

# **The Heart of a Baptist**

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## **“The Heart of a Baptist”**

This sermon comes from a heart breaking for Baptists, for we have begun to lose our way.

### **Introduction**

Throughout its twenty centuries of history, the Baptist movement has been under attack from numerous directions, from the outside by individuals, both non-Christian and Christian, and by hostile public authorities; and from the inside by those who would compromise the integrity of the Baptist faith. These attacks have varied as to time and place, as to ferocity and duration, as to their systemic or ad hoc nature, and as to the degree of their success or failure. However, they all have one thing in common: they seek to bring trauma, even permanent arrest, to the heart of the Baptist movement. Unfortunately, some who have conducted such attacks, especially those who themselves claim to be Baptists, are not always aware of the trauma they are causing.

Today, we must examine Scripture for the heart of the Baptist and clearly and carefully identify those internal agents which would cause it harm. There are three things to be considered: the biblical center of the Baptist movement; the heart of a Baptist; and, the traumas which threaten the integrity of that heart.

### **I. The Biblical Center of the Baptist Movement**

In my historical theology classes, especially those that deal with the Reformation, the students are introduced to the phenomenon that various movements have read Scripture through various scriptural lenses, through certain biblical centers. Inevitably, Roman Catholics will point to the exchange between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16 as the basis for their grant of ordinary and juridical authority to the Pope, the bishop of Rome. By an incredible display of hermeneutical gymnastics, they believe he is the heir of Peter and the vicar of Christ. Inevitably, Lutherans will point to those foundational Pauline passages in Romans 1–8 and Galatians which teach the pristine Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Inevitably, the Reformed or Calvinists will point to the critical Pauline passages in Romans 9–11 and Ephesians 1 which teach the doctrine of election. Inevitably, the Anabaptists will point others to those wonderful discipleship-oriented passages of the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Preachers and teachers from these traditions have learned to propagate their respective denominational faiths by reference to these passages. They then read the remainder of Scripture by reference to their particular foundational passage or biblical center.

Baptists wish to understand and affirm Scripture in its entirety, and yet they too know that certain passages are central to Baptist hermeneutics. Of the four Reformation-

era traditions just mentioned, Baptists come closest to the Anabaptists, for we are their theological heirs, even if we may or may not claim to be their direct historical heirs. Like the Anabaptists, we read Scripture simply, literally, and with a focus upon Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> However, Baptists have some unique central passages which influence their understanding of the Christian faith. As with the Anabaptists, these passages derive from the sayings of Jesus Christ. One foundational text for Baptists, especially for Southern Baptists, is found in Matthew 28:16–20, otherwise known as “the Great Commission.” These words of Jesus, subsequent to his resurrection and prior to his ascension, establish the purpose, platform, and program of the church.

Prior to and during the Reformation period, the Great Commission was considered to be primarily for the apostles. The comments of John Calvin are typical: “when Christ appeared to the disciples, he likewise commissioned them to be apostles, to convey into every part of the world the message of eternal life.” The import of Calvin’s entire discussion is that the commission was for the apostles alone. In his zeal to deny the Roman claim to apostolic succession, the Genevan Reformer never got around to applying the passage to the modern church, except to say that, “in the present day, the operations of Christ are carried on wonderfully in a secret manner.”<sup>2</sup> Calvin did not consider the apostolic commission as extending to the visible church!

However, another Reformer, a Radical Reformer by the name of Balthasar Hubmaier, and one of the earliest and brightest of the Anabaptists, had a different understanding. In the most significant book written on baptism in the sixteenth century, Hubmaier treated the Great Commission as if it were normative for all Christians. He repeatedly cited Matthew 28:18–20 and its parallels. According to Hubmaier, the Great Commission must be obeyed by all Christians, “For a serious command demands serious obedience and fulfillment.” Those who will not follow the commission in its entirety and in an orderly manner are disorderly and disobedient to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Baptists tended to emulate Calvin rather than Hubmaier regarding contemporary application of the Great Commission.

