8; cf. 14:1; Zech 8:22–23; Micah 4:1–5; John 10:16; 11:51–52; Gal 3; Eph 2:12–14; Rev 5:9; 7:9).

“International” conflict in the Old Testament rarely, if ever, appears to be the consequence of race or ethnicity—that is, simply on the basis of distinct heredity. Further, holy writ never sanctions aggression on the basis of mere heredity. Disputes and/or divisions were usually over matters such as territorial control (Exod 1:8–11; Num 20:14–21; 21:21–26; 22:1–6; Judges 11:12–28; cf. Gen 15:13–16; Deut 2:19–23; Lev 18:24–28; 20:22–26), religion or religious custom (Gen 20:11; 34:14ff; Exod 23:30–33; 34:12–16; Deut 23:2–8; Josh 23:3–13; cf. 1 Kings 18:17–40) and even vocation or livelihood (Gen 43:32; 46:33–34; Exod 8:23–26). Distinction must also be made between feudal conflict and heredity-based international conflict.[6]

In considering the biblical record of peoples oppressing other peoples, tribal sociology and “international” suzerain-vassal economies of state must not be conflated with racial discrimination (see for example Judges 3:7–8; 12–14; 4:1–3; 6:1–6; 10:6–9; 13:1; 2 Sam 8:2–6; 1 Kings 4:21, 24; 2 Kings 17:1–5; 23:31–35; Luke 20:22–25; 23:2). While much more may be said here, neither in the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, or Roman Empires was ethnic distinction ever a basis for exclusion from service even in the highest offices of government (Gen 41:12, 14, 38–44; Exod 2:5–10; Dan 1; Neh 1:10–2:8; Esther 2:19–21; 5:9, 13; 6:10; 7:3–10; 8:1–8, 15–17; 9:4; 10:2–3; Acts 22:26–29; Luke 3:1).[7]

**Social Darwinism.** Fast-forwarding to the second millennium, certain influential social engineers disagreed with the supposition that if all mankind derived from a singular

adam, hereditary superiority or inferiority is de facto eliminated. Although it might not be said that Darwinian evolution and social Darwinism are indeed responsible for the genesis of modern racism, one may at least affirm that these theories contributed fundamentally because they propagated the notion of disparate evolutionary tracks for distinct zera or ethnos—families/ethnicities. This pseudo-science was employed not only as justification for the African slave trade, but also as foundational for the “final solution” of Nazi anti-Semitism and other eugenics.

Despite the fact that their notions of racial disparity derived significantly from Tacitus’ early ethnography *Germania* (ca. AD 100)—in which he characterizes the Germanic (i.e., Aryan) tribes of the Roman Empire as “noble savages”—the notion of racial disparity and consequent superiority was advanced by Darwin and other social engineers like Arthur Gobineau, whose *Essay on the Inequality of the Races* earned him the title “The Father of European Racism.” Gobineau surmised,

We must, of course, acknowledge that Adam is the ancestor of the white race. The scriptures are evidently meant to be so understood, for the generations deriving from him are certainly white. This being admitted, there is nothing to show that, in the view of the first compilers of the Adamite genealogies, those outside the white race were counted as part of the species at all. Not a word is said about the yellow races, and it is only an arbitrary interpretation of the text that makes us regard the patriarch Ham as black.[8]

Salubriously for the human race, both contemporary science and reasoned biblical exegesis have dismissed the ill-fated religion of such race ideologues. As the *Encyclopædia Britannica* again helpfully notes, “Genetic studies in the late 20th century refuted the existence of biogenetically distinct races, and scholars now argue that ‘races’ are cultural interventions reflecting specific attitudes and beliefs that were imposed on different populations in the wake of western European conquests beginning in the 15th century.”[9]

## **DO JUSTICE.**

Whatever the cultural temperature, contemporary conceptions of justice are to be assessed based on scriptural precept rather than ever shifting cultural directives, regardless of their mood-induced popularity—legitimate or not. That is not to suggest that individual or even corporate experience can be dismissed by statement of propositional truth alone, though truth is certainly indispensable, as is affection. Nor is it to suggest that the austere disposition of the offended can better advance reconciliation (James 1:20).

[10] To be sure, one ought not to expect centuries of pain, abuse, and oppression—and subsequent multifaceted, multi-generational impact—to be dismissed as either fictional or insignificant; nor can universal equality of either state of being or opportunity be acknowledged as a *fait accompli* simply because randomly adjudicating examples can be adduced (e.g., America has elected a Black president). Alternatively, because incalculable variables exist, neither should one accept *prima facie* assertions of systemic obstruction absent legitimate, good faith attempts to scrutinize the impact of these multifaceted variables. If human society is to flourish—fallen though it may be—members of the race must believe that mutual understanding and civil coexistence despite diverse experience and/or assessment is achievable with the employment of mutual humility and truth in love. After all, such a view used to be called tolerance and for generations sustained societies' peaceable coexistences.

### **Justice is Required.**

Micah 6:8 reveals that God's requisite for his covenant people, in particular, and the human race, in general, is "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Justice is delineated here as neither individual nor social. Its precept demands accord with God's torah, his law or instruction for mankind in every sphere. Contrary to an antiseptic parsing of Micah's three imperatives into distinct residencies, execution of this law of justice is no more divisible from loving kindness and living humbly than the first great commandment—to love God—is divisible from the second great commandment—to love neighbor as oneself (Matt 22:36–40; cf. Deut 6:4–9; Phil 2:3–5). Justice cannot be said to be justice, in any biblical sense, absent execution of others-centered neighbor-love for the sake of God in Christ (Luke 6:27–36).

### **Justice in the Old Testament**

Several words are employed in the Old Testament to communicate the Bible's concept of justice. A term frequently used to refer to the concept of "rightness" or "righteousness" is *tsedeq*. The term is also translated "just" or "justice" and is employed in contrast with "injustice." Unconditional impartiality and fairness in judgment and honesty and evenness in weighing measures in a balance is the idea communicated.

The synonym *mishpat* bears a semantic range that includes "judgment" or "justice" as well as "rule," "standard," or "ordinance." The term *meshar* similarly connotes "fairness," "evenness," or "equity." This term is often employed in reference to integrity rather than duplicity of communication.

In Deuteronomy, Moses makes clear the indivisible relationship between God’s perfect torah “law” and “righteousness/justice.” Immediately after receiving the Ten Commandments and declaring to Israel the Shema—“the great and first commandment” (Matt 22:36–40)—Moses admonishes God’s newly constituted covenant people, “And it will be righteousness [tsedaqah] for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us” (Deut 6:25; emphasis added). The link between the revealed law of humanity’s Judge and the standard of righteousness it both unveils and requires is unambiguous. Of this edict, the apostle Paul unequivocally affirms, “the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void” (Gal 3:17). That is, God’s original intent of justification by faith consummates the very righteousness Moses affirmed but “no flesh” could “do” (Gal 2:16; 3:11; Rom 3:20); for the law itself commands that “the righteous shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4; cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). Justice in accord with torah, then, both remains extant commandment and is accomplished on behalf of “the one who has faith in Jesus,” the law’s promised Righteous One (Rom 3:26; cf. 2 Cor 5:21).

An antonym of tsedeq used only once in the OT is mutteh, meaning “perverted justice” or “injustice” (Ezek 9:9). Like Moses before him, Ezekiel notes the relationship between God’s torah and justice. Ezekiel sees in a vision the elders of Israel abominably and idolatrously disregarding God’s law such that the land is filled with “violence” (hamas; 8:17; cf. Hab 2:11; Gen 6:11, 13), “blood”—i.e., unjust death—and “injustice” (mutteh; 9:9). Ezekiel’s vision communicates that rebellion against God’s law is both the definition of injustice and leads to injustice (cf. Rom 1:18ff).

Two synonyms of mutteh are: awel, which is translated “injustice” or “unrighteousness,” and avath, which refers to something that is bent or crooked. Similarly, the verb aqal means “to bend, twist” (one OT occurrence, Hab 1:4). Justice, then, is conceived as straight and orderly while injustice represents judgment that is crooked, perverted, and discordant with torah.

Habakkuk 1:4 contrasts hasadiq “the righteous” with rasa “the wicked/evil,” asserting that hamas “violence” (Hab 2:11; cf. Gen 6:11, 13) is the state of affairs because “the law [torah] is paralyzed/powerless” and “justice [mishpat] never goes forth” because “justice [mishpat] goes forth perverted [aqal].” Importantly, Habakkuk is careful to articulate the catalyst for the discordant state of affairs: “the law is paralyzed.” Again, perversion of justice (i.e., injustice) is, by definition, rebellion against God’s torah—his instruction for every sphere of life (cf. Rom 12:2).

## **Justice in the New Testament**

The NT's communications about the idea of justice focus not primarily on the debt of justice humans owe to one another (though that debt is integral to the first [Matt 22:37–40; Rom 13:8–10]), but on the debt of justice the human race owes to its perfectly righteous God and the perfect standard of his torah.

One of the words translated “righteousness” or “justice” in the NT is *dikaiosune*; it comes from the term *dikaio*, which connotes correctness and rightness. Both terms derive from *dike*, which means “right” or “justice” in terms of accomplished judgment. The notion has the thrice-holy God as its source and faith in him as its sole means of salvific acquisition. For example, Paul's thesis for his letter to the Romans states that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness [*dikaiosune*] of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous [*dikaioi*] shall live by faith’ [Hab 2:4].” One might well say that this is Paul's thesis statement for all his communications (1 Cor 2:2), for he reiterates this gospel truth in 2 Corinthians 5:21: God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness [*dikaiosune*] of God.” The apostle links the humanly unachievable OT requirement of justice (e.g., Deut 6:25; Micah 6:8) with the hope that this perfect standard can be imputed to enemies of God's law and justice through the gospel of grace through faith (cf. Rom 5:6–11; 3:21–26). The righteousness/justice God requires, then, is first a gift rather than a human accomplishment.

The second great commandment (Matt 22:39) is not abrogated by the accomplishment of justice through the gospel as a gift from God. The term *dikaiosune* also entails responsibility of obedience to God's law.[11] Again, justice in accord with God's law both remains extant commandment and is accomplished on saving behalf of “the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26; cf. 2 Cor 5:21). The “fruit of righteousness” (Phil 1:10) is the pursuit of every righteous one who lives the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26) in humanity's righteous Savior. “Doing justice” is not the basis of the Christian's salvation, however, for “by works of the law no one will be justified” (Rom 3:20, 27; Gal 2:16); rather, it is the evidencing fruit of that justification (Matt 12:33; James 2:14–26).

