

Back To Bedrock

Messages On Our Historic Baptist Faith

Paul W. Powell

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The scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

Dedication

*A host of Baptist forebears came to Texas
from throughout the United States and
from various nations of the world.*

*They established in Texas
one of the strongest Baptist witnesses to Christ
on the bedrock of solid biblical doctrine and polity.
This book is dedicated to those Baptists.*

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Foreword

This book is the product of Baptist cooperation. Paul W. Powell, author of numerous books, responded positively to a request to prepare a book of sermons on the bedrock of Baptist beliefs.

The request came out of a conversation between E. Eugene Greer, Jr., and me in our roles as volunteer staff members with the Baptist Distinctives Committee/Texas Baptist Heritage Center of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Gene Greer, who served as Director of Projects and Research prior to his death in July of 2003, felt there was a need for a book on basic Baptist beliefs and doctrines. Further discussion led to the conclusion that two books rather than one would be helpful: one a book of sermons on basic Baptist beliefs, the other a book for church members on Baptist heritage, beliefs, and polity that I was already in the process of writing.

Paul Powell was the choice to do the book of sermons. He is an experienced pastor, Baptist denominational leader, former president of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, current Dean of the George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University, and author of numerous books including books of sermons. When approached with the idea, Paul Powell agreed to write this book.

The book is unique in that the messages are based on Baptist beliefs as expressed by those who, in 1840, formed the first Baptist association in Texas. Because the Baptists who drafted those Articles of Faith came from churches throughout the United States to settle in the frontier Republic of Texas, the faith they articulated is not provincial, that is a “Texas Baptist” version of Baptist beliefs. Rather they are in many ways the bedrock beliefs of Baptists from

a wide variety of geographical areas and of church backgrounds. Therefore, persons from throughout the United States and beyond can identify with the content of this volume of sermons—the bedrock of Baptist beliefs.

Funding for the project came from various sources, including the Baptist Distinctives Committee/Texas Baptist Heritage Center, a grant from the Prichard Family Foundation, individuals, and the James and Irene Landes Fund that has been provided by Ruth and Bill Pitts, daughter and son-in-law of the Landeses, for projects of the Texas Baptist Heritage Center. Various persons contributed time and effort, such as the staff of the George W. Truett Theological Seminary and the volunteer staff of the Texas Baptist Heritage Center. Nancy Floyd, assistant to the Dean at Truett Seminary, typed the initial rough draft of the manuscript. Doris Tinker, volunteer Director of Organization and Communication with the Texas Baptist Heritage Center, helped in many ways to bring the project to completion such as researching original documents, verifying sources, and general editing. Gary Wilder, who has published a number of Paul Powell's books, guided the volume to its final printed form.

Cooperation is a key component in Baptist life and to all who cooperated to make this volume of sermons possible appreciation and gratitude are owed.

William M. Pinson, Jr.
Director (volunteer), Texas Baptist Heritage Center
Executive Director Emeritus, Baptist General Convention
of Texas
Dallas, Texas
2003 A. D.

Preface

When asked to do a book of sermons on Baptist beliefs I pondered what approach to take. I thought about the many statements of faith that have been developed by Baptists through the years. The more I thought about it, I felt I would use the first statement of faith adopted by Baptists in Texas when they formed the first Baptist association in Texas. As much as any statement of faith, it focuses on bedrock Baptist beliefs. And it is much briefer and more to the point than statements of faith that came later.

It was several months before I finally decided to undertake this writing. These pages are the result. I am aware that no Baptist can speak for another, and I do not desire or pretend to do that. Certainly these pages are not the “official” position of any Baptist organization. Nor have I made an effort to exhaust the doctrinal statements that I address. My singular purpose is to offer sermons on what I believe to be Baptist views about these subjects. It is my hope that these messages will encourage pastors to preach their own sermons on these basic doctrines that we cherish and to provide grist for their sermonic mill. If I can accomplish that, our Baptist people will be better informed about what it means to be a Baptist, our churches will be stronger doctrinally, and our evangelism and missions will be more effective.

Paul W. Powell, Dean
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Waco, Texas
2003 A. D.

