

A Historical View of the Doctrinal Importance of Calvinism among Baptists

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Southern Baptists were the product of a complex of dynamics at work among Baptist Calvinists. The connective tissues, easily traceable because of their clearly partitioned distinctives, goes back at least as far as John Spilsbery who wrote in 1643, “I believe God out of the counsel of his will, did, before he made the world, elect and choose some certain number of his foreseen fallen creatures, and appointed them to eternal life in his Son, for the glory of his grace: which number so elected shall be saved, come to glory, & the rest left in sin to glorify his justice.” [John Spilsbury, *A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme* (London: 1643), 44] This same confessional conviction can be seen as distinctly operative in Roger Williams, John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes and William Screven, who urged the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, to “take care that the person be orthodox in faith, and of blameless life, and does own the confession of faith put forth by our brethren in London in 1689.” [Benedict, 1813, 2:123]

The Philadelphia Association retained these convictions by adopting the 1689 Confession as their own and judging theological orthodoxy in its light for two centuries: As an example the church planter John Gano wrote in 1784 in his exposition of the doctrine of “Effectual Calling” as an associational circular letter: “They are such as God hath chosen and predestinated both to grace and glory, elected and set apart in Christ, as redeemed by his blood, although by nature children of wrath even a others; . . . This is an

holy, heavenly, and, consequently, an high calling..” [*Minutes of the Philadelphia Association, 1707-1807*, 202].

As the Separate Baptists converged with the Regular Particular Baptist, they brought not only a First Great Awakening experiential zeal along with them but a fully compatible theological position as they covenanted under the influence of Shubal Stearns to uphold “particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ, effectual calling by the Holy Ghost; free justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ.” [Baker, Sourcebook, 18] Daniel Marshall, Stearns’s brother-in-law followed his lead in developing a confession for the Baptist church at Kiokee, Georgia, when he wrote, “According to God’s appointment in his word, we do hereby in his name and strength covenant and promise to keep up and defend all the articles of Faith, according to God’s word, such as the great doctrine of election, effectual calling, particular redemption, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, sanctification by the Spirit of God, Believers Baptism by Immersion, the saints absolute final perseverance in Grace.” Etc. [Thomas Ray, *Daniel and Abraham Marshall: Pioneer Baptist Evangelists in the South* (Springfield, IL: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 244] Daniel Marshall’s son, Abraham Marshall, founded the Georgia Baptist Association and gained the adoption of an abstract of doctrine in 1790 believing it was his duty to do so since it was “impossible to have communion where there is no union.” The abstract affirmed the “imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity” and the “corruption of human nature and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will-ability.” They asserted their belief in the “everlasting love of God to his people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race, to grace and glory” through a covenant of redemption “between the Father

and the Son, before the world began, in which their salvation is secure, and that they in particular are redeemed.” Those so elected in Christ in this eternal covenant, “will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported by the spirit and power of God, so that they shall persevere in grace, and not one of them be finally lost.” [Ibid., 247-48.]

The Charleston Association in its adoption of the 1689 Confession and in the preaching of such men as Oliver Hart, Richard Furman, Basil Manly, Sr., bequeathed the same theology to James P. Boyce. In his analysis of the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints, Boyce wrote, “This doctrine is inseparably associated with the other doctrines of grace which we have found taught in God’s word. So true is this, that they are universally accepted, or rejected together. The perseverance of the saints is a part of every Calvinistic confession. . . . All the evidence, therefore, of the truth of the doctrines already examined, may be presented in favour of this which is a necessary inference from them. In like manner, all the independent proof of this doctrine confirms the separate doctrines, and the system of doctrine, with which it is associated.” [J. P. Boyce *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 428] Boyce’s conviction at this point challenges the contemporary position of many Baptists who still maintain a doctrine of perseverance but separate it from the rest of the system of which it is intrinsically a part.