## **Impartiality in Judgment**

The torah's precept of impartiality attends both testaments of Scripture. In the second iteration of God's law to his covenant people in the OT, the subject of justice features prominently in the instruction as it did in the first iteration. Deuteronomy 1:17 commands unintimidated impartiality in all Israel's adjudications on the basis of the

judgments' accord with Yahweh's torah. Moses commands, "You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's." This unconditional precept is reemphasized in Deuteronomy 16:18–20 where Moses prescribes "righteous judgment." He elaborates, "You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you." This kind of righteous judgment necessitates that Lady Justice be blindfolded as she weighs matters in her balance. Neither is impartiality determined subjectively by the majority but decretively by God's perfect torah. Majority (or mob) rule does not necessarily equate to justice (Exod 23:2); in fact, quite the opposite is often the case (Prov 1:10–16; cf. Exod 32:21–34; Josh 5:13–15; James 1:20).

Because the Logos incarnate can never be said to contradict the Logos inscripturated, when Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), one may never interpret this admonition as a moral mandate for a "preferential option for the poor," as do liberation theologies.[12] To do so would be precisely contrary to the inspired mandate, "You shall do no injustice [awel] in court [or "judgement," mishpat]. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness [tsedeq] shall you judge your neighbor" (Lev 19:15; cf. Deut 1:17; 16:19; Exod 23:3; emphasis added).[13]

Illegitimate distinction-making in dealing with our neighbors is judged by James (and our Lord) as "evil," "sin," "transgression," and "guilt" against "all of [God's law]" (James 2:1–10). James does not appear to struggle with ambiguity on this point. He assesses this feigned love of neighbor as tantamount to willful rejection of God's torah. Simply, such willful behavior cannot be said to be Christian. In his brief epistle on assurance of saving faith, the apostle John agrees with James' judgment of this one who practices sin (1 John 3:6–10).

### **Social Justice?**

Because justice is attributable only to and by individuals—i.e., only personal individuals rather than impersonal constructs are accountable for justice—the concept of "social justice" is at best derivative.[14] Absent an absolute and universal standard, it cannot exist as more than parasitical because no objective standard can exist for what one group opines is just in contrast with another group. A standard has to be coopted from a source transcendent to both (or more) groups or judgment is weighted in favor of one or the other group depending on circumstance and/or group primacy. The notion of "social

justice” can exist only as an ideological chimera employed to advance a socially formative agenda. Even if opposing groups could establish equity between them, no group can appropriate unequivocally egalitarian equity to each individual identified as a member of that group. Further, individuals ought to be regarded as individuals with distinct merits and demerits and not the dehumanized offal of communitarian authority. Despite its virtue signaling, social justice is definitionally deficient at providing what it proposes and thus is applied with the ineluctable bias of the one (or group) attempting to apply it. It is therefore not justice. Justice, then, is to be preferred, lauded, sought, and enjoined.

From a Christian perspective, an objective and absolute standard of justice does exist. That standard of justice—i.e., life in obedience to our Creator’s torah—has been revealed to the human race such that all are without excuse in regard to knowing “what is good and what does the LORD require” (Micah 6:8; cf. Rom 1:18ff). Because justice may be defined simply as rendering to each one his due (Rom 13:7–10), the greatest of all injustices biblically is rebellion against the gospel of Jesus Christ, “for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4; cf. Matt 12:32), and the human race is commanded to “ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (emphasis added; 1 Chron 16:29; Ps 29:2; 96:8; cf. John 4:24; 14:6; 1 John 2:22–26; 2 John 9). In the end, full justice will be accomplished, not in social measure, but in measure to each individual member of the human race (Ezek 18:2–4, 20, 30; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10). In the absence of forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God’s righteous, eternally unrelenting justice will be measured to each guilty sinner. Then, too, will social justice be a meaningless phrase.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The biblical voice on matters of the human race is reconciliation and unity rather than division and discord. The apostle John encourages Christians to test the spirits, whether they are of God. Correspondingly, Christians are encouraged by the conciliatory tone of Scripture to test the voices speaking into the discussion of race and racism. Any spirit that denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh to tear down the dividing wall of separation, thereby killing the hostility (between Jew and Gentile, in particular, but between all those unified in Christ, in general; Eph 2:14–16), should be granted an audience only with the qualifier that itself portends—division rather than reconciliation.[15]

The reconciliation that is integral to the gospel of Jesus Christ does not entail assimilation as much as it does homogenization. That is, the diversity that exists within the unity of the Christian church is to be no more self-conscious than the familial awareness of an

adult who was adopted into a family as an infant. He is aware of the biological distinction between his and his parents' genealogies, but that consciousness does not act as pretext for his every interaction with his parents who loved and raised him as faithfully as any. To make repeated issue of the adoption would serve undoubtedly to platform differences and division rather than unity in the family. Simply cultivating familial affection as family surely would prove a more effective means of knitting the family together as it is intended to be.

Racism is a sin issue. Sin will not be extirpated from the groaning earth until the eschaton. Therefore, racism from sinful, self-willed, evil persons likely will persist until the end of the age when the Judge of all the earth returns to judge the living and the dead and make all things right, "justice roll[ing] down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). Hopeful, God-fearing image bearers will recognize until then that hatred either perpetuated or perennially reheated can never seed reconciliation. Rather, "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7) and "covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8; James 5:20; cf. Prov 10:12; 17:9; 19:11). If Jesus Christ so loved our damnable race, we certainly can and ought to love our neighbors as ourselves, for God's torah is fulfilled in this one word (Luke 10:25–28; Gal 5:14; James 2:8).

---

## NOTES:

[1] This view affirms a historical rather than a metaphorical or mythical understanding of the Genesis account of the origin of the first man and woman. For a robust discussion of the idea, see Ardel B. Caneday, and Matthew Barrett, eds. *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

[2] Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=race>, retrieved 8 May 2019. Cf. Webster's New World College Dictionary, 5th Edition, s.v. n3, "race" (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

[3] Peter Wade, Yasuko I. Takezawa, and Audrey Smedley, "Race: Human," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., retrieved 8 May 2019 from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>. The entry on race begins, "Race, the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral differences. Genetic studies in the late 20th century refuted the existence of biogenetically distinct races, and scholars now argue that 'races' are cultural interventions reflecting specific attitudes and beliefs that were imposed on different populations in the wake of western European conquests beginning in the 15th century." Britannica continues, "At no point, from the first rudimentary attempts at classifying human populations in the 17th and 18th centuries to the present day, have scientists agreed on the number of races of humankind, the features to be used in the identification of races, or the meaning of race itself. Experts have suggested a range of different races

varying from 3 to more than 60, based on what they have considered distinctive differences in physical characteristics alone (these include hair type, head shape, skin colour, height, and so on). The lack of concurrence on the meaning and identification of races continued into the 21st century, and contemporary scientists are no closer to agreement than their forebears. Thus, race has never in the history of its use had a precise meaning.”

See also, John Barnshaw, “Race,” in Richard T. Schaefer, ed. *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, Volume 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 1091, which defines race as follows: “A race is a social grouping of people who have similar physical or social characteristics that are generally considered by society as forming a distinct group. In contemporary scholarship, four main concepts characterize race. First, race is socially constructed, in that humans use symbols to create meaning from their social environment. This means that race is not an intrinsic part of a human being or the environment but, rather, an identity created using symbols to establish meaning in a culture or society. Second, race is partially characterized by physical similarities such as skin color, facial features, or hair texture. Although physical characteristics constitute a portion of the concept of race, this is a social rather than biological distinction. That is, human beings create categories of race based on physical characteristics rather than the physical characteristics having intrinsic biological meaning. Third, race is partially characterized by general social similarities such as shared history, speech patterns, or traditions. . . . Fourth and finally, race is characterized by the formation of distinct racial groupings in society that self-identify as such. Race is not an inherent biological grouping, so racial categories emerge from historical processes and often gain legitimacy in society through political action.”

The U. S. Census Bureau also qualifies race as socially (even individually) constructed rather than biologically defined: “The concept of race as used by the Census Bureau reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify. These categories are sociopolitical constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both racial and national-origin groups.” U. S. Census Bureau, “Race,” [https://web.archive.org/web/20080509192236/http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long\\_68184.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20080509192236/http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_68184.htm), retrieved 9 May 2019.

Additionally, the term “ethnicity”—which has come to be used in synonymous or ambiguous relation to “race” because of the latter’s negative association with racism—is wrought with similar ambiguity; see *Oxford English Dictionary* Second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), s.v. “ethnic”; Anne-Marie Fortier, “Ethnicity,” in *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: Nov. 1994), 213–223; Ronald Cohen, “Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology,” in *Annual Review Anthropology*(1978) 7:379–403; Nathan Glazer, and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity—Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[4] Scripture circumvents any attempt to self-justify by employing a narrow interpretation of the meaning of “brother” in 1 John 4:20. In elucidating the second great commandment and directing attention to the contrary concept of ethnic discrimination, Jesus himself taught that every human being should love his neighbor impartially as himself (Luke 10:25–37; Lev 19:13–18; cf. Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; James 2:8).

[5] While advocates of theistic evolution bear no brief for any macro-evolutionary distinctions among various groups of human beings, no biblical warrant exists for any argument of intra-human ontological superiority or inferiority. For a critique of theistic evolution, see J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Wayne Grudem, et al., eds. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

[6] For example, in the book of Judges, Abimelech is relying on a feud between the houses of Jerubbaal

(Gideon) and Shechem to opportune his own ascension to Israel's throne. Abimelech goes to the leaders in Shechem to appeal to "his mother's [Jerubbaal's concubine; Judges 8:31] relatives" for support against his 70 half-brothers in Israel (Judges 8:30), imploring the former to "remember also that I am your bone and your flesh" (Judges 9:1–2). Leaving aside the outcome of the story—which readers may discover for themselves in Judges 9—no assertion of racism may be made here of Abimelech's motivation for going to war against his half-family. First, they are of the same (near and distant) heredity; so, the charge of racism would prove not merely delusional but absurd. Second, Abimelech presents no notion of Israel's ontological inferiority as motive for opposing them. Rather, he insists that Israel—as a people who did not originally inhabit the land of Shechem—should not rule over the people of Shechem, whom Abimelech claims as his own people through his maternity. Nothing in Abimelech's power-grab indicates racial or ethnic advantage as the substance of his campaign.

[7] Biblical narratives that appear on the surface to be racially motivated may be explained in terms beyond mere hereditary supremacy. For example, John's editorial comment in John 4:9 indicates that "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Ezra 4:10; Nehemiah 13:23–27; and 2 Kings 17:5–6, 24 delineate the origin of the Jew/Samaritan conflict.

The dispute in Acts 6:1ff between the Hellenists and the Hebrews is more of a cultural-linguistic than an ethnic conflict, particularly since both groups were Jewish.