Introduction

The first missionary Baptist church in Texas was organized with eight members at Washington-on-the-Brazos, in November 1837. Soon, other churches were organized and Baptist work began to flourish and prosper. Naturally as the number of churches grew, the pioneer preachers and church members sought to duplicate the Baptist organizational structures that they had known before coming to the frontier. So, in June 1840, four ministers and about 25 Baptist church members gathered at Independence, Texas, for the purpose of forming the first Baptist association in Texas. Two of those ministers were strong Calvinists with anti-missionary views. The result was, after several days of fruitless discussion, the meeting adjourned without action.

On October 8 of that same year, the Baptists in the area tried again to form an association. This time, 11 messengers from three churches with a combined membership of 45 met at Travis, a few miles south of Brenham. All three churches were missionary Baptist churches – and T.W. Cox was pastor for all three churches. In those days, because there were so few pastors, some served more than one church at a time, traveling from church to church to hold services. Cox was chosen as the first moderator of the association. R. E. B. Baylor, a district judge and lay preacher, was also present. Z. N. Morrell, pastor of a fourth church nearby, was sympathetic with the effort but could not attend due to illness.

All four churches had previously ratified a list of 11 brief Articles of Faith. So the group voted unanimously to form a missionary association based on those Articles of Faith, adopted a Bill of Inalienable Rights, and laid ambitious plans for strengthening the churches and winning

Texas to Christ. They also adopted a Constitution as well as 15 Rules of Decorum, and asked Judge Baylor to write a Circular Letter addressing all of the churches of Texas. Copies of all of these documents, just as they wrote them, along with the minutes of their meeting, can be found in the appendix.

By statement or implication these documents established the basic tenets of early Baptists in Texas. The first and most obvious thing about their statement is its brevity: eleven brief articles covered the essentials of their faith. By contrast, statements of faith developed by Baptists in subsequent years have become longer and longer. Apparently, the more our denomination grows, the more detailed our statements of faith become.

The Articles of Faith clearly were not considered to be a creed by early Baptists in Texas. This was voluntary, a statement of what was generally believed, while a creed is obligatory and something that must be accepted. These were autonomous churches filled with free and independent thinking Baptists, and the documents adopted by the early Baptists affirmed the freedom of both the individual and the churches. At that time, neither individuals nor churches were coerced by Baptists in religious matters; membership and participation were voluntary.

These brief, concise articles represented the essentials of the faith of the early Baptists in Texas who formed the Union Baptist Association and the foundation on which they would build a cooperative work to win Texas to Christ. As such, they were bedrock convictions. They were sufficient then, and they are sufficient now. If Baptists will take seriously our responsibility to Christ and respect one another's liberty in Christ, we can work together for him in any time in history just as early Baptists did in their day. Their record of achievement is awesome. Today, Texas Baptists owe much to the dedication, vision, and convictions of those who formed this first Baptist organization in Texas

which reached beyond the organization of local congregations.

Texas Baptists and, indeed, Baptists everywhere in every generation need to duplicate their vision, dedication, convictions, and spirit of acceptance and cooperation to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly lost Texas community and the world. We need to do it for Christ's sake. We need to do it for our sake. And we need to do it for the sake of the lost in Texas as well as those around the world.

Chapter 1



God

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe in the existence of one God, and that there is a Trinity of Characters in the God-head, — the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet not three Gods, but only one true and living God. (Article 1)

The God Who Is

Acts 14:8-12

When Mark Twain was at the height of his career, he met dignitaries from all over the world. The story goes that, one day, his young daughter said to him, “Daddy, if this keeps up, pretty soon you are going to know everybody in the world except God.”

It would be a tragedy to go through life and never know God, or perhaps worse, to have a distorted view of him. William Temple reminds us, “If you have a false idea of God, the more religious you are, the worse it is for you — it would be better for you to be an atheist.”

We are aware, of course, that God is greater than our understanding of him will ever be. In the words of the author of Ecclesiastes, “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all” (Ecclesiastes 11:5). We cannot understand ourselves, much less our Creator, but the more

we know about him, the more we want to worship and honor him.