Southern Baptists of the nineteenth would have confirmed the Defence of Calvinism on the part of Charles Spurgeon who argued by query, “What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ . . .? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touchstone, will discover itself here. I have my own

private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith without works, nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called.’ [Spurgeon, *Autobiography* 1:168]

While Spurgeon never changed his position on the corrupting influence of non-Calvinist doctrine, he also knew that other theological movements were even more sinister. He believed that “Arminianism has usually been the route by which the older dissenters have traveled downward to Socinianism,” and that Calvinism had a “conservative force” for retention of vital truth; nevertheless, he professed to care “far more the central evangelical truths” than for Calvinism as a system. [*Sword and Trowel* April, 1887, 196] Spurgeon stood against a change within the Baptist Union that pressed away, not only the doctrines of grace, but compromised on other cardinal issues of revealed faith such as the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the inerrancy of Scripture, the entire system of imputation, and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps in a day when we are seeking a consensus it would be appropriate to remind ourselves that Calvinists have stood for more than just their distinguishing doctrines, but have held steadfastly to other doctrines that are essential for the health of Baptist churches in our day. On this basis one would hope to press for an agreement that

Calvinism has within it a core of doctrinal beliefs not unique to Calvinism but perhaps more consistently attested within the Calvinist system. I would like to explore some of these with you.

The Baptist Calvinist has historically been a consistent advocate of the divine inspiration of Scriptures. A large number of cogent defenses of the inerrancy of Scripture have been written by Calvinists. Some would say that these are among the most profound ever produced in Christian literature. Outside of Baptist life one would merely have to call to mind the affirmations of John Calvin [*Institutes* Book 1, chapter vi-x.], Francis Turretin [*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Topic Two (Giger and Dennison 55-1690)], John Owen [*Works*, 16:296-345], Charles Hodge [*Systematic Theology*, Chapter 6, 151-191], B. B. Warfield [*The Works of Benjamin Breckenbridge Warfield*, Volume 1 “Revelation and Inspiration”], J. Gresham Machen [*Christianity and Liberalism*], J. I Packer, and the late James Montgomery Boice to learn gratitude for the profundity of their grasp of this doctrine and its intrinsic importance for Christian faith. Within Baptist life the works of such Calvinists as John Spilsbery, Benjamin Keach, John Gill, Andrew Fuller, Charles Spurgeon, John L. Dagg and John A Broadus wrote specific defenses of biblical inspiration and inerrancy at critical junctures in the historical progress of Baptist witness to a variety of skeptics and unbelievers. Spilsbery bound himself to the witness of Scripture in setting forth a biblical church order believing that the apostles served as “unerring Oracles of God, and the infallible mouth of Christ,” so that to all the churches their “testimony was unquestionable.” [*The Baptists*, 1:115] Benjamin Keach defended the immediate inspiration of the Bible as “every part of it the genuine dictate of the Holy Ghost” [B&B, 79] “contained most exactly and most purely in the Originals.” [B&B, 80]

John L. Dagg wrote that “a careful examination of the inspired word has not only served to repel the charge [of inconsistency] by reconciling the apparent discrepancies, but it has added new proof that the Scriptures were written by undesigned and honest men without any collusion, and that there is perfect harmony in their statements, even when apparently most discordant.” [*Manual of Theology*, 34] John Broadus, who called Calvinism an “exalted system of Pauline truth” agreed with Dagg, not only in his Calvinism but in his confidence in Scripture affirming “Most cases of apparent disagreement in the inspired writings have been explained, and we may be sure that all could be explained if we had fuller information.” [John A Broadus, *A Catechism of Bible Teaching*, T&T, 198] He based this confidence on his biblically-taught conviction that “The inspired writers learned many things by observation or inquiry, but they were preserved by the Holy Spirit from error, whether in learning or in writing these things.” Catechism, T&T 198] Charles Spurgeon, the forementioned Calvinist, withstood in solitary splendor the destructive ravages of modernism in the Baptist Union of England and fought against the broadening attitude of acceptance of such doctrinal diversity. For his courage and his defence of an inerrant Bible he was rewarded with disdain and censure by the Baptists that should have embraced him as singularly faithful in his calling as a shepherd. “We who believe the Holy Scripture to be the inspired truth of God,” Spurgeon believed, “cannot have fellowship with those who deny the authority from which we derive all our teaching.”[B&B., 225, *Sword and Trowel*, November, 1887, 559]

In *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration* Basil Manly, Jr., the author of the *Abstract of Principles* that serves as the confessional standard for faculties at Southern and Southeastern Seminaries, presented a strong defense of biblical inspiration that affirms

the error-free character of the biblical text. Manly distinguished between revelation, inspiration, and illumination in a helpful way and also showed how God designed different kinds of outcomes from the variety of his superintending activities in the world. While we *connect* God's operations in providence both in nature and human affairs, his grace in redemption, his distribution of talent, strength, and wisdom among persons, and his work in producing an inspired volume, we also *distinguish* between the designed outcome of each these activities of God. Manly showed that whereas these other activities did not purpose to produce infallible truth, the divine activity of inspiration did intend it and, in fact, accomplished its intention with no violation of human personality. He defended plenary inspiration with this understanding: "the Bible as a whole is the Word of God, so that in every part of Scripture there is both infallible truth and divine authority. [B&B, 192, *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, 59.]