But in 1785, the Particular Baptist minister, William Carey, burdened by the Spirit of God for the salvation of all the nations, questioned the Calvinistic truism. He was promptly accused of compromising the sovereignty of God. John Collett Ryland, a hyper-Calvinist Baptist minister, retorted, “Sit down, young man; when God wants to convert the heathen, He’ll do it without your help or mine.”<sup>4</sup> Carey, out of respect for the old minister, may have sat down, but the fate of the lost continued to eat at his heart. After years of study, both of the Bible and of the needs of the world, Carey issued his famous booklet, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians*, in which he examined whether the Commission should be restricted to the apostles. His reply was threefold: if

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2003), 70–93.

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:380–81, 391.

<sup>3</sup>Balthasar Hubmaier, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (1525), in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1989), 95–149.

<sup>4</sup>Ernest A. Payne, “Introduction,” to William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, To Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792; Introduction, 1961; Reprint, Didcot: Baptist Missionary Society, 1991), 11.

the command to make disciples of all nations is restricted to the apostles, then so is the command to baptize; if the commission is restricted to the apostles, then subsequent evangelists have been disobedient; and, if the commission is restricted to the apostles, then Christ's statement with regard to his continuing presence is nonsensical, for the apostles are already dead.<sup>5</sup> For Carey, the Father of the Modern Missions Movement, the Great Commission was absolutely central to Baptist faith and practice.

In 1814, when American Baptists first began to organize themselves into a convention, a southern minister was asked to preach. Richard Furman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, and the first president of the Triennial Convention, chose as his text the Great Commission. The convention was so impressed that they asked Furman's permission to publish his sermon with their proceedings.<sup>6</sup> In 1845, when the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, the address of the convention noted that, "Our objects, then, are the extension of the Messiah's kingdom, and the glory of our God."<sup>7</sup> The founders of the Southern Baptist Convention believed in the Great Commission as the best way to glorify God. B.H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, believed this commission has "the greatest of all authority" for Southern Baptists, whom he called, "Missionary Baptists."<sup>8</sup>

When the leading executives in this denomination gather today to coordinate their strategy, they refer to themselves as "The Great Commission Council." In the International Mission Board of the SBC, missionaries often speak of "Great Commission Christians" and their magazine is entitled, *Commission*. In most Southern Baptist churches today, you will find the Great Commission is central in their ethos and often in their documents. And for the 160<sup>th</sup> year of this great convention, to support his laudable goal of reminding Southern Baptists about their responsibility to be baptizers, Bobby Welch chose the Great Commission as the convention's central text.<sup>9</sup> Baptists, especially Southern Baptists, have been and are a Great Commission people!

There are five Greek terms which are critical for understanding the text of the Great Commission and therefore, the heart of a Baptist: *Iesous*, *poreuthentes*, *matheteusate*, *baptizontes*, and *didaskontes*. The one noun in the group of terms, *Iesous*, dominates, directly or pronominally, every verse in the passage. The one full verb is an aorist active imperative, *matheteusate*, and is the central command of the commission. The three participles or verbal adjectives—*poreuthentes*, *baptizontes*, and *didaskontes*—also function in an imperatival sense, but are grammatically dependent upon *matheteusate*.<sup>10</sup> Let us read the Great Commission, humbly and reverently seeking the Spirit's illumination:

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<sup>5</sup>Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians*, 35–37.

<sup>6</sup>James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 153–54.

<sup>7</sup>William B. Johnson, "The Southern Baptist Convention, To the Brethren in the United States; to the congregations connected with the respective Churches; and to all candid men," in *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Richmond, Virginia: Ellyson, 1845), 19.

<sup>8</sup>B.H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Four Gospels*, ed. J.B. Cranfill (Grand Rapids: Broadman, 1948), I:434.

<sup>9</sup>*Annual of the 2005 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention, 2005), 38.