Another episode that may be misconstrued as involving racial discrimination is the confrontation between the apostles Paul and Peter in Galatians 2. The apostle Paul publicly rebukes the apostle Peter (and others) for placating a form of discriminating hypocrisy that was "not in step with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:11–16). Notably, Paul's rebuke focuses on Peter's error in regard to the relationship between the law and grace rather than on the ethnicity of Jews and Gentiles.

[8] Arthur Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, translated by Adrian Collins (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 118; full text available at <https://archive.org/stream/inequalityofhuma00gobi#page/n5/mode/2up>. See also Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (United Kingdom: John Murray, 1871); Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin), *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1869); Joseph Arthur, comte de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* [Essay on the Inequality of the Races] (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Freres, 1853), later published in English as *The Inequality of Human Races*, translated by Adrian Collins (London: William Heinemann, 1915; Wolcott, NY: Scholars Choice, 2015); Frederick L. Hoffman, "Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro," in *Publications of the American Economic Association*, vol. 11 (New York: Macmillan, 1896): 1–329. W. E. B. DuBois reviewed Hoffman's assertions in W. E. B. DuBois, "Race Traits and Tendencies of American Negro' by Frederick L. Hoffman, F.S.S. [Review]," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 9 (January 1897): 127–133; Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* (New York: Brentano's, 1920). Other Post-Enlightenment advocates of this disparate evolutionary view include Gobineau's disciple Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Herbert Spencer, Charles Davenport, Alfred Ploetz, Leonard Darwin, and Karl Pearson.

[9] Peter Wade, Yasuko I. Takezawa, and Audrey Smedley, "Race: Human," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., retrieved 8 May 2019 from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>.

[10] Social media—because it is a forum intentionally incompetently suited for civil, thoughtful, sustained dialogue—often contributes to further division rather than resolution and reconciliation. For example, a November 9, 2015 tweet from egalitarian Traci Blackmon—"Endless dialogue is a tool of the privileged."—is quoted by Ken Wytmsa in his *The Myth of Equality* in the context of his assertion that "it is a privilege to ignore the consequences

of race in America.” Whether or not Blackmon is asserting that the dialogue on race in America has reached an impasse is not the point. The point is that this kind of truncated rhetoric—the standard format of social media—because it only exacerbates attitudes rather than proposing viable solutions, is not helpful in advancing toward the resolution and reconciliation that people of good will on all sides of an argument hope to achieve. See Ken Wytsma, *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege* ((Grand Rapids: Intervarsity, 2017).

[11] For an argument against what has been called Free Grace Theology, see Wayne Grudem, “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

[12] In some liberation theologies, “Theology . . . is not an effort to give a correct understanding of God’s attributes or actions but an effort to articulate the action of faith, the shape of praxis conceived and realized in obedience. As philosophy in Marx’s famous dictum, theology has to stop explaining the world and to start transforming it. Orthopraxis, rather than orthodoxy, becomes the criterion for theology.” So argues Latin American Liberation theologian Jose Miguez Bonino. To the contrary, however, orthodoxy must be the measure of our orthopraxis, lest ever-shifting cultural relativism become our standard for adjudicating truth and error. That is, as Carl F. H. Henry asserted, “divine revelation [is] the basic epistemological axiom” by which all faith and practice is to be judged, not a given culture’s contemporary praxis. See Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1986), 81, 112; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 18; Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Gerhard Ludwig Muller, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015); cf. Stanley Grenz, and Roger Olson *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*(Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1993), 211, 218–19; and Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 218.

[13] Moreover, the meaning of Christ’s beatitude in Luke 6:20, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” is plainly illuminated by its parallel in Mark 5:3, which reads, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (emphasis added; cf. Ps 34:18; 51:17; 138:6; Isa 57:15; 61:1; 66:2). Preferring any group or class in judgment is, by biblical definition, partial and therefore injustice (see also Deut 24:17; Lev 19:13–15 and contexts; 2 Chron 19:7; Prov 24:23; 28:21; Mal 2:9; James 2:1, 9; cf. Job 34.17–19; Ps 94.20; Ezek 9.9; 18.7–8). Even restitution is to be meted impartially, righteously, and equitably (Exod 21:33–22:17; Lev 6:1–7; Num 5:5–8; cf. Luke 19:8).

[14] In his *The Mirage of Social Justice*, 1974 Nobel laureate Friedrich Augustus von Hayek inveighs, “social justice is an empty phrase with no determinable content,” and “I have come to feel strongly that the greatest service I can still render to my fellow men would be that I could make the speakers and writers among them thoroughly ashamed ever again to employ the term ‘social justice.’” Friedrich Augustus von Hayek, “The Mirage of Social Justice” in *Law, Legislation and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2012), 258.

[15] Russell Kirk similarly argued, “It is a principle of English and American jurisprudence and statecraft that we are not compelled to extend freedom to those who would subvert freedom.” Russell Kirk, *Academic Freedom: An Essay in Definition* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 114.



SCOTT LEE

# Reformed by the Word: One Church's Journey

---

All reformation begins with the Word, because it is the Word that is empowered by God for the work that needs to be done[1]. I was asked to share what God has done in one small church in Arnold, MO. And while we are not a model for anything, we have been the recipients of God's grace that is mediated to His Church through His Word.

Paul tells Timothy that it is the God-breathed Scriptures that equip the man of God for every good work[2]. The work of reformation, then, must begin by equipping the preacher with a solid conviction that the Bible is God's Word of truth, that it is powerful, and that it will, indeed, do the work. As Luther said toward the end of his Reformation, "I did nothing. The Word did everything."

I am grateful that my earliest experience of Christianity was forged at the time of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. I was converted right out of High School in 1981 and discipled by men who loved the Bible. They instilled in me the beginnings of that same love. I entered Southwestern Seminary in 1985 at the height of the controversy over inerrancy at the Dallas Convention where I worked in the book store. I heard the arguments in the hallways and saw how it rocked our school. Yet watching the whole thing unfold drove deep within me a conviction that the Bible is God's Word without mixture of error and convinced me that at the heart of the pastor's task is a commitment to faithful biblical exposition.

It was during those years in seminary that I fell in love with the faithful resilience of Martin Luther, the passionate intellect of men like Jonathan Edwards, and the deep commitment to Scripture found in so many of our Baptist forefathers as reflected in Tom Nettles and Rush Bush's book, *Baptists and the Bible*. I was drawn to the teaching of men like RC Sproul and John MacArthur, though I didn't know why at the time except that what they taught stirred my heart to love the truth. I'm grateful for that, because other things I received in seminary weren't so helpful. It was the beginning of the church growth movement which emphasized a pragmatic approach to 'building' the church on principles of business management and techniques of psychological manipulation. It was all about getting decisions and increasing the number of attendees by the use of these methods.

As a result, when I graduated seminary and entered the pastorate in 1991, I carried many of these practices with me. The first thing I did was take our deacons through a study called "Equipping Deacons in Church Growth Skills." I showed video clips from movies like *Sister Act* with Whoopie Goldberg to show our people how to contemporize the church and repackage our message to get people interested. We had lots of games and activities, and I guess people liked it, because we began to fill the building. But it was all so shallow. There was little depth. We would run from one new program to another so that I found myself constantly pushing to keep people interested. It was exhausting. My wife said to me one day, "You are angry all the time!" "No I'm not!" I shouted. But I was, because when it's all about you having to manufacture something, it's exhausting! After a couple of years, I was near burnout.

One thing kept that from happening – that deep commitment God had given me to preach His word verse by verse through books of the Bible (though certainly I didn't do it very well). I remember struggling through places like Ephesians 1 thinking, "I know what that seems to be saying, but it can't possibly mean that!" And yet, the Word kept pulling me forward, prompting me to question the things we were doing. I became schizophrenic in my preaching. One Sunday, I'd preach on the sovereign holiness of God, because that's what the text said. The next I would try to entertain with a skit or other 'clever' innovation. But the Word of God would not let go. I didn't know it at the time, but God was working on me. He was doing a work of reformation in my heart and mind; luring me out of my man-centered, programmatic little universe into the wider world of His Amazing Grace. I found that the commitment to preach the Word was beginning to shape the preacher even more than the church.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul charges young Timothy "in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." As men who dare stand behind the pulpit, we bear a solemn responsibility for what we preach. It

is not our pulpit. It is not our church. We don't get to set the agenda. When Paul says, "I charge you in the presence of God," he means the God who is present in every church service, every counseling session, every deacon's meeting, every Bible study and every conversation. He is the Judge before whom we must answer for the way we treat His people and what we teach them. That's why James 3:1 warns that not many should be teachers, knowing we will incur a stricter judgment! Since we must face this Judge, we must be careful to preach His Word, not our own. [3]

The realization that I was accountable to God for every word I spoke in His pulpit began to have a marked effect on my preaching. He had, after all, given me a Bible rich with truth, treasure and power, and a command to preach it. I was not at liberty to squander even a second on anything less than His unvarnished truth. As Paul told Timothy, I must "be ready in season and out of season.[4]" "Be ready" means "Take your stand!" Stand there and preach whether it's popular or not, whether it's received or rejected, whether they applaud you or fire you, but preach the Word. Open the God-breathed Scriptures and trust Him to work through them!

For years I have kept a journal where I record my inmost thoughts and struggles. In November of 1997, as I was working through these things, I wrote the following,

*"God speaks when His word is clearly and simply expounded in faithfulness to its Author and Guide. The servant of God has no warrant to seek fame or notoriety, or reputation. His task is to know God, to know God's word and to speak the truth in love. Let God be God!"*

Elsewhere that same month I wrote,

*"The theological education of all God's people is an imperative! It is my imperative today: to study to show myself approved; to teach the true knowledge of God; to train Christians to walk worthy of His calling; to proclaim the sure and ancient Gospel of Christ"*

That solemn realization had a big impact on me personally long before it did anything for our church. I now see that the first question we need to ask in the work of reformation is not, "How can I reform my church?," but "Am I willing for God's Word to reform me?" Only when it changes me, can it change my church.

As I said, my preaching had become somewhat schizophrenic – an uncertain trumpet sound! But as I kept moving verse by verse through Scripture, trying to let it speak for itself, I began to see things more clearly. Chief among them was God's sovereignty and how it extended even to salvation. That pesky passage from Ephesians 1:4-5 continued to haunt me, "...even as he chose

us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.” I began to scare myself. This wasn’t what I was taught in seminary! I started to wonder if I was slipping into heresy. The Bible seemed to be saying one thing – it’s all about God and His glory – but I had been taught something else – that it depended on me working the right programs. I felt caught between two worlds.