Calvinism provides a more consistent rationale for inerrancy than other theological systems. One of the most often repeated objections to the divine inspiration of Scripture is that its assumption of perfect divine control of the process runs roughshod over human freedom. Virtually every defender of inerrancy has to discuss the relation between inspiration and human freedom. The writers must be robots, automatons, so the objection goes, in order to produce an error-free text. Apart from such a dictatorial process, given the limitations imposed by sin and creatureliness, an *a priori* expectation is that the human author will make some slip along the way. The Calvinist system, however, has no stress between the freeness of human personality and verbal inspiration. God's particular providence over all events includes every choice of every moral creature without diminishing the free moral agency of the creature. Through the use of a variety of

means, God controls the entire complex of events in every sphere of his created order “according to the counsel of his own will” [Ephesians 1:11]. In the same way that God’s sovereignty brings about the fulfillment of his prophecies according to his decree with no violation of human freedom, so he inspired Scripture both as to authority and truthful content, that is, in a plenary way, without suspending the individual personality traits of every biblical writer. This view, called “compatibilism” in the wide-ranging debates on his issue was fully affirmed by Basil Manly when he wrote, “Yet this human personality of theirs [that is, the apostles] is not in the slightest degree incompatible with their utterance being at the same time the message of God.” [Manly, *Bible Doctrine*, 173]

The Baptist Calvinist has historically been a consistent advocate of a fully Trinitarian theology. Examples Calvinistic Baptists have been among the most ardent defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity. Benjamin Keach in his exposition of the Covenant of Redemption, John Gill in his treatises against Socinianism and Deism and in his arguments for the eternal generation of the Son, Boyce in his discussion of the personal relations in the Trinity in which he posits the biblical truth that these relations result “necessarily from the nature of God,” and John L. Dagg when he states “In the work of salvation, the divine persons co-operate in different offices; and these are so clearly revealed, as to render the personal distinction in the Godhead more manifest, than it is in any other of God’s works,” one sees a consistent trinitarian orthodoxy organically related to their entire system of thought. [254] The Second London Confession stated as a conclusion to its article on the Trinity “which doctrine of the Trinity in the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.” J. P. Boyce, at the close of a discussion of the person of Christ as it relates to atonement, concluded “The

doctrine of the Trinity lies, therefore, at the basis of that of the atonement, and hence the denial of the latter by all those who reject the former.” [ST 325]

Calvinists believe that their perception of salvation has an intrinsic dependence on the Trinity as is manifest in no other theological system. They believe the doctrines of grace are themselves a manifestation of the necessary co-equality of the persons in the Trinity. That which is intrinsic to the glory of one person of the Trinity necessarily involves the glory of the other persons. Each person undertakes to accomplish in the great works of God that which is most appropriate as an expression of the eternal relations within the Trinity. So it is true of Creation, Providence, and Redemption. What the Father knows, the Son knows and the Spirit knows. What the Father decrees, the Son decrees, and the Spirit decrees. That which the Father desires to effect, the Son desires to effect, and the Spirit desires to effect. The scheme of redemption in particular manifests the equality of the three persons of the Trinity in each of these ideas but at the same time shows the eternal distinctions of person. The Father elected, the Son in obedience to the will of the Father procured, and the spirit, honoring the will of the Father and the obedience of the Son, effects in the personal experience of the elect person. As Dagg reasoned on the basis of the scriptural data, “The Father alone is not presented as acting in a subordinate office; but appears as sustaining the full authority of the Godhead, sending the Son, and sending the Holy Spirit. . . . In this order of operation, inferiority of nature is not implied, in the subordination of office to which the Son and the Spirit voluntarily consent. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in each of the divine persons, and renders the fulfillment of the covenant infallibly sure, in all its stipulations.” [Dagg *Manual of Theology*, 255]

Because every aspect of salvation requires one of infinite power and glory to bring it about, Calvinism rests its soteriology on the doctrine of the Trinity. A system that does not require the same transactions, such as an atoning work by a sacrifice equal to the glory of the broken law and the offended deity, or a resurrection from death to life of spiritually incapacitated sinners does not require the same degrees of power and honor for each respective aspect of salvation and thus is more susceptible to heretical amendment on the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In light of this reality, John Dagg discussed the doctrine of the Trinity in his Book Seven, Doctrine Concerning Divine Grace.