<sup>10</sup>David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has incorporated a number of changes in the preaching program for our students, including the use of the

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus [*Iesous*] had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go [*poreuthentes*] therefore and make disciples [*matheteusate*] of all the nations, baptizing [*baptizontes*] them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching [*didaskontes*] them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

## II. The Heart of a Baptist

The heart of a Baptist has a source of life and four chambers, each of which is quite evident in this central text. The source of life for the Baptist heart is Jesus Christ. The four chambers are: a compelling desire to engage in the mission of evangelism, a call for personal conversion, the regenerate church, and an authoritative Bible.

**A. Iesous: “Jesus.”** *The Baptist heart gains its life through Jesus. Baptists believe in the centrality of Jesus Christ, both in His divine-human person and in His atoning work.*

Christ is central to this text and to our faith. The disciples came to Galilee and “when they saw Him, they worshiped Him.” Why worship this man? We worship Jesus Christ because He is God; because He is our salvation; because He is our way, our truth, our life. In His person, Christ bridges the divide between God and man. In His atoning work, Christ bridges the divide between a righteous, wrathful God and sinful humanity by the propitiatory shedding of His blood. Christ, our redemption, is applied to our heart, through regeneration by the Holy Spirit, all for the glory of God. Indeed, we might even be bold enough to say that it is the life-giving blood of Jesus that courses through the Baptist heart.

Yes, Baptists worship a Triune God, for we are baptized in the one name of the threefold God. Yet, unlike some evangelicals, we recognize that the Trinity is focused primarily on the glorification of the Son. The Spirit Himself glorifies Christ, and therefore, we glorify Christ. The Father Himself glorifies Christ, and therefore, we glorify Christ. Yes, we also glorify the Father because Christ glorifies the Father. Yes, we also glorify the Spirit because He, too, is God.<sup>11</sup> But the Trinity is primarily focused on glorifying the Son; therefore, we simple Biblicists primarily glorify the Son, too. Baptists are a Christocentric people. Ask a Baptist child what she believes and she will invariably begin her answer with the precious name of “Jesus.”

A Prayer: “Oh, Jesus, you promised to remain with us ‘even to the end of the age.’ In you is our hope. In you is our joy. In you is our way, our truth, and our life. We know that you became a man for our sake. We know that you died on the cross for our sake. We know that you rose from the dead for our sake. We know that, even now, you are with us. We trust that you

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Greek text in sermon preparation. The current preacher/professor has long advocated expository preaching and is elated to see Dr. Allen lead Southwestern’s proclamation courses in this direction.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Malcolm Yarnell, “The Glory of God,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Chapel, 30 October 2003 [Video-recording] (Fort Worth, Texas: Roberts Library, 2003).

will keep us from all harm. You, you are the norm by which everything else is judged. You, you fulfill the Old Testament. You, you are revealed in the New Testament. Oh, Jesus, come again, show us those wounds that bled and that body that died for our sin. Oh, Jesus, come again, we desire to worship you in the flesh which rose again for our redemption. Oh, Jesus, we thank you for being with us, even now, by your Spirit. Oh, Jesus, we worship you. Our life is in you, Second Person of the Trinity, fully God and fully man.”

*To be a Baptist is to be Christ-centered.*

**B. Poreuthentes: “Going.”** *The first chamber of the Baptist heart is the chamber through which the Baptist blood must spill itself and thereby grow the number of Baptist hearts glorifying God in the church: a mission of evangelism.*

Tertullian, the early church father who questioned the novel practice of infant baptism, knew that the best ground for the growth of the Christian faith is that ground which has soaked the blood of the martyrs. The blood of the martyrs – *martus* means “witness” – is the seed of the church.<sup>12</sup> “Martyrs” are those Christians who are willing to publicly and privately confess Christ in all situations, no matter what the danger. When Baptists truly understand the commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples by going, teaching, baptizing, they know they must go. Jesus said, “Go.” Go? Go!