About that time I was asked to teach for Missouri Baptist University and had an interview with Dr Curtis McClain. During the interview he asked if I held to the “Doctrines of Grace?” I told him I believed that doctrine was important and grace was central, but I didn’t know what he meant by “Doctrines of Grace.” He gave me a copy of Dr Nettles’ book, “By His Grace and For His Glory” and as I began to read, I saw how these precious truths of God’s sovereign grace were indeed the teaching of Scripture and the foundation of historic Baptist faith. The more I read, the more I realized I was not slipping into heresy. I was slipping into historic, biblical Christianity where God reigns supreme and saves for His glory through Christ’s finished work! It was like a blast of fresh air. I felt like I’d been born again again! I wrote in my journal for October 21, 1997,

*Somehow in Christ, God has chosen to begin a quiet revolution in this sinner’s life. Truth – Gospel Truth – has become clearer as I sit at the feet of the great Reformation Masters these past months and imbibe from the same source as they the waters of the free grace of a Sovereign God in salvation. Penetrate my soul, O God. Renew my mind by your Word. Grant me the same fire and zeal evidenced by Luther, the same clarity of thought seen in Calvin and Augustine, the same faithfulness and spiritual fervor evidenced in Edwards. Let this awakening not be a passing fad, but a deepening and motivating conviction. If it is from you, let it lead where it may. I am your willing servant by grace alone. I am ready to declare myself on the side of truth in the Doctrines of Grace. I am a Calvinist in the line of the reformation and the Gospel preached by the Apostle Paul. Let God be God. Sola Fide; Sola Gratia; Soli Dei Gloria*

Suddenly I could see the God-centeredness of God on every page of Scripture! It was liberating! It wasn’t about me! It wasn’t up to me. It was all about God. And I couldn’t wait to tell my people because I knew they were going to love it too. Many, however, did not. As I was soon to discover, reshaping a church from it’s man-centered assumptions to a God-centered Gospel is rarely done without opposition and pain.

At the end of 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul tells Timothy that his pastoral work must be done with “complete patience.” That proved true in our case. The process that began with me in 1995 wouldn’t bear fruit for several more years. I tried to read everything I could find about the

centrality of Christ in preaching, the purity of the gospel, etc. We took it slow at first. I avoided the “C” word, knowing people wouldn’t understand it. We didn’t start with classes on systematic theology (though they would come later) or frontal attacks against the invitation system (though I did remove the manipulative aspects). More than anything, I wanted our people to know God. So, I kept the focus on God’s Sovereignty and man’s depravity. Spurgeon said, “Preach up Christ, and preach down man.” That’s what I tried to do, along with a focus on a biblical understanding of conversion and the new birth. I taught about regenerate church membership and church discipline (which the Reformers said is a mark of the true church). Things seemed to go well at first. I believed our congregation would see the truth of God’s sovereign grace from Scripture and embrace it with the same joy I had. I think I under-estimated how deep depravity runs within the human heart.

Immediately after urging Timothy to preach with all patience, Paul warns him in that “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”[5] Principle among those myths is that of human autonomy. “They will not endure sound teaching,” he says. They won’t put up with it because it grates against their autonomy and dethrones their sinful pride.

The words translated “sound teaching” mean “health-giving doctrine.” It’s where our word “hygiene” comes from, indicating that which brings health. It is the God-centered Gospel of grace focused on the finished work of Christ that brings spiritual health to a church. But that Gospel doesn’t leave any room for human pride of accomplishment. So, wherever a man-centered Gospel exists – and that is the gospel of this age – there will be conflict. In my youthful arrogance I didn’t understand that. I thought I could bring them along through force of will. I was sure that if I just kept teaching the Bible, they would lovingly embrace these truths.

By January of 1999, questions began to be raised by some in our congregation. In a deacon’s meeting, one of our deacons asked if I was a “Calvinist.” When I asked what he meant, he really didn’t know. He just knew it was something bad. So, I asked specifically what I had taught that concerned him. Again, he didn’t know of anything. He’d just heard this word used about me. Clearly there was “talk” going around. I decided the best way to answer his question would be to lead the deacons through a study. Like many Baptist churches, our deacons at that time served as a kind of leadership counsel. So, I bought them a couple of books, “Journey in Grace” by Richard Belcher and “A Southern Baptist Looks at the Doctrine of Election” by Robert Selph. I asked them to read the books and then we would schedule a retreat where we could open our Bibles and study what Scripture says. That was my plan.

Well, “the best laid plans of mice and men . . .” My Journal entry for March 9, 1999 says simply, *“Into the fire.”*

The morning my wife saw “Frank”[6] enter the church carrying a Bible and the book on Election, she knew there was going to be trouble. Frank rarely brought a Bible to church, and he wasn’t a deacon, so why did he have that book? I was in my study looking over some things when there was an urgent knock at the door. One of our ladies was in tears. She said she could hear Frank in the men’s class declaring, “The pastor is a heretic. It’s time to get rid of him. Are you with me?!” By the time I got there, a crowd had gathered and accusations were flying. This was not what I had planned! What surprised me, though, was that his biggest concern wasn’t really the doctrine of election, though that’s what all the yelling was about. But as we got into it, it became clear he was most upset about what I had taught concerning biblical church membership, conversion, and church discipline. He had many relatives who, though members of the church, never came and gave no real evidence of conversion. For him, the suggestion that such might not be Christians after all was like stealing their salvation. They’d made a decision. Who was I to question it?! It was then, I discovered, that the real issues people are upset about are often hidden behind the noise of other things. The “presenting” issue might not be the real issue at all. Toward the end of the confrontation, he said, “You know what your problem is, Pastor? You don’t believe every Christian is really a Christian.” I reminded him that Jesus Himself said “not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven”[7] (Mat 7:21). But he wasn’t willing to listen. He stormed out promising to take half the church with him. That was the spark.

The next few weeks were chaos! The planned deacon retreat had to be called off, and instead, we invited Frank to meet with us and share his concerns. He refused. Yet, the charge of heresy continued to spread. People who had been close friends wouldn’t even speak to me, including a retired pastor who had once been a great support, but now began to urge people to flee the church. I begged God to let me resign. I didn’t want to go through this! But, as clearly as I’ve ever known anything, I knew we had to stay.

Because things were out of hand, the deacons called a special meeting of the church. I would be given a chance to answer the questions that had been raised and then the church would vote whether I should resign or remain as pastor. As you might imagine, everyone came to that meeting, including some we hadn’t seen for months, if ever! My goal was to lay out the Gospel of God’s sovereign grace as clearly as I could. I began by reminding them that our guide for all truth must be Scripture alone, not “what I’ve always believed.” I warned them that a word like ‘Calvinism’ is a “bag word.” I held up a McDonald’s bag and said, “Will you eat what’s in here?” I then added, “Before you answer, you better check inside – it could be a hamburger, or it could be a tarantula! But let’s open the bag and look inside.” I then explained the Doctrines of Grace

using the familiar TULIP, giving special attention to Election and the Nature of the Atonement, since those issues had come to the forefront. When I finished, I handed the meeting over to the deacons, left the room and waited for the vote.

To my surprise, those who voted were unanimous that I stay. But a large group had abstained. Over the next few weeks between a third and half our congregation left, including half the deacons and Sunday School teachers. Many spread far and wide the news that our church had fallen into the heresy of Calvinism. I was a painful time. I wrote in my journal for April 17, 1999,

*The bleeding continues as former friends and one-time church members continue what can only be considered a campaign of slander against the Doctrines of Grace and me for preaching them. Each week brings fresh wounds and accusations, yet also, fresh mercies as God continues to uphold and support his servant. I suppose it is the complete ignorance that gets to me. How willing otherwise sane people are to believe the ridiculous and how blind Christian people can be to the clear truth of God's word – and resistant! Our losses have been tremendous, at least 1/3 of our membership so far and half the deacons. My name is slandered throughout the county. Branded a hyper-Calvinist and a liar (that one truly hurts!) Yet Lord, I can do nothing but look to you in faith and throw myself, my reputation, my integrity, my future, my family, my ministry, my all upon you! You will uphold! You will strengthen! You will bring stability! And then move us forward in accomplishing your divine will. You alone do I trust!*

What got us through was the conviction that God's word is true and the faithfulness of those who stayed with us. I attended the Founder's Conference that year and shared our struggle. Many prayed for us, and some even followed up with phone calls. That helped, but the Lord got us through. As the smoke cleared, we began to see great freedom. The people who remained at Rockport wanted to be there. They wanted the truth of the Gospel. They wanted reformation. We were able to begin the process, unhindered, of revising our constitution to bring it in line with Scripture. We adopted a new, clearer confession of faith based on the Abstract of Principles that would lay the foundation for biblical eldership and church discipline. Yet, don't imagine it got easy from there! We continued to have struggles. The process of basic reformation took another three years, and really it's still going on.

Like shaping your soul, the work of shaping a church takes years of persistence. You can't do it in a five-year pastorate. It takes a commitment to stay in place, to love your people, to persist when it's painful, to preach the Word with patience, and not give up in the face of opposition. In the fifth verse of 2 Timothy 4, Paul gives four things that must be a part of a reforming pastor's life.

First, he tells Timothy to be “sober-minded.” “Don’t lose your head!” it means. Don’t get swept away by the conflict itself. Don’t let it become about you. They’ll try to make it about you. That’s a given. There will be accusations. Some will even be true, because you’re a sinful man. I had to repent of many attitudes during that time. So, be honest about your failings. “Watch your life and doctrine closely!”[8] Be accountable to other brothers. But keep your focus on Christ! Keep preaching the truth in love.

Second, “Endure suffering,” because there will be suffering. Jesus promised that. If you’re not willing to endure suffering and take some hits, you’re in the wrong business! You will be betrayed by some along the way. You will be slandered. Jesus was. Paul was. You will be, if you are faithful to proclaim the truth. So don’t be surprised when it happens. Don’t be shocked when people turn against you. Because it isn’t about you, not if you’re preaching Christ. So, keep the focus on Christ. Keep pointing them to Christ. And keep close to Christ yourself.

Our work of reformation took another three years to work out. We made lots of mistakes along the way: we mishandled church discipline; we tried to make men elders who weren’t yet qualified; we had to rethink every aspect of worship, evangelism and missions. Everything had to be re-examined. It seemed like we would take three steps forward and two steps back. Going through my journals, I see this dance: a victory here, a win there, followed by a big set-back with all the doubt that can bring. As late as October of 2003, I still wasn’t sure where this was going! At perhaps the lowest point in ministry, I wrote,

*I must admit that as a pastor I have been a complete failure! I can preach. I can teach. I can counsel and love people. But setting out a vision and getting people to follow, to “buy in” and give their lives to it – this I just don’t seem to know how to do! I don’t know what my next step will be. I seem to have lost any real vision for Rockport.. Lord, I ask one of two things: Either renew my vision for this church and give me the energy, joy, and stamina to see it through, or remove me. Re-assign me. Let me do something else I’m better fitted to do.*

Yet, God worked. He owned His word. Little by little He began to re-shape the hearts of his people, but it took years for a truly healthy fellowship to emerge and begin to see people get it. And we’re still learning! But it has become a church that is a joy to pastor, filled with people who have a real desire to know and walk with Christ.