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of substitutionary atonement. Central to the gospel is the atoning work of Christ. Scripture witness makes it abundantly clear that Christ in his death has taken on himself the penalty of our sins. “He Himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree,” Peter says [1 Peter 2:24] “He gave Himself for our sins,” Paul wrote, “that he might rescue us from this present evil age.” [Galatians 1:4] “He hath made Him who knew no sin to be made sin for us,” he wrote to the Corinthians [2 |Corinthians 5:21] and he reminded Titus, that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity.” The church at Ephesus was admonished to “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God” {Ephesians 5:2}. The writer of Hebrews argues for Christ’s substitutionary atonement throughout. He has “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” being “once offered to bear the sins of many.” [Hebrews 9:26, 28].

Calvinists have with only rare exceptions, the late-eighteenth-early-nineteenth-century New Divinity men, maintained this truth inviolate. As John Gill wrote, “Christ interposed, and offered himself in the covenant, to be a Mediator of reconciliation, or to

make satisfaction for sin; and so mercy and truth have met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” [John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, Baptist Faith Series (Baptist Standard Bearer), 232.] Oliver Hart in speaking of the way in which Christ as mediator has made intercession for transgressors argued, “This he did not by laboring to extenuate their crimes, but by offering himself as their sponsor, to stand in their room and stead; bear their sins; make an atonement for their guilt, restore to the law its honors, and answer the demands of justice.” [Minutes 186] Though Andrew Fuller has sometimes been represented as not accepting substitutionary atonement, there is no convincing and sustained evidence for such a proposal. “All those threatenings which belonged to him heretofore no longer stand against him” he preached as he surveyed the blessings that come to the Christian; “but are reckoned, by the judge of all, as having been executed on Jesus his substitute, who was ‘made a curse for us.’” [Fuller, Works 1:280 In a funeral sermon preached in 1790 entitled *Christ Our Substitute in Death and Judgment* Fuller described Christ’s work in the context of Isaiah 53. His expository comment after quoting several phrases is quite pointed: “He bore the wrath due to our sins. The shaft of vengeance spent itself in his heart!” {Ibid. 476.] James P. Boyce also gives several pages to his discussions of the substitutionary aspect of Christ’s suffering.

It is no surprise that each of these also argues that the atonement was either by design or by nature effectual only for the elect. But it is this very particularity that renders the atonement necessarily substitutionary. *Substitutionary*, in fact, seems to imply effectuality and particularity. If his death genuinely removed the judicial verdict against sin, then who among those for whom Christ has died will also suffer for his own sins? For this reason, many that do not hold to a definite effectual atonement remain open to

other options concerning Christ's death. The victory theory of Lutherans, the moral influence theory of Liberals, the moral government theory of Arminian Grotians have all been propounded to bypass the supposedly offensive implications of a truly substitutionary and propitiatory atonement. The Calvinist has the greatest stake in maintaining the biblical view of Christ's suffering in such a way as to redeem, reconcile, forgive sinners. "If we died with him, we shall live with him." A Calvinist pastor will always proclaim a substitutionary atonement.

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of religious liberty. Isaac Backus wrote his massive *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Baptists* as a defense and explanation of Baptist life as orthodox, growing, Calvinistic and thoroughly committed to religious liberty. He included narratives of the sufferings of Obadiah Holmes and John Clarke for the faith of Baptists and included their confessions of faith that the world might be aware of their Calvinistic orthodoxy. Clarke wrote, "All things with their causes, effects, and circumstances and manner of being, are decreed by God. . . . The special decree of God concerning angels and men is called predestination. . . . Election is the decree of God, of his free love, grace, and mercy, choosing some men to faith, holiness and eternal life, for the praise of his glorious mercy. . . . The cause which moved the Lord to elect them who are chosen, was none other but his mere good will and pleasure." [Isaac Backus. *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists* 3 vols (Newton Mass.: Backus Historical Society, 1871)1: 206. This was reprinted in one volume by Arno Press in New York, 1969] The confession of Obadiah Holmes includes the following: that God's providence extends "to the least creature and action" including

the reality that “No man can come to the Son but they that are drawn by the Father to the Son.” He also affirmed “God hath laid the iniquity of all his elect and called ones, upon him;” also “I believe none have the power to choose salvation, or to believe in Christ for life; it is only the gift of God.” [Ibid., 207-08] Clarke and Homes suffered, Holmes being mercilessly whipped, for their witness as Baptists. By the blood of their suffering they argued for liberty of conscience and separation of Church and state. Clarke’s work *Ill News from New England* described the events in which their suffering in Massachusetts came about and included an extended defense of liberty of conscience based on the Lordship of Christ and the sovereignty of God.