Baptists “go” when they proclaim the message of Jesus Christ in every place across all borders and every other barrier, to every people in every language with the color of every skin, at all times in every situation without exception. Jesus said, “Go.” If the government says, “Stay,” and Jesus says, “Go,” Baptists go. If your comfort level says, “Stay,” and Jesus says, “Go,” a Baptist will go. If your culture cries, “Stay,” and Jesus says, “Go,” Baptists must go. Wherever the obstacle, it must be crossed. Whoever the opponent, he must be lovingly defeated. Whatever the problem, it must be solved. Our task is to go. Go! Go! Go! Baptists are a people who will not be stopped by anything in their attempt to glorify God by making disciples in every situation. The Baptist who claims not to be an evangelist is simply not a Baptist. Baptists are always on mission, the mission of evangelism. *To be a Baptist is to be an evangelist.*

**C. Matheteusate: “Make disciples.”** *The second chamber of the Baptist heart is the chamber through which the life that is available by the blood of Jesus Christ becomes ours personally: the salvation that begins with the free gift of justification and proceeds to full discipleship.*

Jesus has commanded his disciples to “make disciples.” The Baptist business is the business of preaching the free gift of justification, of preaching the conversion of sinners, and of preaching the need to carry the cross.

Baptists affirm the Reformation doctrines of *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*. Justification is by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone. We are not saved by our own efforts, but by simply believing in the efforts of Christ on our behalf. Before the divine throne, in the highest court of creation, the righteousness of Christ is declared to be our righteousness as a gift. By reason of our union with Christ, the Father

<sup>12</sup>Tertullian, *Apology*, 50, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:55.

declares the sinner righteous. He looks at me, a sinner, and sees Christ, the righteous One. It is Christ's righteousness, a righteousness alien to us, which saves us.

However, justification is only one aspect of salvation. *Inter alia*, salvation includes conversion and discipleship. By conversion, we affirm two things: faith and repentance. We tell people that they must be born again. Your mother cannot help you, your father cannot heal you, your preacher cannot preserve you, your doctor cannot protect you, and you cannot save yourself. Only Christ can save you: you must trust in Him and turn from your sins. "Repent and believe" is the message of Jesus (Mark 1:15). Therefore, "repent and believe" is the message of Baptists. To believe that Jesus died and rose again is not enough until you believe that Jesus died and rose again *for you*. The Baptist faith is a personal faith, a faith for disciples of Jesus.

The Baptist faith is also about discipleship. The person who claims to be a Christian, but is unwilling to take up the cross, should be considered a hypocrite. The Christian faith issues forth in an obedient life to the commands of Jesus Christ. We measure our soteriological assurance by the measures of 1 John: confession of the full humanity and full deity of Jesus Christ, love of the brethren, and obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ. Salvation does not begin in good works, but it sure does end up there! *To be a Baptist is to be a disciple of Jesus.*

***D. Baptizantes: "Baptizing." The third chamber of the Baptist heart is the chamber through which the Baptist heart begins to join itself with the beat of other Baptist hearts: regenerate church membership evidenced by baptism for believers only.***

Jesus called his people to not only make disciples by going and teaching, but also by baptizing. Apart from baptism into the local church in the name of the Triune God, the Great Commission is unfulfilled. Jesus said, "Baptize." Baptize? Baptize!

Baptists are baptizers. It is absolutely incredible the secondary and tertiary concerns which have been brought forward to define the heart of the Baptist movement. E.Y. Mullins has done some good, but his attempt to define Baptists according to a solipsistic "soul competency" has unfortunately encouraged theological liberalism in our denomination. What, then, is the beginning Baptist distinctive? It is baptism! Baptism, I say! Baptism is the Baptist distinctive which leads all other Baptist distinctives! Stop looking elsewhere for who you are. If you are a Baptist, your beginning distinctive is baptism: baptism for believers only; baptism by immersion alone; baptism based upon one's profession of faith; baptism as a meaningful symbolic representation of personal conversion; baptism as a faith commitment; baptism as an ethical commitment; baptism into a local congregation; baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; baptism as identification with the one God who is yet three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; baptism as a public testimony to regeneration. Baptism! Baptism! Baptism!