Third, “Do the work of an evangelist.” Don’t stop preaching the Gospel. Don’t stop emphasizing missions. And, if you’re not doing those things now, get started, especially if you’re known as a Calvinist. You know the accusations: Calvinism kills missions! Don’t let it! Shortly after our fire began, a friend[9] counseled me, “Now that you’ve got a reputation as a Calvinist, make sure your church is the most mission-minded church they know.” He said, it will drive the

Arminians crazy, and shut the mouths of a lot of critics! It did! Even though our DOM at the time did not share our theology, he remained a strong supporter of our church over against our critics. He said the reason he did so was because of what he saw as our biblical commitment to missions and evangelism.

Finally, “Fulfill your ministry.” Pastor, don’t forget to be their pastor. Don’t forget to shepherd your people. If there is conflict, many of them will be hurting as much as you are, perhaps more! Many won’t understand what’s going on, they’ll just know they’re hurting. And don’t forget that your wife and children are hurting too! No matter what you may be feeling, you’ve got to man up and give your attention to their needs. Your people need you to keep loving them, no matter which side of the fence they come down on. Remind yourself often, that even the ones who oppose you, are not the real enemy. Satan is. Lies are. They are not. Some are misinformed brothers and sisters who think they’re protecting something precious, but you’re still their pastor.

Some can be won by your Christ-like love, even if they don’t understand your God-centered doctrine. We saw people leave and then years later come back because they’d been loved. I had one lady knock on the church door years later. She’d said some pretty hurtful things, but as I opened the door she burst into tears, threw her arms around my neck and said, “Oh pastor, I’m so sorry. I said some terrible things back then. But God won’t let me sleep! I know you were trying to lead the church as you thought best! I want to ask you to forgive me.” We cried and prayed together and assured one another of forgiveness in Christ. It was a sweet moment. There have been several like that. And though not everyone will come back, my job is to love them all, no matter what! Because we who believe the doctrines of grace, should be the most gracious people of all. No matter how difficult things get – and they can get really difficult – let them find in you a truly God-centered man who knows and walks with Christ. Let them find in you the most loving, kind, gracious, Gospel-centered person, they’ve ever met. And let them see how it’s rooted in these doctrines of God’s sovereign grace that you cherish and preach.

---

## NOTES:

[1] 2 Timothy 3:16-4:5

[2] 1 Tim 3:16-17

[3] 2 Corinthians 4:5

[4] 2 Timothy 4:2

[5]2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)

[6]Not his real name.

[7]Matthew 7:21

[8]1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV)

[9]Tony Mattia, Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Wamego, Kansas

---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Scott Lee is the pastor of Rockport Baptist Church in Arnold, MO, where he has served since 1991. He is married to his wife Amy and they have two grown daughters and three grandsons. In addition to pastoring Rockport Baptist Church, Scott has taught as an adjunct professor for Missouri Baptist University (1995-2018), and led conferences for pastors, missionaries and students in Romania, Ukraine and Mexico through HeartCry Missionary Society and Psalm 67 Missions Network. Scott also seeks to mentor younger pastors and to raise up and equip future pastors, elders and missionaries from within Rockport.



TOM NETTLES

# “The Good is oft interr’d with Their Bones”

---

There can be no doubt that John A. Broadus embraced fervently the cause of the confederacy in the Civil War. Broadus went to serve as a chaplain in the Southern army. He was active in preaching among the troops and saw waves of revival and conversion in the camps. In a pamphlet he wrote to the Confederate soldiers *We Pray for You at Home*, he pointed particularly to his prayers for the “just and glorious cause in which you so nobly struggle that it may please God to make you triumphant that we may have independence and peace.” He also prayed for the Holy Spirit’s influence to bring them to hate sin and love holiness and that they would flee to Christ as an atoning sacrifice.

Broadus believed in the inevitability of the Civil War. Apart from several other considerations, the nation’s fathers had left two important questions mistily defined. One concerned the character of the Federal Government. Does a state have a right to secede from the union or would such action be seen as rebellion? The second, Broadus described as “a certain great social institution, grown into portentous and tremendous proportions,” that had fallen under the ban of the civilized world. Is slavery compatible with freedoms stated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution? “I verily believe,” Broadus pronounced, “that it is worth all our dreadful financial losses, all the sufferings of the long and frightful conflict, yea, and the blood of our precious dead, to have those two questions behind us forever.” Forever!

On these perceptions of the result of the War, Broadus was right. The secessionist action of the

South was not seen as a matter of the autonomous rights of the states but as, in the words of Lincoln as he enacted the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, an act of “rebellion against the United States.” The Declaration of Independence had stated clearly, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The Constitution of the United States was written to “secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Did these words apply to the slaves that lived, worked, sang, sought to produce families and pursue happiness within these states.? Lincoln believed so and thus also “sincerely believed” the suppression of this rebellion and the enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation to be “an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity.” He appealed to the “considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.” That constituted the answer to Broadus’s second question; neither on the basis of the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution could slavery be maintained as viable in the United States of America. Amendment 13 finalized this abolition of slavery stating “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Divine providence ruled in giving answer, for the Southern position on both these issues “was appointed” to fail. Apart from the exegetical question that occupied much energy among theologians of both the North and the South as to whether the Bible presented slavery in every situation as an immoral and necessarily oppressive institution, Broadus concluded that, concerning its legality in the United States, Providence had decided the question. So earnest and intense was Broadus that he conceded as a necessary cost to decide these questions “all our dreadful financial losses, all the sufferings of the long and frightful conflict, yea, and the blood of our precious dead.”

The struggle and deaths, however, still served a noble purpose for the South, Broadus believed, for it “preserved the self-respect of the Southern people.” To have acquiesced simply to avoid suffering when conscience said that rights were disregarded and treated peremptorily would be unmanly and disrespectful. “It is better to have been brave and beaten, than never to have been brave at all.” No shame, no lack of respect attends the present union because there is now no underestimation of the manhood or conviction of either North or South. “The graves of our fallen soldiers,” Broadus contended, “make it possible that this generation and the coming generations of the Southern people should feel no shame in consequence of their defeat.”

Speaking at the dedication of an art museum, Broadus argued strongly for the educational value of all museums and for the rapid gathering of the “precious and often perishable relics” of the

heroism of Confederate soldiers. “The conflict is over,” Broadus remarked; “its animosities have been quite laid aside and we are contented and patriotic citizens of the United States; but the relics of that great civil war are sacred, for us and for our children, and its heroes, its splendid heroes, shall be famous forever.”

While we wish that every Christian man of the South could have risen above the dominant views of the culture, they did not. We wish they could have worked rapidly and with true zeal for the superior condition of freedom (1 Corinthians 7:22). They were enmeshed in a network of economic, societal, cross-cultural, and exegetical complexities that established an assurance of mind that they were right. In our present position of freedom established by 150 years of struggle, we must be careful not to be dismissive or resentful toward the clear and serious nature of instruction to both slaves and masters in Ephesians, Colossians, Titus, and 1 Peter. Driven more by an idyllic vision of what they hoped than by the often brutal reality around them, southern Christians looked toward a society with slave and master refined by Christian love under the authority of a “Master in heaven” (Ephesians 6:9). We relish freedom and seek to rectify real injustices of the past and present, but must beware of looking with suspicion or with a dismissive spirit toward biblical instructions (e.g. Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Timothy 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9, 10; 1 Peter 2:18-21) given by the apostles and imply that they were naïve, immature, unenlightened, and inconsistent with the gospel that they themselves preached.

Many considerate people of the South, however, did transcend certain abuses, saw the slaves as image-bearers of God and equally entitled to gospel privileges along with their masters, and saw the true path to freedom for both was forgiveness of sin and justification by the work of Christ. No matter what kind of social relations defined the earthly status of individuals the transcendent truth for all was found in the revelation of the gospel in Scripture and in the person and work of Christ. Broadus held this during the tensions of secession, during the war and after the war. All that the war dissolved was merely temporal; the eternal verities of biblical revelation as concentrated in the gospel exhibited converting and reviving power beyond the sectional conflict and was not inhibited by geographically defined borders. Broadus focused on that, gloried in that, and his contribution to Christian witness in general and Baptist life in particular flourished within that framework.

No matter how confident Broadus was in his assumptions about how the future would regard the sufferings of the Confederacy and how precious its relics would be, it appears that his confidence of future honor was completely misguided. Everything that Broadus felt was glorious, the absence of reason for shame, the mutual respect that would be maintained, the “splendid heroes” whose fame would endure has now been shattered and subjected to an absolutist existential cultural judgment. He forgot, and perhaps we have also, what the apostle Paul said, “Do not pronounce

judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purpose of the heart” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Some of this removal is warranted; perhaps some is not. That which should be suppressed should be done so for reasons stated and verified in rational discussion filled, hopefully, with good will. Peremptory destruction and removal of publicly owned and exhibited artwork, buildings, plaques, and memorials is a dictatorial intrusion on the liberties of all citizens of the United States, and for Christians, in direct violation of biblical standards of conduct and submission to legitimate authority. Recently, a movement in Mississippi has proposed a change in the state flag to remove the Confederate flag as an element. This proposal has in fact been effected. Ligon Duncan, among others including Baptists, argued that this should be done. His reasons are well-stated and convincing. The Confederate flag, given all the emotional and cultural attachments many may have to it, is in reality, historically speaking, a static symbol of one aspect of American history that sought to justify rebellion and retention of slaves as property. Though many persons have a purely cultural and perhaps nostalgic connection that has nothing to do with rebellion and slavery, but a congenial, neighborly, polite, hospitable way of living, the symbol itself is set in a specific period of time and was a rallying point for the distinctives of the southern cause in the Civil War. Those specific aspects of southern conviction, as Broadus realized, were providentially ruled out of bounds in the American concept of liberty in a democratic-republic. Maintaining a symbol of the rebellion in a celebratory context should be eliminated and then isolated to a context that is purely informative for the purpose of historical instruction.

People, however, differ greatly from static symbols. They interact with other people and with ideas moment by moment. They change their understanding and influence others to change theirs. They create relationships that transcend their personal chronological boundaries and extend their influence into future generations, sometimes for increased ill and sometimes for burgeoning good. It is impossible to isolate a person to a static caricature who is active in thinking, writing, speaking, advancing in knowledge, expanding beyond the restrictions of a narrow span of life. Mark Antony’s line should not be encouraged: “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interr’d with their bones.” So let it not be with Broadus.