Backus described the continued struggle for religious liberty in Massachusetts after the Revolutionary War. The irony of the situation was that the Baptists maintained more purely the original theological position of the Puritan churches than those churches. As Backus noted, “In general, their faith and practice come the nearest to that of the first planters of New England of any churches now in the land, excepting in the single article of sprinkling infants.” Backus then gave fourteen articles of faith divided between soteriological articles and the implications of those truths for the formation of the church. After affirming the fall of humanity in the sin of Adam, Backus represented the Baptists as believing “That in infinite mercy the eternal Father gave a certain number of the children of men to his beloved Son, before the world was, to redeem and save; and that he, by his obedience and sufferings, has procured eternal redemption for them.” The next article stated “That by the influence of the Holy Spirit, these persons individually, as they come into existence, are effectually called in time, and savingly renewed in the spirit of their minds.’ He went on to affirm justification by faith based on the imputation of the

righteousness of Christ, perseverance of the saints, regenerate church membership and several other articles related to the church and the preaching ministry. Baptists, therefore held to the original intent of the “planters” of New England in producing a church composed of visible confessing saints called by sovereign grace, that governed its own affairs, disciplined its own membership, and selected its own ministers. Baptists held to all those and believed the only way to maintain such an ideal in perpetuity was through the New Testament ordinance of believer baptism.

John Leland joined in the Baptist struggle for religious liberty both in Virginia and Massachusetts. Leland believed that “Christ did, before the foundation of the world, predestinate a certain number of the human family for his bride” and that, therefore, “Jesus died for his elect sheep only” and would call them effectually and would keep them by his p[ower to “bring them safe to glory.” [John Leland, *Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. E. Greene (New York: Arno Press, 1969) 625. Because of this Leland also believed, “Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in that way that he can best reconcile it to his conscience.” [John Leland, *Rights of Conscience* in Robert A Baker, *A Baptist Sourcebook* (Nashville; Broadman Press, 1966), 40.]

The rationale for this position, beyond the fact that the exposition of the text combined with the regulative principle of church authority yielded this viewpoint, was clearly Calvinistic. Because of the fall, the human will is in bondage; only the effectual call of God can open the heart to believe. God is determined that all his elect shall come and no power of hell can keep him from saving his elect and thus building his church. In order, therefore, to build a church of living stones with a principle of holiness as their

driving motivation, one must eliminate all factors of external coercion. God builds his church through the preaching of his called and sent ministers, and not through government sponsorship or carnal intervention.

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of missions and evangelism. John L. Dagg was one of the most respected men in Baptist life until his death in 1884 when he was over ninety years old. His books of theology, apologetics, and ethics gained wide distribution among Southern Baptists. His theology text was the first used to teach Southern Baptist ministerial students at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. Broadus remarked that his theology was “remarkable for clear statement of the profoundest truths, and for devotional sweetness.” And reflected gratefully on the “pleasing impulse it gave to theological inquiry and reflection” in his own life. Dagg give expression to a warm evangelical Calvinism throughout his *Manual of Theology*. [John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint Harrisonbur, VA: Gano Books, 1982). He believed in the covenant of grace established before the foundation of the world in the eternal consultations within the triune God. Such an intra-trinitarian agreement extends “to all the works of God: ‘Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.’” [Ibid., 253] The covenant in particular treats the salvation of people as the result of the operation of all three persons of the Trinity. In this Trinitarian context of the covenant of Grace, Dagg described election: “All who will finally be saved, were chosen to salvation by God the Father, before the foundation of the world, and given to Jesus Christ in the Covenant of Grace.” [Ibid., 309] For the Son’s part in the Covenant Dagg stated, “The Son of God gave his life to redeem those who were given to him by the