As Hubmaier, the Anabaptist martyr, discovered, after examining the numerous references to baptism in the New Testament, the order of the commandments in the Great Commission only supports believers-only baptism. According to Hubmaier, the proper sequence or order in the New Testament is: *Wort, Glaub, Tauff, Werck*; word, faith, baptism, work.<sup>13</sup> This order is evident in the Great Commission, too. Did you notice the order of the verbs: going, make disciples, baptizing, teaching? The proclamation of the Word and the making of a disciple always precede baptism. Without the Word, active by

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<sup>13</sup>Hubmaier, On the Christian Baptism of Believers, in Balthasar Hubmaier, 128.

the Spirit in the human through faith, there is no baptism. It may be a bath, but it is not baptism. Unless the Word and faith precede baptism, there is no baptism. Southern Baptists must rediscover their heritage as a believers-only Free Church people. Without baptism based upon public profession of faith, we are disorderly and disobedient! My friends, give a Christian an open Bible and you will get a Baptist every time. *Baptism is the beginning Baptist distinctive.*

Baptism reserved for believers only is the beginning of Baptist ecclesiology. Such baptism guarantees the visible church will only be joined by those who visibly, courageously, and convincingly profess the Christian faith. Two other necessary parts of the Baptist ecclesiological harmony are: second, the continuing sign of personal fellowship with the body of Christ, the Lord's Supper; and third, the practice of church discipline. When church membership is restricted to believers baptized upon their profession of faith; when the Lord's Supper is understood in a memorial or spiritual sense and restricted to the regenerate membership (1 Cor 5); when Christ's command to discipline the church is practiced regularly, rightly, and for the purpose of redemption (Matt 18:15–20); then the integrity of the local church is preserved. The regenerate church that retains its integrity in these areas will ultimately manifest those other important Baptist distinctives: the autonomy—better yet, Christonomy—of the local church, the cooperation of local churches for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of God, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state. *Baptism is the beginning Baptist distinctive.*<sup>14</sup>

***E. Didaskontes: “Teaching.” The final chamber of the Baptist heart is the chamber which defines our authority: Baptists base all of their teachings upon the authoritative text which we call the Bible, the very Word of God.***

Christ commands us to “teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” How do we know what He has commanded us? We know the commandments of Jesus by no other means than through the Bible as illuminated by the Spirit who inspired it. Baptists, especially Southern Baptists, are notoriously identified, from within and from without, as a “people of the book.” We are committed to the biblical doctrine that Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is thus inerrant, infallible, and sufficient for our faith and practice. A perfect Person, the Spirit of God, inspired the prophets and the apostles to write the perfect book, the Bible. The writers in their writings are, as a result, without error. This inerrancy extends not only to the most important matter of salvation, but also to matters of history and science.

The sufficiency of Scripture states that our “doctrines”—that is, our teachings—need to be drawn from the Bible, and that we may never go beyond the Bible for our authority. Scripture, in other words, is sufficient for the message and practice of Baptist churches and their people. Requiring anything more than that which the Bible requires is,

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<sup>14</sup>Unfortunately, there has been little written within the last half-century explicating the biblical and Baptist understanding of believers-only baptism by immersion. James Leo Garrett, Jr., “Baptists Concerning Baptism: Review and Preview,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 43 (2001): 52–67. Baptist pastors and scholars must once again delineate a view of baptism which avoids both ecumenism and sacramentalism on the left (cf. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, *Baptist Sacramentalism* [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003]) and a close identification with scholastic Calvinism on the right (cf. Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* [Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2003]).

by basic Baptist definition, a legalistic heresy. Requiring anything less than that which the Bible requires is, by basic Baptist definition, a liberal heresy. We find our authority in the Bible alone, no more and no less. On the one hand, Baptists teach all things contained in God's Word. On the other hand, all that Baptists teach is contained in God's Word. *To be a Baptist is to teach the Bible entirely and the Bible alone.*

This is the Baptist heart. It has its source of life in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and it has four chambers: a mission of evangelism, personal salvation, the regenerate church, and an authoritative Bible.