We are like Gamalial Bradford when he began to write his book on Robert E. Lee. He initially approached the subject in a spirit of hostility. He had little sympathy with the South, and so at first he decided that the title of his book would be *Lee, The Rebel*. As he studied the material and came to know the man better, however, he decided that “rebel” was not quite the right word, so he changed it to *Lee, The Southerner*. After he read more and knew Lee still better, he decided that to call him “Southerner” was also inadequate. Therefore, he changed the book’s title to the one you now know: *Lee, The American*.

The apostle Paul helps us better know God on the occasion of healing a crippled man at Lystra (Acts 14:8-12). When the people witnessed this miracle, they believed that Paul and Barnabas were really gods who had come to earth like men. The idea that God would someday visit this planet is an ancient truth that is no doubt a remnant of the original revelation God gave to Adam of a promised salvation (Genesis 3:15). References to this exist in most other religions of the world, indicating that man at some time heard or sensed that God would visit the earth.

In their excitement, they called Barnabas “Jupiter” or “Zeus,” the chief god, because he was the leader. They called Paul “Mercurius” or “Hermes,” the god of oratory, because he was the spokesman.

The people of Lystra were ready to worship Paul and Barnabas, but Paul protested, declaring that they were only men possessing the same weaknesses and frailties as everyone else. Then he seized the moment by encouraging them to reject their false gods – who were not gods at all – and to accept the one true living God.

In his sermon, the apostle helps the people of Lystra and us to form the right idea about God. He points to three things about God that we need to know.

- He is the God of creation.
- He is the God of revelation.
- He is the God of salvation.

Only Two Choices

First, God is the God of creation. Mankind has always been interested in origins: we want to know where we and the world came from and how it all got here. These are reasonable questions. After all, we have the world on our hands, and it demands an explanation.

There are only two explanations to choose from: either the world created itself, or someone else created it. To think that the world made itself is preposterous. Can you think of anything else that has made itself?

Paul's answer is that God is the one who "made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15). The Bible opens with that affirmation. The scriptures say, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Translated, the word "created" is the Hebrew word "bara," which suggests the idea of making something from nothing. God did not take a lump of clay, roll it into a ball, toss it into space, and call it the Earth. He did not take a piece of yellow construction paper and a child's scissors to cut out the stars and tack them to the inner lining of the universe and call it the heavens. Instead, he took nothing, and from that he made everything.

Man can take something and make something. He can take lumber and build a house. He can take steel and manufacture a car. He can take a lump of clay and fashion a vase. But the living God took nothing and made everything from it.

This, of course, is a faith assumption. It happened only once, and it can't be duplicated. No one was there to see it except God, so either we take his word for it, or we guess as to how the universe got here.

The idea that the universe made itself is even more ridiculous when it is presented on another level. Let me illustrate. History tells us that atheist Robert Ingersoll once visited the great preacher Henry Ward Beecher, who took Ingersoll into his study to show him his theological books. Beecher's study also housed a magnificent contoured globe of the world, complete with mountains and valleys rendered in a beautiful, creative work of art.

Ingersoll, a bright, highly educated man, looked at the globe and said: "Beecher, that is a beautiful work of art. Who made it for you?"

Challenging Ingersoll's denial of God's creation, Beecher replied, "Oh, nobody. It just happened."

Set on that scale, Ingersoll knew better than that, and so do we. If we can't believe that a model of the world made itself, how can we believe that a universe, as vast and as complex, as predictable and majestic as ours is, made itself?

The wisest of those who study the universe agree. Physicist and mathematician, Sir James Jeans, after a lifetime of studying the universe wrote a book entitled *The Mysterious Universe* in which he stated: "The universe is beginning to look more like a great thought than a great machine. The vast creation all about us seems to be the expression of thought. If this is so, it seems reasonable to say that the thought is that of a great thinker, God."

Wernher von Braun, who headed the U.S. space rocket development program, once observed about the universe that he could not envision the entire universe coming into being without something like a divine will or the creation without the concept of a creator. He noted that space flight requires great precision in calculating celestial movements, forces and timing, but added that the exacting physical laws had already been built into nature, from which science merely learns. In other words, according to von Braun, the laws are there and must have been laid down by some-

one.