Father in the Covenant of Grace.” [324] He reasoned through the entire issue and thinks the most scriptural and most reasonable view of Christ’s work is that he has borne the wrath of God for his people in accordance with the principles of distributive justice. [327-331] Also, “the Holy Spirit effectually calls all the elect to repent and believe” [331] The outward external call apart from regeneration always fails. This work Dagg described as omnipotent and, just as in the initial creation God’s purpose proceeded unresisted, “equally unresisted is the power by which he new-creates the heart” [333]. Dagg identified the internal operation that produces this effectual, and thus unresisted, calling as regeneration. In another context, Dagg discussed the work as Regeneration in its broadest sense of sanctification in which he stated that it proceeds with faith as its foundation. He is quick to add, however, even in that context, that regeneration in the sense of the new birth, the new creation, or being raised from death to life precedes faith and is the efficient producer of it. {Dagg: 279-282} God’s love toward his people operates as an efficient cause before it operates as a motive and “faith is produced by its efficient power.” {281}

Within the context of these expositions, Dagg turned aside objections to them on the account that they render evangelism useless. Then in a positive way in his *Manual of Church Order*, Dagg wrote, “Every Christian is bound to do what he can for the conversion of others, and for spreading the knowledge of truth,” but this call falls especially on the gospel minister who has been especially prepared and called, a call that includes a “sincere desire to glorify God, and save souls.” [Dagg *Manual of Church Order*, 243, 245] In a section on the “Duty of Baptists” Dagg asserted, “It is our duty to labor faithfully and perseveringly to bring all men to the knowledge of the truth.” [302]

He affirmed that the great commission “requires us to preach the gospel to every creature; and we ought to be foremost in obeying it.” He pointed to the far-reaching consequences of the obedience of William Carey and the English Baptists as well as the providential conversion of Judson and Rice to be regarded as “as a special call of God on American Baptists to labor for the spread of the gospel throughout the earth.” [303] This duty was not merely theoretical to Dagg. During his pastorate at Fifth Baptist in Philadelphia he remarked that “souls were given me in reward for my labor, not in large crowds, but in sufficient number to keep me encouraged.” He, along with friends in the Philadelphia Association, discussed “Can nothing be done to build the walls of Jerusalem in these troublous times?” Together they drew up a constitution for the Pennsylvania Missionary Association that eventually became the Pennsylvania Convention. When the Association had made some progress in collecting funds, Dagg received a visitor one day asking if there were any in the city “who cared for the souls that were perishing in the interior, where he had for some time been laboring as a missionary, self-sustained.”

[Autobiography, 30] That man Eugene Kincaid, became the first agent of the Missionary Association and under his labor the Baptist cause in Pennsylvania enlarged.

Calvinists are no less committed to the evangelistic preaching of the gospel than they are to the necessity of the incarnation. Christ’s fervency for the glory of his Father in descending to earth is the model for our fervency in preaching this good news. When one objected that election precludes evangelism, Dagg responded “The objection to election applies equally to every part of the divine purpose, and proceeds on the supposition that God has predetermined the end without reference to the means by which it is to be accomplished.[Dagg 315] None preached the truths of the doctrines of grace with greater

fervor than Spurgeon. But without any fear of its being a contradiction, he would say, “Anybody who calls off the thoughts of the church from soul-saving is a mischief-maker.” [“Travailing for Souls,” *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, 9:29] “If any minister,” Spurgeon proposed, “can be satisfied without conversion, he shall have no conversions. God will not force usefulness on any man. It is only when our heart breaks to see men saved, that we shall be likely to see sinners’ hearts broken.” [“Travailing for Souls.” Spurgeon’s *Sermons* (;17)] Obadiah Holmes, mentioned above, included in his confession an article on God’s ordained means of calling his elect: “I believe,” he wrote, “although God can bring men to Christ, and cause them to believe in him for life, yet he hath appointed an ordinary way to effect that great work of faith, which is by means of sending a ministry into the world, to publish repentance to the sinner, and salvation, and that by Jesus Christ.” [Backus, 208]

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of Christ-centered preaching. Baptist Calvinists have been clear and consistent in their Christ centered emphasis. Every Christian knows the glory of Christ and sees in Scripture and feels in his soul the pre-eminence of Christ as the avenue to salvation and the glory of God. Richard Fuller, a strong Calvinist that served churches in South Carolina and Maryland, had a homiletic compass that always gravitated toward Christ. In a sermon entitled “The Gospel not a Philosophy, but a Revelation” Fuller consistently led his hearers to see the glory of Christ as constituting the sum of all the revelation that God has given and the answer to all the apparent impossibilities that human reason could never overcome. The revelation meets every longing of the human soul and intellect and “carries along with it self-authenticating credentials; but its communications entirely

transcend the discoveries which our senses or our reason ever could have made.”