### **III. The Traumas Which Endanger the Baptist Heart**

A surgeon must be a precisionist. When he takes the scalpel to the precious tissues of the human heart, it behooves him to make no mistakes: to move neither too fast nor too slow, too deep nor too shallow, too far to the right nor too far to the left. A surgeon must be extremely careful. Likewise, the Baptist theologian must be careful when excising those dangerous tissues which threaten to traumatize the Baptist heart.

However, surgery nevertheless is sometimes required. There comes a time when the danger of inaction is greater than the possible dangers of action. Now is a time for surgery. Please allow me to identify five critical issues or calcified tissues which threaten the Baptist heart.

#### ***A. The First Calcified Tissue is the Loss of Biblical Fidelity.***

We know well the danger of liberal theology. The acidic results of higher criticism have been felt by our denomination, and beginning in 1979, the Southern Baptist Convention engaged in a major act of self-surgery. This was necessary and at least within our seminaries, may now be proclaimed to be largely successful. In our apparent victory, however, we must not lose vigilance. Liberalism can so easily return to those with keen minds, who may be tempted to consider their thoughts to be greater than God's thoughts.

There is another danger with reference to the Bible, however. This danger is biblical ignorance in the pulpit and the pew. The preacher who refuses to let the Bible preach itself in an expository manner threatens his people with the state of spiritual and moral anemia. The Sunday School teacher who asks what his students feel about the text rather than how the text feels about the student threatens his people with the state of self-induced hypnosis. The father who neglects to open the Word of God in his home and lead his family in prayer and devotional worship condemns his children and grandchildren to ignorance and possible spiritual death. The individual who leaves the pages of his Bible unturned on a daily basis is out of communion with His God. How do you expect to hear God if you don't open your ears to His Word?

Whatever happened to our emphasis for children to engage in Scripture memorization? Where has our foundational biblical literacy gone? Why do many Baptists no longer bring a Bible to church? The calcified tissues of biblical infidelity and illiteracy are threatening to arrest the Baptist heart.

### ***B. The Second Critical Issue is the Calvinist-Arminian Debate.***

This debate has been with Baptists at least since their later beginnings in England's "Long Reformation."<sup>15</sup> The Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century advocated all five points of the Synod of Dort. The General Baptists denied at least the conception that Christ died simply for the elect. Today, the debate continues. There should be little concern with a low-key debate which can be and is quite healthy.

However, the debate can become quite unhealthy when some Baptists demand that others advocate their particular position. I am not a five-point Calvinist myself. Neither am I, by any stretch of the Reformed imagination, anywhere near being a rank Arminian. My Reformed students cheer when they hear me quote Calvin favorably. They grouse when they hear me decry the dangers of Reformed theology. My less-Reformed students cheer when they hear me advocate human responsibility. They grouse when they hear me advocate our absolute dependence upon divine grace. And they all grouse when I discover what their personal positions are and then make them publicly debate on behalf of the opposing position.

Hyper-Calvinism is becoming a real problem in the Southern Baptist Convention. When a Calvinist allows his own reason to draw lines where Scripture does not draw them, he becomes a hyper-Calvinist. According to Timothy George, hyper-Calvinism is defined doctrinally as the advocacy of eternal justification, ethically as the surrender to antinomianism, and evangelistically as the refusal to give an invitation.<sup>16</sup> It is the anti-invitation expression of hyper-Calvinism that currently challenges Southern Baptists. Now, it matters not exactly how you conduct the invitation, but we must treasure the divine command to be instruments in the calling of sinners to repentance and faith. The invitation is not to replace baptism, but an invitation to Christ is nonetheless necessary. (Please notice that five-point Calvinism is not necessarily hyper-Calvinism. Moreover, Kevin Kennedy has conclusively shown that not even Calvin was a five-pointer.<sup>17</sup>)

Similarly, hyper-Arminianism can be a real problem in the Southern Baptist Convention. When an Arminian allows her own reason to draw lines where Scripture does not draw them, she becomes a hyper-Arminian. We might define hyper-Arminianism, or Pelagianism, doctrinally as the denial of divine election, ethically as serial binges of personal wickedness when loss of salvation is followed by an unbiblical regaining of salvation, and evangelistically as the refusal to witness due to an explicit or implicit universalism. Pelagianism is most evident when people assume they save themselves rather than trusting entirely in the gracious work of God.