Yet another scientist, Walter F. Burk, who managed the Mercury and Gemini Space projects, told how his study of space had increased his faith in God, indicating that the further man penetrated space, the more he was confronted with the wisdom, majesty, and omnipotence of God.

When we look at the heaven and the earth, what we see seems to have “Made by God” stamped on it. How else can we account for it?

The Many Witnesses

Second, God is the God of revelation. Paul says that God has never left himself without a witness in the world. He points first to the goodness of God in nature. Paul says, “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

Have you considered the goodness of God when he created our world? In all his works, God was and is planning for our welfare and our dependence on his thoughtfulness! Without his rain, we have no food to eat; without his sun, we freeze to death; without his air, we would suffocate. It is this very goodness of God, Paul declares, that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

A friend recently ate in a restaurant that was decorated with red, white, and blue patriotic posters that read “Bless America.” Surprised that the posters did not read “God Bless America,” she asked the manager why God had been omitted. She said the manager responded by saying that they did it to keep from offending anyone. My friend told him that without God, we have no blessings. She was right: “Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights . . .” (James 1:17).

Whether you look in a microscope or a telescope, the

message is always the same: God is the God of power and intelligence, order and goodness and our world bears his trademark. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning scaled the heights of truth with these words: “Earth’s crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God.”

As long as the stars shine, the rains fall, and the seasons change with predictability, God will have a witness in the world. In the days of the French Revolution when anti-religious sentiment was strong, a Christian saw a man destroying an object of devotion in a church. “We are going to destroy everything that reminds people of God,” the man said. “Ah,” said the Christian, “but you cannot pull down the stars.”

The apostle Paul had only time enough to point to one witness to God before his sermon was interrupted by the angry mob from Antioch, who stoned him and left him for dead. If he had been able to finish his sermon, he would no doubt have pointed to conscience as another witness to God. His moral law is written on the hearts of men. The Scriptures say, “Man’s conscience is the lamp of the eternal” (Proverbs 20:27, Moffat). The very existence of conscience within us is a reflection of God in the soul of man. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, philosopher Immanuel Kant noted two things that never ceased to fill his heart with awe and wonder: “the starry heavens above me and the moral imperative within me.” Without, there is creation; within, there is conscience.

The Scriptures are also a witness to God. Nature and her laws speak to us about God, but the message is fragmented. It tells us nothing of the love and grace of God. Conscience, in our innermost being, tells us of God, but its message is partial. Without the Bible we could never know God’s name, and we could never know his character and personality. The only place we find a clear revelation of a personal God is in his word: the Bible.

The full and final witness comes to us through Jesus

Christ. The Scriptures say:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Concerning Christ, the Scriptures say, “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). This manifestation of God is by far the most complete revelation that God ever gave to the world. If you want to know what God is like, look closely at Jesus Christ. He displayed not only the wisdom, power, and majesty of God, but also the justice, mercy, grace, and love of God.

God Believes in You

Finally, the living God is the God of salvation. Paul was unable to finish his sermon to the people of Lystra, but if he had, no doubt he would have preached the gospel – he always did. He would have declared, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

How can we know God in a personal way? In the same way you can know a watchmaker. You can look at his work and tell something about him: his intelligence, skill, and love of beauty, for instance. Yet to know him, he has to open his heart to you. If he sealed his lips, you would never really know much of him.

It is the same with God. You can look at his work and

know something about him, but if God did not open his heart, we could never really know him. He has done that through Jesus Christ. At a specific time in a specific place, God invaded the earth. He broke through human history at a place called Bethlehem. At that point, God made his Normandy; he established his beachhead in human affairs. God became human flesh.

Although God is one person, he reveals himself bearing three relationships to man: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, known as the Trinity. While the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, beyond explanation and our understanding, the truth is nevertheless there and necessary to express those relationships. Someone once expressed it this way: “All there is of God is in the Father, all that was ever seen of God is in the Son, all that was ever felt of God is in the Holy Spirit.”

When the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus of Nazareth, she did not give birth to a personality. She gave birth to a body. The personality had existed forever because the personality was the personality of God. The apostle John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John also tells us that God made all things great and small — and without him, nothing was made. Thus, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:3,14).