[Richard Fuller *Sermons by Richard Fuller*, 1:19] Christ is the *wisdom* of God in that his incarnation and death solved the insoluble dilemma of how guilty and unholy creatures could be righteous. Christ is the *power* of God in that that which pure omnipotence could not do as a matter of arbitrary force, was done through the incarnation and passion of Christ. “God has but to will,” Fuller, preached, “and on earth, in heaven, in hell, over the entire universe, all things are controlled by an impulse as direct and irresistible as that communicated by my will to the nerves by which I open and shut my hand.” But forgiveness is not a matter of unmitigated omnipotence but a matter of a necessary moral transaction. Because of the Man Christ Jesus, “The Lord of life and glory expiring upon a cross,” a guilty unholy one “appears before the inspection of Omniscience clothed in a perfect righteousness.” [Fuller, 26] The gospel also is a revelation of the love of God that comes in the form of “mercy to sinners.” No one knows or exhibits love but the one that gave his only Son as a propitiation for sin. Such love is “not a weakness, a blind effeminate attachment overlooking the guilt of its object; but love, holy, righteous, uncompromising in its abhorrence of sin; and yet rescuing the lost and ruined by an interposition before which reason is staggered, imagination recoils, and faith can only wonder, admire, weep rejoice, adore.” [Fuller 29] The revelation of this gospel concerns things prepared from eternity. Nothing has taken God by surprise or defeated his purpose of glorifying himself by preparing a people for a prepared place. It all resides in Christ. “By the redemption which is in Jesus, even the existence of moral evil—that dark mystery—is overruled, so as to reflect amazing splendor upon all the divine perfections and at the same time to exalt those who are saved from among men to an immortality of

surpassing blessedness and glory.” All are called, but only those that love will come for the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to those that are perishing but the power of God to those being saved. Faith is “something more than the conviction of the intellect; that until love opens our eyes, the things of the Gospel are hidden from us; that it is love which comprehends, feels, rejoices in the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Like Fuller, Boyce saw these truths of grace as finding their coherence in the person and work of Christ. Boyce’s great sermon on “Christ Receiving and Eating with Sinners” has a Christ-centered focus that should be the goal of every gospel preacher to emulate. Christ waits on sinners, Christ seeks sinners, and Christ rejoices in the coming of sinners and invites them with all earnestness to come to him. And “shouts out his triumph throughout the realms of heaven, and the angelic hosts rejoice at the salvation of a single man.” [Boyce Sermons, 81]

Spurgeon opened the Metropolitan Tabernacle with the unmistakable affirmation of the centrality of Christ. “I would propose,” he preached,” that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; . . . I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist. . . . but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply—“It is Jesus Christ.” My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill has left a body of divinity admirable and excellent in its way; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.”

[MTP, 1861, 169] As he developed his thought more, he focused on what, indeed, it meant to preach Christ. In one section pertinent to our intent here, we hear him remind us that if one preaches Christ he must of necessity preach doctrine. “If I preach Christ I must preach him as the covenant head of his people, and how far am I then from the doctrine of election? If I preach Christ I must preach the efficacy of his blood, and how far am I removed then from the great doctrine of an effectual atonement? If I preach Christ I must preach the love of his heart, and how can I deny the final perseverance of the saints? If I preach the Lord Jesus as the great Head and King, how far am I removed from divine sovereignty? Must I not, if I preach Christ personally, preach his doctrines?”

Baptist Calvinists affirm a christocentric revelation and gospel because that the emphasis of Scripture. If the Calvinist properly understands Paul’s affirmation that our calling is in accord with his own purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began [2 Timothy 1:9] and that he has given us all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, the proper response is to drive every message toward Christ. The Father’s purpose of glorifying Himself is Christ-centered and the Spirit’s work of drawing sinners to salvation is the same as drawing them to Christ. If any would see God glorified and sinners saved then the preacher’s exposition must lead to Christ, the one in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. Election can not save apart from Christ; irresistible grace cannot save without establishing union with Christ; Christ’s death was fully effectual because of who he was. The Calvinist believes that God operates by means that are consistent with his character, and the only one in whom salvation resides in a way consistent with the character of God is in Christ.