There is room in this convention for people who are five-point Calvinists and for people who are not. Consider some recent heroes in Southern Baptist life. Herschel Hobbs was a one-point Calvinist; W.T. Conner was a two-point Calvinist; the Baptist Faith & Message apparently teaches a modest three-point Calvinism; W.A. Criswell was a four-point Calvinist; and, it is rumored that some of my conservative colleagues at another seminary may be five-point Calvinists.<sup>18</sup> There is room for all of the above in the

<sup>15</sup>Nicholas Tyacke, ed., *England's Long Reformation 1500–1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup>Timothy George, "John Gill," in George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 26–28.

<sup>17</sup>Kevin Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. James Leo Garrett, Jr., "Walter Thomas Conner," David S. Dockery, "Herschel H. Hobbs," and Paige Patterson, "W.A. Criswell," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, 212, 226–27, 247; *The*

Southern Baptist Convention, but a modest Calvinism is preferable. Problems come when someone forces upon others their own non-biblical opinions concerning the details of the mysterious relationship between the twin biblical truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Problems also occur when theology becomes an excuse for not evangelizing. The calcified tissues of hyper-Calvinism and hyper-Arminianism must be excised from the Baptist heart.

***C. The Third Critical Issue concerns the Presbyterian and Quaker Threats to Baptist Ecclesiology.***

Some Baptists have been toying with Presbyterian structures in their churches, arguing for multiple elders, or for a forced distinction between teaching and ruling elders. These are minor concerns, but a problem really occurs when they allow eldership to limit congregational oversight. Recently, the most prominent Reformed Baptist, John Piper, has begun to move his church toward open membership. In other words, you won't have to be baptized to join his church. Of course, Piper's movement away from Baptist ecclesiology did not begin with open membership. There were earlier signs of a relentless move towards Presbyterianism, including the adoption of multiple elders and open communion. Piper fails to understand that regenerate church membership is best served by fidelity to the commands of Jesus Christ. Christ commanded baptism for believers only, the Lord's Supper as the continuing sign of fellowship with the church, and intentional church discipline.<sup>19</sup>

In 1934, Baptist historian W.W. Barnes warned against the specter of "presbygationalism," a relentless move away from religious voluntarism and missions.<sup>20</sup> Barnes did not, however, warn against the equally dangerous specter of "quakerism," and Southern Baptists in the twentieth century moved toward individualism, religious self-sufficiency, and theological liberalism. Today, the pendulum swings again, now away from Quakerism and towards Presbyterianism. Baptists would do well to avoid equally the dangers of Presbyterianism on the right and of Quakerism on the left. We must retain our foundational congregationalism, which results from a regenerate church evidenced by believers-only baptism.

***D. The Fourth Critical Issue is the Lack of Intentionally Orthodox Preaching.***

A fourth calcified tissue is the apparent weakness of Christological and Trinitarian orthodoxy in many Baptist pulpits. For many years, it was unusual to hear a sermon about Trinitarian orthodoxy or the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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*Baptist Faith and Message: A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), arts. 3, 5.

<sup>19</sup>John Piper, "More Clarifications on the Baptism and Membership Issue: How Important Is Church Membership?" Accessed 24 October 2005; available from [http://www.desiringgod.org/library/fresh\\_words/2005/101205.html](http://www.desiringgod.org/library/fresh_words/2005/101205.html); Internet.

<sup>20</sup>William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Study in the Development of Ecclesiology* (Fort Worth: Taylor-Lowe, 1934), 78.

<sup>21</sup>In a collection of 49 exemplary Southern Baptist sermons, only one (by J. Alfred Smith) dealt with Christology proper, while the Trinity does not seem to have been a major concern whatsoever. R. Earl Allen and Joel Gregory, eds., *Southern Baptist Preaching Today* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987).