Jesus Christ was older than his mother. He made the ground she walked on, the air she breathed, and the water she drank. Most mothers look to heaven in gratitude for the new life that has been given to them, but Mary looked down to heaven in gratitude, because heaven was in her arms.

George Bernard Shaw in his play *Man and Superman* once cautioned, “Beware of the man whose God is in the skies.”² I am not exactly sure what he meant by that, but in Christ, the dreams of the people of Lystra that God would come down to man were fulfilled. “But when the fullness

of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). The living God came to earth as a man and lived among us. In time, he died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again. In him, and in him alone, there is salvation from sin. That is the gospel Paul would have preached.

In a scene from one of my favorite movies, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, an elderly priest speaks to the young convict, the Count, encouraging him to turn to God. The despairing prisoner complains, saying that he does not believe in God. The wise priest replies, “No matter — he believes in you.” God believes in you enough to think of your needs and provide for them in his creation. He believes in you enough to make himself known to you by revelation, and he believes in you enough to come to earth and die for your salvation. Now, will you believe in him?

Chapter 2



The Scriptures

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are revealed from God, and that they contain the only true system of faith and practice. (Article 2)

The Book We Believe

2 Timothy 3:16-17

On a recent trip to China, a Truett Seminary professor learned that the Bible could not be sold in bookstores in China – only in churches. The reason? The law prohibited two kinds of literature from being sold in public — pornographic and seditious.

Which category do you think the Bible falls under? The professor, who knows well the contents of the Old Testament, joked that the Bible could be disqualified on both counts. But the real reason, of course, is that it is considered seditious by the Communist leaders.

During Romania's Communist era, the government required a permit to carry or own a Bible. Nelu and Verginica Prodan, both lawyers who defended Romanian Christians in religious liberty cases during that period, were harassed and arrested as “enemies of the state” for distributing Bibles from their garage to the oppressed believers of Romania. According to Verginica, whose family eventually moved to Texas, the government reasoned that the Bible

was a weapon in the hands (and hearts) of people, and thus should be regulated and restricted just like handguns.

Attempts like this to squelch the message of the Bible are not new. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin gives the following description of the difficulties under which the Bible was read in the home of his great-great grandfather, who lived in England under the reign of Queen Mary:

They had got an English Bible, and to conceal and secure it, it was fastened open with tapes under and within the cover of a joint-stool. When my great-great grandfather read to the family, he turned up the joint-stool upon his knees, turning over the leaves then under the tapes. One of the children stood at the door to give notice if he saw the apparitor coming, who was an officer of the spiritual court. In that case the stool was turned down again upon its feet, when the Bible remained concealed under it as before.¹

It's strange, don't you think, that a book this old, which emphasizes love and peace and the highest ethical values known to man, should be considered dangerous. But the Bible is a dangerous thing — especially to those who would crush the human spirit, oppress the powerless, or restrict God's spirit. They know that because of its message, they cannot, for long, enslave Bible reading and believing people.

And in spite of the powers of all of these governments, with their military might and Gestapo-style police, they have not been able to destroy the influence of The Book. So, you might ought to look around your house to see if there are any Bibles on coffee tables or within the reach of children and houseguests. Like a handgun, it can explode in the human heart, killing the rebellious sinful will and triggering an eternal change of destiny, and you could be held accountable.

What is there about the Bible that makes it so loved and, at the same time, so feared by certain people? The apostle Paul helps us to understand when he writes, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

In these verses, the apostle Paul tells us that the Bible is:

- Divine in its origin.
- Authoritative in its message.
- Sufficient in its scope.

The Breath of God

First, the Bible is divine in its origin. The apostle says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16). What does that mean? The word “inspired” means “God-breathed.” During the winter, if we breathe on a pane of glass, our breath congeals into crystals of ice. Likewise, God breathed on men, and it crystallized into the scriptures. Just as a mighty blast of wind through the pipes of an organ produces beautiful music, so did the breath of God, through the lives of men who were in tune with his will, produce the Scriptures.