When Broadus died, his contemporaries saw his character and his contributions as indicative of true greatness in manhood and unusual endowments of grace. C. L. Corbitt remembered the final lecture given by Broadus in New Testament in 1895. He lingered over the description of Apollos as “mighty in the Scriptures.” As he repeated that phrase over and over, “the whole class seemed to be lifted through him into a sacred nearness to the Master.” What occupied the man just weeks prior to his death? He was absorbed, and wanted others to enjoy the same vision, of the transcendent beauty and power of Scripture. Let us pray for such men today.

The Evening Post in Louisville wrote just before Broadus died, "Clear in all his views, lucid in all statements, earnest and persuasive in argument, . . . the work he has done will live after him." The Courier Journal said, "There is no man in the United States whose death would cause more widespread sorrow than the death of Dr. Broadus." W. D. Thomas compared Broadus in his convictions about Scripture and the person and work of Christ to the bilious liberalism of the day affirming that he had no "indefinite faith" but a "clear and firm trust in the atonement of the Son of God." When seeing the greatness of Broadus, one must know that "Faith in Christ worked in him, quickening, purifying, and elevating all his impulses, powers and aspiration, and made him what he was. In this time of unrest and of drifting away let us not forget that this scholar, this great and good man, was Christ's man." Can we sense the irony that this contemporary "time of unrest" drives us to forget that "this great and good man was Christ's man?"

Another observer, knowing of Broadus's great respect in the South, said, "Yet he was as much loved in New York as Virginia. Whatever he spoke from any platform on either side of the line was applauded to the echo on both sides of the line." A. H. Newman wrote, "I have long regarded Doctor Broadus as the finest and most perfect specimen of Christian manhood I have ever known, and I look in vain for his superior in the history of the church since the apostolic age." B. H. Carroll said that Broadus was "the foremost Baptist left in the world when Spurgeon died. . . . He was the wisest man I ever knew." W. H. Whitsitt lamented that when death took Broadus "Unrivalled genius and usefulness, exquisite learning, peerless eloquence, iron industry, apostolic piety, have all been scattered." He also observed, "It would seem that a man of such endowments and achievements should be formed to live a thousand years."

When Broadus was pastor of the Baptist church in Charlottesville, Virginia, he preached revival services in December of 1858. He was the co-founder of the Albemarle Female Institute where Charlotte Diggs Moon was enrolled that year. She attended this revival service to scoff. Unable to sleep one night because of a barking dog, her mind raced with thoughts of eternity and the state of her soul before God. She went to a prayer and inquiry meeting the next evening and spoke with Dr. Broadus. According to her testimony, "I went to the service to scoff, and returned to my room to pray all night." She was baptized on December 22 after relating her Christian experience to the Baptist church in Charlottesville. Reared on a tobacco plantation in Virginia with servants to wait on her hand and foot, she became a missionary to China who progressed from a sense of western superiority to considering herself one of the Chinese. Her sacrificial service and her great success as a missionary teacher and an evangelist among Chinese women laid such a groundwork of single-minded devotion in missionary service that the annual offering for foreign missions was named in her memory. The long extensions of Broadus's faithful gospel preaching are remarkable.

When Southern Seminary was founded, so vital was Broadus's consent to teach for the initial existence of the school, that his hesitation to accept the invitation to teach delayed its founding for one year. When it reconvened after the Civil War and seemed on the verge of immediate collapse, Broadus resolved, "Suppose we quietly agree that the Seminary may die, but we will die first." When only one student, a blind one, took his course in homiletics, his careful preparation of lectures for that student led to his writing *On The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. This probably is the single most influential textbook on preaching in America.

His commentary on Matthew in the *American Commentary* series was a model of scholarship in interpretation and in practical suggestions for preaching each text. One who has spent many minutes with Broadus in his reflections on the text has found himself smiling with pleasure and praying with gratitude for this gift. In writing of the meaning of God's having hidden spiritual truth from the "wise and prudent," (11:25) after details about etymological and translation matters, Broadus wrote,

We often now witness the same state of things. Intelligent and reflecting men frequently overlook the simple beauty and perfect fitness of the plan of salvation, which is plain enough to those who are consciously and confessedly weak, and who gladly receive the Lord's teachings without cavil or difficulty. The gospel is so intensely practical that it can be understood at the outset only by persons willing to receive it, and will be thoroughly known only in proportion as it is truly loved. Here as everywhere, we see the adaptation of the gospel to mankind. Not all men can become wise and intelligent, but all may, by the grace of God, become babes.

His *Harmony of the Gospels* manifest an understanding of critical studies admired internationally without receding any from his commitment to the unerring character of the biblical text. He pioneered in a new way of discussing the progress of the life of Christ freeing the discussion from the artificial subjection to feasts and Passovers; he looked to the internal logic of the text and history itself in accord with the driving purpose of Jesus. In his preface, Broadus wrote, "Thus we become able to follow the inner movement of the history, toward that long-delayed, but foreseen and inevitable collision, in which, beyond all other instances, the wrath of man was made to praise God." Broadus emphasized this same idea I one of the answers to his catechism (mentioned below) "What is the greatest example of God's bringing good out of evil? The crucifixion of Christ is the greatest example of God's brining god out of evil."

His *History of Preaching* contains masterful analyses of sermonic structure and preaching style of scores of historic preachers described in elegant and easily comprehended prose. The short volume arose from a series of lectures Broadus gave at Newton Theological Institution in May 1876. In his final remarks in that series, Broadus said, "In your time, as in all times, the thing

needed will be not oratorical display but genuine eloquence, the eloquence which springs from vigorous thinking, strong convictions, fervid imagination and passionate earnestness; and true spiritual success will be attained only in proportion as you gain, in humble prayer, the blessing of the Holy Spirit.”

Broadus and Basil Manly, Jr. were instrumental in founding the first Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1863. Broadus served as its corresponding Secretary from 1863 to 1866 and was one of its most creative and prolific writers. In 1867 he attended a Sunday School Union celebration where more than 2000 Sunday School children attended to listen to a speaker. Broadus commented, “Probably 2500 were kept forty-five minutes listening to a most inappropriate address from a distinguished preacher. . . . It was full of spread eagle, geology and infidelity, cyclopedia and dictionary, and the poor children sat trying to listen.” His sympathies for children being taught the truth and being cared for in a manner fitting to their capacities was enormous and insightful. This is demonstrated in his *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* which contains fifteen lessons from “God” to “The Future Life,” each section with basic questions and then a section of “Advanced questions.” The last advanced question under the topic of the “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible” asks, “Has it been proven that the inspired writers stated anything as true that was not true?” The answer: “No; there is no proof that the inspired writers made any mistake of any kind.” In his *Harmony of the Gospel*, Broadus put in the hands of his son-in-law A. T. Robertson the longer explanatory notes at the end of the volume. Robertson began that section with this explanation: “In explaining a difficulty, it is always to be remembered that even a possible explanation is sufficient to meet the objector. If several possible explanations are suggested, it becomes all the more unreasonable for one to contend that the discrepancy is irreconcilable.” Broadus and Robertson took the same view on the unerring character of Scripture gave historical credibility to the claim that such was the historic position of Baptists on Scripture.

Soon after the war, Broadus was in the company of some young men who had begun to participate in activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Broadus could not hold his peace. H. P. Griffith records, “I never heard a more scathing rebuke administered than he gave the young men and the Ku Klux. He grew eloquent over the woes already inflicted by the organization, and spoke with withering power of the criminality of lawlessness and of the just retribution that was sure to come.” Is retiring the Broadus gavel now seen as a symbol of the “just retribution” deserved by the criminality of the Klan?

In 1879 at the Southern Baptist Convention, Broadus proposed an amendment that preserved Southern Baptists as a distinct convention, rather than reunite with the brethren in the North. Stinging with the Toy controversy and finding some reasons to be suspicious of doctrinal developments in the North, this settled the convention as a distinct entity with a conservative

theological determination. Those strong biblical convictions stated so clearly in the era of burgeoning modernism formed an important element of the foundation to which Southern Baptists have been able to recall themselves. In its final version under the influence of Broadus, the resolution read, “Resolved, That five brethren be appointed by this Convention to bear to our Baptist brethren of the Northern States, at their approaching anniversaries, expressions of our fraternal regard, and assurances that, while firmly holding to the wisdom and policy of preserving our separate organizations, [Broadus addition italicized] we are ready, as in the past, to co-operate cordially with them in promoting the cause of Christ in our own and foreign lands.”

In 1888, after the death of Boyce, Broadus was offered the presidency of the Convention but he declined saying that the two things he could not learn to do were ride a bicycle and serve as President of the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1891, Broadus singlehandedly stopped a contentious debate on the floor of the Convention that led to the revival of the Sunday School Board, now Lifeway Christian Resources. He served as President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from the death of James P. Boyce in 1888 until his death on March 16, 1895.

While he did not serve as Convention president, Broadus did donate a gavel to be used at the SBC proceedings. He presented it in 1872 to J. P. Boyce immediately after Boyce was selected president of the convention. The Annual for 1872 states,

Bro. J. A. Broadus, of S. C, presented to the Convention a mallet for the use of the President, which he had brought from Jerusalem for that purpose.

Its handle is made of the balsam tree which grows by the river Jordan forming a large part of that beautiful fringe of green trees which has always marked the banks of the sacred river, and beneath whose shade the multitudes looked on as the Saviour was baptized. The head is of olive wood, reminding us of the Mount of Olives, from which He ascended to Heaven. This simple mallet thus suggests to us the beginning and the end of our Lord’s public work on earth.

On motion of Bro. J. B. Jeter, of Va., the mallet was received with the thanks of the Convention.

This symbol of the Lord’s redemptive work, because passed through the hands of Broadus, is perceived as a symbol of racism. The proclamation to retire the gavel because it is called the “Broadus” gavel is intended to send a strong statement of conviction that the SBC is being thorough in clearing its conscience of its racist past. Without controversy, whatever racism presently exists should be repented of. Every racist should and can repent. Whiteness is not a natural inability that inhibits genuine repentance from moral evil. We can all be sure, moreover, that whatever remnants of racism remained in Broadus at his death have been erased now. Even

so will all indwelling sin in all of us find perfect cleansing at the appearing of Jesus Christ in his glorious purifying holiness.

Let us consider whether retaining a gavel with which the name of “Broadus” is connected shows that we are not sufficiently sensitive to the slave-owning repercussions of the name. Retiring the gavel, so it is assumed, could be seen as another concrete indication of the sincerity of our repentance. The gavel, donated by Broadus as a symbol of Christ’s saving life and death, must be retired, it seems, for present repentance to be genuine.