The disdain of some Baptists for “creedalism” allowed flirtation with old heresies.<sup>22</sup> Without the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople and the formula of Chalcedon, many are left without a ready defense against heresy. Mormons, who have a twisted Christology and a perverse theism, thus drew numbers of Southern Baptists into their dens of damnation. Many Southern Baptists simply did not understand that Mormons are not Christians. Indeed, were it not for the first hymn in the *Baptist Hymnal*, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” one wonders whether some Southern Baptists were ever exposed to basic Christian orthodoxy. Thank God for the musicians who preserved our orthodoxy. We preachers must start proclaiming the sublime scriptural truths of the Trinity and of the God-man, or face divine judgment. Perhaps you could start with this very passage, by helping your people discover the mystery of a singular “name” for the threefold God.

***E. The Final Critical Issue is the Loss of Missiological Clarity.***

A final calcified tissue is the rise of missionary methods that call for a Nicodemite secrecy rather than a bold witness to the lost. Some propose a “Camel method” of witness in Islamic and Hindu cultures. New Christians are encouraged to hide their faith, continue attending mosque or temple, and otherwise act like Muslims or Hindus. Ralph Winter and his U.S. Center for World Mission apparently consider baptism a Western rather than a biblical activity.<sup>23</sup> They forget that inward conversion to Christ must be followed by an external believers’ baptism, and that one cannot separate Christ from His church. Christians who do not practice baptism are simply not Great Commission Christians. Southern Baptist missionaries should firmly rebuke other missionaries who do not completely fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus said to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Without baptism the Great Commission remains unfulfilled! The rise of unbiblical missiological methods is unfortunate but not without precedent. In medieval Catholicism, people sought to build the Kingdom of God by following certain methods or having a pleasant liturgy. The focus was on humanly-devised methods rather than upon the free offering of divine grace through bold proclamation of the divine Word. The Reformers rebuked the sacramental methodologies of the Middle Ages. Baptists, the complete Reformers, should rebuke unbiblical methodologies, whether we find them among Roman Catholics or among other evangelicals. Baptists, through their “Bold Mission Thrust,” must boldly proclaim the Word of God!

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Robert Setzer, *Encounters with the Living Christ: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1999), critiqued in Yarnell, “Whose Jesus? Which Revelation?,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 1 (2003): 46–52.

<sup>23</sup>Ralph D. Winter, “Editorial Comment,” *Mission Frontiers* 27 (September–October 2005): 4–5. Elsewhere in this magazine issue devoted to “Insider Movements,” Frank Decker encourages missionaries to separate Christ from Christianity (8), Charles Kraft rejects fears about syncretism in favor of an extreme form of contextualization (9–11), and John and Anna Travis believe that God is “doing a new thing” to reach the remaining nations, effectively severing the connection between discipleship and baptism (12–15). Some Southern Baptist proponents of the Camel method appear to have embraced the Insider Movement, encouraging evangelists to misrepresent their Christianity. The Camel method relies more upon the Koran than the Word of God, which biblically and historically has been considered the only sufficient means of conversion. Cf. Kevin Greeson, *Camel Training Manual: The secret of the camel is out . . . Muslims are coming to faith in 'Isa* (Bangalore: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 45ff. Greeson’s book is sold by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Accessed 11 November 2005; available from <http://imbresources.org/index.cfm/fa/store.prodlist/CatID/23/DeptID/1.cfm>.

**Conclusion**

Oh! This Baptist heart is breaking for the loss of Baptist fidelity! Baptists, of whom Southern Baptists comprise the healthiest part, are besieged. Our faith is under assault. In the culture, in the ivory tower, and in the churches, we face huge and potentially debilitating challenges. To be quite honest, Baptists could be frightened for their future. Did Baptists not have a sovereign God Who providentially cares for His people, despair would arise. Fortunately, God is in control and true Baptists will ultimately survive and gain the victory by His grace. That said, we face greater challenges today than we have ever faced before. The Controversy or Conservative Resurgence of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century is a mere precursor to the battles for theological integrity which face us, some of which will make that episode look like child's play. Will you seek to propagate and preserve the Baptist heart?

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