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of holiness of life. When John A. Broadus wrote in his *Catechism of Bible Teaching*, “The only sure proof of being a true believer is growing in holiness and usefulness even to the end,” he merely stated in shortened form what Calvinistic Baptist theologians and preachers had been saying since the seventeenth century. Benjamin Keach argued strongly for the necessity of holiness as naturally concomitant to justification. [W]here justification is, there is also sanctification; a man is not sanctified that is not justified, nor are any actually justified that are not sanctified; though it is true, "God justified the ungodly . . . yet God doth not leave them unsanctified by the Spirit. [Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*. 547, 548] The Christian, therefore, is "not to work for Life, but from Life." If one is justified, then assuredly faith has been wrought in his heart by the Holy Spirit, a "Principle of Life wrought in the Soul" which causes one to "live a Holy Life and renounce all Sin and Iniquity from a Principle of Faith." The Christian sees sin as "so hateful unto God, and so abominable in his Sight" that out of love to Christ he desires to "do all things whatsoever he commandeth him." [Keach *Display of Glorious Grace*, 60]

Abraham Booth (1734-1806), the English Particular Baptist preacher noted for his book *Reign of Grace*, wrote in his personal confession of faith “I believe the absolute necessity of regeneration in order to eternal life; and am fully persuaded, that *without holiness*, that is, a real love of God producing cheerful obedience to his commands, *no man*, whatever his religious pretensions or professions may be, shall see the Lord.” In sermon on Galatians 5:22, 23 by Booth outlined every manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit as arising from the dual sources of revealed truth and the Spirit’s efficacious work. “Every holy disposition, “Booth contended, “so far as it is really holy in its exercise, is

under the influence of divine authority, and is produced by divine agency, through the instrumentality of truth.” After his full exposition of the text Booth closed, “Such, my brethren, is the morality of the New Testament. So perfectly fitted are the genius of the gospel, and the doctrines of grace, to produce in the heart, and to manifest in the life, those tempers ‘against which there is no law.’” [Abraham Booth, *The Works of Abraham Booth*, ed. Michael Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 29f,41, 49. This is volume one of a projected three volumes set by Particular Baptist Press.]

For the Calvinist, the divine purpose in election, atonement, and effectual calling, is the gathering of a people zealous of good works. Because regeneration is an immediate and sovereign operation of God, it alters the affections and necessarily gives rise to hatred of sin and remorse for it. The new heart embraces Christ and his righteousness and then seeks to practice righteousness because Christ is righteous [1 John 3:7]. The Calvinistic Baptist in a way consistent with his system expects holiness in increasing measure in all the people of God.

The Baptist Calvinist has been historically a consistent advocate of regenerate church membership. The *Summary of Church Discipline* of the Charleston Association said that “a particular gospel church consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body.” It is not to be built “with dead but living materials. None have a right to church membership, but such as Christ will own as his sincere followers at the last decisive day.” If a man is not born again he may not enter the kingdom of God “or in to a gospel church.” P. H. Mell, the outspoken Calvinist from Georgia, began his book of *Corrective Church Discipline* with the statement, “It is the Saviour’s will of precept that the constituents of His churches shall

be regenerated persons. He authorizes none to receive the ordinance of Baptism, and to have a lot among His visible people, but those who believe with the heart that He is the Son of God.” [Dever, Polity, 422] An article that appeared in the Baptist Record in 1882 and reprinted in the Christian Index examined the anxious bench method of evangelism and found it as a whole “pernicious.” The abuse connected with this system has “resulted in grievous injury to our churches by filling them with an unconverted membership; and this last,” so the article goes on to assert, “is one great reason . . . why our efficiency as a denomination is not commensurate with our numerical strength.” Christian Index, November 9<1882, 1]

One need never fear that a Baptist who is a Calvinist will go lightly on this Baptist distinctive of regenerate church membership. Historically their commitment to the new covenant in which God writes his law on the heart has made them zealous for receiving only those that can articulate an experience of grace. The gradual compromise of the ideal of regenerate church membership as indicated by our deceitful numbers has coincided with the loss of two practices essential for maintaining this distinctive; one, care in receiving members, and two, care in maintaining spiritual health in the entire congregation through close attention to both formative and corrective discipline.

Concluding Remark: It can hardly be denied that those issues that mark Southern Baptists so strongly found their most vocal and articulate advocates from Calvinistic ranks. In contemporary Southern Baptist life, their strongest defenders will be Calvinists. What an anomalous, even tragic, irony it would be for those that birthed the Convention and fostered its foundational strengths with such a firmly grounded theology

should now be seen as enemies of its mission and its effectiveness in the world. Brethren,
this cannot be.