Seeking a way to be content with this proposal, I have looked at this as a possible application of 1 Corinthians 10:28-32 and Romans 14:13-19. Seeking such has produced no coherent argument or application to this case. To avoid a lengthy line of reasoning, I must let the reader fill in the narrative between these points. First, those who think otherwise on this issue are not weaker brothers whose consciences will be harmed by retention of the use of the gavel. They are mature brethren who can interact with an alternate viewpoint based on a reasoned doctrinal consideration. Second, Broadus is not a piece of animal flesh offered for worship in a pagan temple to be consumed or not consumed in a moment and be done with. He was a living man, a vibrant Christian witness, who gave his life to honor Christ and his word. Rather than a mute assault upon a sensitive conscience, his ministry was aimed at opening hearts—of all ethnicities—to the glory of Christ, the power of the gospel, and the joy and purity of worship before the triune God. No, this proposal is not a fair example of a Romans 14:15 conviction. It has more in harmony with Colossians 2. Without any perverse intention, this proposal arises from “plausible arguments” (4) in support of “human traditions” (8), with “an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion” but in the end have no true revelatory basis and “are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (23).

We should bind Paul never to utter the name of Peter or consent to his apostolic status if we bind ourselves to wash away the name of Broadus (Galatians 2:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 9:5; 2 Peter 3: 15, 16). In addition, I think we will find that instead of obeying the law of condescension to a weaker brother, we are breaking the law against bearing false witness, for we present a gifted brother’s ministry in a radically false light. That he was an antebellum slaveholder is not the dominant fact of Broadus’s long ministry and to imply that it is simply wrong.

If Broadus were merely a static, immutable pledge to a racist conviction, the move of retirement could be defended. As shown, however, such is not the case. His beneficial influence extends deeply into Southern Baptist life. We must avoid the inexplicable narrowness of spirit and deficiency in gratitude implied in such a proposal. Personally, I am not embarrassed at all by the name of Broadus and I hope I would be joined by many in expressing deep gratitude and humble

acceptance for the great gifts bestowed on men (Ephesians 4) by Christ's ascension which were found resident within this rarely gifted man.

Despite his devoted scholarship, his insight and contribution to lasting SBC institutions, his sacrificial spirit, his universal respect, his theological clarity and steadfastness, the character assessments carefully crafted by his contemporaries, we are weighing the name "Broadus" in the balance; do we seriously find it wanting? Have we come to a rare moment of clarity now to have transcended Broadus in piety and morality and have reached a depth of repentance for him finally to find ourselves purged with hyssop? Does the imputation to the Broadus gavel a racist ruse mature our growth in grace?

This symbolic act of dissolving the "Broadus" factor, however, raises some interesting possibilities as to how we can overcome undeniable providential connections. Many parts of the Southern Baptist Convention have living sinews to the denominational and doctrinal foresight of Broadus and many others like him. If we have convictions about a Broadus gavel, then why not dissolve the convention, return to 1879, accept the resolutions proposed by I. T. Tichenor, and unite with the northern brethren? Broadus's resistance kept it from happening. We should not be surprised if someone suggests that Lifeway Christian Resources, the successor to the Sunday School Board, be eliminated. Broadus's fingerprints are on it. The name "Broadman" (Broadus and Manly) has been long gone so why not dissolve B&H, for "B" still stands for Broadus. For consistency in our reasoning, someone might suggest abolishing the trade press along with the division that publishes Sunday School materials.

But should someone suggest that we press on with the elimination of reminders of the legacy of Broadus, Broadus Street at Southwestern Seminary should be renamed. In addition, dissolve, not only the name of Broadus Chapel at Southern Seminary, but get rid of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After all, since due to the determination and resolve of Broadus, it survived the financial devastation of the war and by his sacrificial labors in appealing for funds kept it afloat during lean years. It is a much bigger reminder of Broadus than a gavel.

Perhaps we should take a close look at every publication that bears his name. Any republications of his *Harmony of the Gospels* and his *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* should be discouraged in order to preserve the new virtue of the Southern Baptist Convention. Our connection with Broadus should be shunned with righteous indignation. If people know we are connected to Broadus, then they also should know that we don't like it.

Then there are all those people who had such high regard for and public acclamation of Broadus. Does anyone suppose that we could contribute to public perception of our virtue to produce

resolutions of reprimand toward, B. H. Carroll, A. H. Newman, The Courier Journal, J. R. Sampey, and A. C. Dargan for their unashamed public admiration of Broadus? If using a gavel he donated gives an uncomfortable feeling, then creating distance from these Broadus admirers is in order. Without it, we are out of step with the social conscience of the day. Let's not even talk about the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Converted under the gospel ministry of Broadus, baptized by Broadus, and inspired to pursue mature selflessness in missionary labors . . . Too late, I think someone already is calling for its renaming.

And what should we say of Rabbi Moses who said, "Before I became familiar with Doctor Broadus, I knew Christianity only as a creed which seemed absolutely incomprehensible to me. I judged it mainly from the untold, unmerited misery, the agony of ages which Christian rulers and nations had entailed upon poor Israel under the impulse given by Christian priests and teachers. But when I learned to know and revere in Broadus a Christian, my conception of Christianity and my attitude toward it underwent a complete change. Broadus was the precious fruit by which I learned to judge of the tree of Christianity. . . . Ah, it was his delight to honor and love men, and to inspire them with self-respect and moral courage. The central warmth of his great heart diffused itself as a genial influence in glance and smile, in clasp and word, on his family, his friends, his disciples. . . . His heart was a noble vessel brimful of the milk of human kindness; the slightest touch of pity caused it to overflow."

Clearly, the Rabbi estimated Broadus apart from our context. Had we been there, would our insight have been more morally perceptive than his? Did this man, clearly sensitized to the spirit of oppression in men, fail to give an honest statement of his impression of Broadus? It seems that task has been left to us. And we will rid ourselves and our consciences of this last vestige of Broadus, the gavel he gave. The man who should live a thousand years was unable even to maintain respect for 125.

---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Tom has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory*; *Baptists and the Bible*, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon*.



TOM NETTLES

# For The Vindication of the Truth: A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith

James Renihan. Baptist Symbolics: Volume 1. For the Vindication of the Truth: A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith. Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press.

---

If you are just about to begin your adventure into this world of confessional exposition, get ready for an encounter with a work of art. This examination of the First London Confession of the Particular Baptists (or “baptistic congregationalists”) combines so many pertinent elements in an interesting and orderly fashion that the reader is as much entertained by the organization as he is informed by the content of the narrative.

Before listing these aspects of composition that I found admirable and engaging, I want to make two personal points about the confession itself, ideas that Dr. Renihan has woven into his narrative. First, the confession itself as a literary structure holds importance for Baptist life in a way that it does not for any other denomination. The confession arose basically from the defense John Spilsbery gave for the right [obligation!] to begin a church based on the immersion of

believers only. When Spilsbery's action in forming a church on such a basis was challenged, he wrote a defense of reinstating baptism de novo apart from any succession in the ordinance from previous administrators. He enunciated four principles of church formation, or "constitutional causes," in *The Lawfull Subjects of Baptisme*. First must come the Word of God "fitting and preparing of the matter for the forme." The preaching and reading of the word humbles and brings down the proud heart of man and makes him fit matter for the body of Christ, the church. Second, a "confession of faith" declares the "fitnes of the matter for the forme." The power of the Gospel "shining into the heart of man" so convinces the sinner of its truth that its leaven "seasons and sweetens the whole man." The Word operates like a fire that "breaks forth and discovers itself" with such clarity in "such as have it," that they delineate specific truths from that Word. A confession of faith consisting of particular doctrines naturally develops. Others so prepared come to the same judgement concerning these truths. This leads to the third "constituting cause" of a church. The believers so fitted by the Word now covenant to be a body of believers joined by "free and mutual consent and agreement upon the practice of that truth so by God revealed, and by faith received." This voluntary covenant precedes the ordinances. It is in the agreement indicated by such a covenant relationship that the agreeing body then warrants the corporate practice of the ordinances of the New Testament. The seal then is set by baptism, an obedient response to apostolic teaching under the authority of Christ himself. This baptism is a confession of faith both in the internal submission to Christ's redemptive work and in the external expression of the body of truths incorporated in the written confession. The fourth cause follows, the Spirit's work in knitting and uniting their hearts together in truth. Unity in love and truth progresses in the body by means of the Spirit's acting on the proclamation of the bible. A corporate witness to propositional truths provides the only clear evidence that such a work of the Spirit has, in fact, occurred.

Spilsbery considered this as necessary for the being of the church. He declared in no uncertain terms that saving faith must be manifest in the hearty approval and assertion of a body of propositional truths. No church, and thus no baptism, could exist apart from submission to orthodox evangelicalism embodied in a confession of faith. His own ten-point confession is included as an appendix in this volume. Submission to such constituted the covenantal agreement necessary before baptism in Spilsbery's doctrine of the church. The First London Confession, therefore, not only gives a public witness to truth taught by the churches but to heart commitments of each of the members expressed before they are received to baptism and membership.

Another remark about the confession is its comprehensive trinitarian witness to Scripture. This serves to justify the confidence that a coherent and consistent statement of faith can be produced from the written word of God. The doctrine of God affirms the full truthfulness of Scripture in

saying “Truth is that whereby he [God] declares that alone which he hath decreed, and though his sayings may seeme to sound sometimes another thing, yet the sense of them doth always agree with the decree” (article 3). Scripture never lies. Article 8, to which Renihan refers at the key critical developments of revelatory truth says, “In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know, believe, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.” We are pointed forward to the offices of Christ. In his office as prophet we find that Christ “hath perfectly revealed the whole will of God out of the bosome of the Father, that is needful for his servants to know believe, and obey.” The prophetic office of Christ, therefore, confirms the very Scripture that has taught us about these messianic offices. The Scriptures teach us all we need to know about Christ as prophet, and Christ as prophet reconfirms what Scripture tell us we need to “know, believe, and obey [acknowledge].” Beyond that, the effectual operations of the Spirit in salvation include his work in teaching the elect “to see, know, and beleve the truth of the Scriptures, & not onely so, but the excellencie of them above all other writings and things in the world.” Why? Because they “hold forth the glory of God in his attributes [article 3], the excellency of Christ in his nature and offices [articles 17-21], and the power and fulnesse of the Spirit in its workings and operations” [articles 22-26]. The doctrine of Scripture, therefore, promoted in the Confession is fully comprehensive in the testimony borne to its truthfulness by each person of the triune God. It breathes the air of full submission to the Bible, giving no room for speculations or additions, or irrelevant extrapolations from men. Finally, the confessors affirm that even if they do not win the confidence of their Protestant contemporaries and are viewed as in vital error, they confess, “that after the way which they call heresie, worship we the God of our Fathers, beleiving all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets and Apostles, desiring from our soules to disclaime all heresies and opinions which are not after Christ” (article 52).

Thus, seeing the vital importance for the process of composing a confession and the central place of Scripture in that composition, I want to delineate seven compelling traits of Jim Renihan’s exposition of this confession.

First, this is simply an exposition. What does the confession mean? Why did its writers organize it in this specific way? How do the various articles of faith relate to one another? What do certain words mean? How do these words and ideas relate to the broader theological context, most importantly the doctrinal expositions that were maturing in English Puritanism? This expositional quality is an education in itself.

Second, this is an adventure in polemics. How the plain meaning and the contextual clarity of the simple statements of the confession can be twisted by contrarians to the new sect of

antipaedobaptists entertains as much as it startles. Enmity is a creative force in its attempts to destroy. On the other hand, the willingness of the new Baptists to concede at every point possible for the sake of peace and the removal of any suspicion of heresy demonstrates the scriptural principle, “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18).

Third, this is a fascinating study in the use of sources. The matching of modern commentators on the confession placed alongside the antiquarian contemporaries of these seven churches that produced the confession is a work of a seasoned thinker and researcher in difficult historical relations. The richness of Renihan’s knowledge and skillful use of primary sources should encourage every historian with the dignity of his calling and the approximation of truth that is possible through hard work. Arising from these sources that hovered around the series of editions of the confession is an explanation of concepts and contextualized language that exhibits an entirely credible display of the purpose of the confession.

Fourth, concerning that purpose, we find that the doctrinal exposition not only was intended to be instructive to the churches and their membership, but to align the Baptists with the broad Reformed orthodoxy of the Puritans, the Presbyterians, the Anglicans, and the Independents. They wanted first to establish the conscientiously-held truth that they were orthodox in their doctrine of Scripture, the understanding of the Trinity, Christology, the doctrines of grace, and their prayerfulness for and submission to the government in all lawful matters. God alone is Lord of the conscience and no man can intrude there. While accomplishing this work of stating objective truth, they also wanted to manifest their heartfelt fellowship with orthodox believers in non-baptistic religious bodies. This energy for orthodoxy, pointed out clearly and fittingly throughout this work, is an important point. Much of the twentieth century saw a vaporizing of this primary commitment and shifted the identity of Baptists simply to issues of liberty of conscience. Instead of seeing liberty of conscience as an implication of new covenant orthodoxy properly conceived, many historians condensed Baptist identity to that single affirmation, along with the right of private interpretation. The effect of this reductionistic project was to thrust aside the confessional element that gave rise to Baptists as a flowering of Protestantism into a consistent ecclesiology. Renihan’s exposition is a clear reminder of the necessary dependency of true liberty of Conscience on a firm commitment to biblical truth.

Fifth, Renihan weaves a marvelous tapestry of arguments between the Baptists, their foes, and their friends. One may want to doubt me when I say that this interweaving of theologically precise vocabulary, oddly constructed arguments, and scholastic logic is fascinating and entertaining, but the doubt would not be fitting. The manner in which Renihan shows how ideas and phrases and vocabulary from one writer are used constructively by another and implanted in the confession, while others dispute the accuracy of arguments and condemn the [remote!]

implications of certain phrases is a fascinating study of human interaction. It also shows how iron sharpens iron and how theological clarity often is a community work. Renihan's appendices reveal his own skill in relevant polemical writing.

Sixth, the author's care in getting behind the articles to the larger discussion is frequently gripping and yields surprising transparency of meaning. For example, his discussion of article twenty-five on the preaching of the gospel in relation to preparations of the law is a masterful work in displaying the historical context of doctrinal vocabulary. He demonstrates how words, like "absolutely," "preparations," "terrors," "naked," "sinner," "ungodly," work together to produce a profound doctrinal and experiential affirmation. His display of the various nuances of meaning and the interactions of theologians writing on this important issue is deeply instructive. Again, may I say, sections like that produce a deep sense of satisfaction in the beauty and symmetry of biblical truth and the sanctified artistic impulse that works toward such a cogent display of reality.

Seventh, Jim Renihan is himself engulfed in the goodness of the confessional content and purpose. Not only does he express confidence that the framers of the confession were in the "mainstream of federal thought" and that they were "using common language to describe" their ascription to confessional biblical theology, but he also seems to exude delight at times with a phrase like, "It is wonderful how this is expressed." When a reader knows that the writer is fully on board with an important subject, has a personal happiness in the content of his matter, and is unafraid to express his unity with certain ideas, it goes a long way to help the reader enjoy and embrace the good things that are set before him. I believe this will be your experience in your journey through this exposition.

---

## **ABOUT THE REVIEWER:**

Tom has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory*; *Baptists and the Bible*, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon*.



TOM NETTLES

# Thundering the Word: The Awakening Ministry of George Whitefield

Kurt Smith. *Thundering the Word: The Awakening Ministry of George Whitefield*. Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2020.

---

If you have not read a biography of Whitefield, this is the first one you should read. It is energetic, spiritual, appreciative, honest, and accessible. You will grasp the life of Whitefield, sense his passion, feel his energy, learn his doctrine, appreciate his preaching, sympathize with his disappointments, and embrace his relevance. Also, you will learn, from the way the footnotes supplement the text, what books you should read to expand your acquaintance with any aspect of Whitefield's life and thought.

If you have read many books on Whitefield, this is the one you should read next. Though overall one finds the scope succinct, the parts on which the author makes expansion are treated from a perspective seldom seen in Whitefieldian genre. Detailed attention to pivotal issues in Whitefield's life from a stance of pastoral theology intensify the charm and the usefulness of this volume.

One way to read this book would be to read the text straight through without being distracted

into the footnotes. You will find the narrative coherent and satisfying. Then go back and read the footnotes by themselves. This will punctuate your understanding with provocative reflections from Whitefield himself, other biographers of Whitefield, and a variety of Whitefield's contemporaries. Of course, just a page by page reading that includes both text and footnotes will be an enriching experience. That is the way I read it.

As mentioned above, this biography of Whitefield may serve also as a manual of pastoral theology. Kurt Smith is a pastor who loves history, particularly biographies of faithful and useful Christians, that he might glean and share with others insights for God-honoring ministry. As one reads this book, he can trust that accuracy of judgment and careful evaluation of sources is built into every discussion. Kurt has consulted an enormous number of secondary sources and has employed them for careful, succinct, accurate interaction with the research of others. Engaging the footnotes, the reader will find that Smith's knowledge of the "state of the question" concerning Whitefield research is thorough. Those who love Whitefield, who celebrate Whitefield, who give close but fair scrutiny to Whitefield, and those who are jaundiced in their view of Whitefield have received a close read from Kurt. He corrects the misreadings of some cynical historiographers along the way.

In addition, His consultation with primary sources is truly impressive. The sermonic literature, Whitefield's diary, his letters, the words of contemporary critics, friends, converts, and other observers of Whitefield's ministry are engaged generously throughout the book. This combination of secondary and primary sources is not pressed together in a haphazard manner but with pleasing attention to context and accurate integration of subject matter.

I mentioned the value of this work for pastoral theology. Smith spends an impressive amount of critical thinking on pastoral issues that naturally emerge in Whitefield's ministry. One obvious area is the relation of Whitefield's unfaltering belief in and presentation of the leading doctrines of Calvinism with his fervent evangelism. Smith gives an excellent summary of the vital connection between the sovereign decree of salvation of the elect and the necessity of the use of means for its perfect accomplishment. Along with this is not only the cerebral pleasure of seeing the connection, but the passion for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners that floods the mind and heart of the grand itinerant. Whitefield was fearful of the kind of Calvinism that had been learned only in the university and not absorbed in the heart.

Another point of pastoral theology is the manner in which one should carry on controversy. Smith points to the humble approach that Whitefield took in his letter to Wesley after Wesley had taken a strong public stance against the doctrines of grace. Whitefield answered the content objections that Wesley had but also modeled a self-effacing humility in doing so. Looking at

Whitefield's demeanor in controversy, Smith isolated the assumptions that were productive of his humility. He knew that the decree of salvation and the gift of saving faith were given irrespective of his own unworthiness. They were sovereign bestowals that emphasized, not any degree of merit, but absolute dependence. He remained aware of how indwelling sin affected his life every day. His confidence in the truth grew alongside increased dependence of the person and work of Christ. Whitefield maintained a teachable spirit and was never at ease with the dimensions of his own spiritual growth. Whitefield examined his own conduct in controversy and criticized his own judgmental spirit in declaring, with regrettable self-confidence and censoriousness, the unregenerate status of some ministers.

Smith takes a close look also at Whitefield as a preacher, focusing on the richness and Christ-centered nature of his content and the sincere exuberance of his style. Smith distilled six informative points from observing Whitefield's sermons and illustrates each of these points with a rich body of primary source material. Whitefield was aggressive. Every sinner in the vast audience knew that he was going for them. He was compassionate, exuding love and sorrow for lost sinners. He used an interrogative method of evangelistic assault, forcing his hearers to engage the content of the sermon by answering vital questions. A fourth trait was the doctrinal content of his sermons. He was God's messenger and salvation could come only in accord with the truth. Next, his preaching was authoritative. He preached God's word, not his opinions. He issued absolutes and ultimatums for he spoke the message of divine revelation, not human surmise. Finally, (and all is vain without this element) his preaching was anointed. The Spirit of God gave palpable indications that he owned the preaching of Whitefield, that Whitefield's mission was divinely given and divinely blessed. Each of these points is fleshed out with anecdotal richness through consultation with a cloud of witnesses.

We also learn from Smith's sensitive account of Whitefield that opposition to energetic, zealous, and faithful service can be expected and in some cases might not be diminished. Popular uprisings against Whitefield as well as ecclesiastical harassment from some ministers was a regular occurrence. In the midst of those storms, however, Whitefield saw blessings on his ministry and sensed genuine effusions of the Holy Spirit that made the opposition seem as mere flea bites.

The reader also will find a tender and honest treatment of two areas where Whitefield has been faulted by the generations following. Whitefield's marriage to Elizabeth that placed no curb on his constant travel and long absences, often at sensitive times, is examined with historiographical integrity and emotional patience. Also, Smith gives a candid view of Whitefield's ownership of African slaves. These chapters will round out the humanity of Whitefield with a pertinent analysis of the way Whitefield's conduct related to Scripture and to life-situation.

Several appendices complete the book and illustrate some of the important discussions that Smith pursues in the text.

I commend this work with gusto. This commendation comes from an expectation that each reader will find that the time and energy given to this pleasure will be multiplied in serious meditations on personal holiness and faithful discipleship.

---

### **ABOUT THE REVIEWER:**

Tom has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory; Baptists and the Bible*, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon*.