Peter helps us understand inspiration more clearly when he tells about holy men who spoke as they were “moved” by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:21). The Greek word for “moved” means “to be picked up and borne along.” The same word is used in Acts to describe what happened to the ship the Apostle Paul was traveling on to Rome. The ship was caught in a violent storm, and it appeared as though it would be dashed against the rocks. In an effort to save the ship and their own lives, the sailors threw the cargo overboard to lighten the load, wrapped ropes under

the hull to strengthen it, lowered the sails, and prayed as the ship was “driven” by the wind (Acts 27:17). The word “driven” and the word “moved” are translations of the same Greek word.

Like the wind that pushed the ship and drove it forward, so the Spirit of God came upon men and moved them to write the Holy Scripture. Those men who wrote the Bible were men upon whom the Spirit of God came with such force that they were compelled to write what they wrote. Like Jeremiah, God’s word was like a fire in their bones, and they could not keep it to themselves.

What is the scope of inspiration? It encompasses the totality of Scripture. The apostle Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The sentence construction in the original language is such that the word “all” signifies “every single part of the whole.” Inspiration is as broad as Scripture itself. Each single part of it is from God.

Some people want to believe that parts of the Bible are inspired and other parts are not, so they pick and choose the parts they believe are true. But if you believe part of the Bible and reject part of the Bible, it is not the Bible you believe, but yourself.

How did God inspire men to write the Scriptures? What method did he use? We are not told. Scholars have developed many theories of inspiration. Two of the most common are the “dictation theory” and the “dynamic theory.” The dictation theory says that men received every word from God, i.e., he dictated scripture and men transcribed it word for word as he told them.

The dynamic theory is the inspiration of ideas. It suggests that God impressed truths on men and allowed them to choose their own words to express these truths.

Let me illustrate. Over the years, I have had good secretarial assistance. Occasionally I have given a letter that I have received to a secretary and asked for a response to

be written. Our working association has been such that there was an implicit understanding of what needed to be communicated.

This is the dynamic method — the one I believe that God used in giving us Holy Scripture. This is the best way to account for the differences in style and unique phrases of the various biblical writers. That's why Paul does not sound like John, and John does not sound like Peter.

Regardless of how he did it, we believe that God guided and guarded the writers of Scripture so that they gave us the message he wanted us to hear. Besides, it is the message, and not the process, that matters.

How can we be sure the Bible is inspired? Why shouldn't we believe it is just another book written by men? There are many evidences of inspiration, one being its amazing unity. More than 40 authors representing every walk of life and many different countries wrote the Bible over a period spanning some 1,500 years. Yet when gathered together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it tells a complete story.

The Statue of Liberty, which stands in New York Harbor, was made in Paris, France. It was cast in many parts of various sizes and shapes. When these parts were brought to America and assembled, the result was a statue of stately beauty. This was not unusual in that all of the parts were cast in a single place and were fashioned with the idea of forming one statue. But suppose these parts had been fashioned by many men, living in different places during different periods of time, and with no common purpose. And suppose that when all these parts were brought together, they fit one into another to make a beautiful statue. That would have been highly unusual; in fact, it would have been miraculous. So it is with Scripture.

The inexhaustibility of Scripture also indicates its inspiration. A person can exhaust the meaning and the contents of other books, but not the Bible. One of the greatest

Greek scholars in American history, A. T. Robertson, reportedly said, just prior to his death: “For more than 50 years I have studied, preached, taught, and written about the New Testament, yet I never open its pages without discovering some truth not heretofore understood by me.”

Another evidence of its inspiration is its survival. No other book in history has been so despised as well as attacked by despots as the Bible, yet it has endured.

Fulfilled prophecy is further evidence of the Bible’s inspiration. The Bible predicts events long before they happen, and those events come to pass with complete accuracy. Only a book from God could do that. We cannot know the future. We cannot know what will happen five years from now, five days from now, or five minutes from now. Anyone who can accurately predict the future must have the mind of God.

The most important evidence of its inspiration is its message, which bears out to be true, in part, because it leads us to a personal experience with Christ. The fact that the Holy Spirit uses the Bible now indicates that it is his work to begin with.

Taken together, all of this evidence makes the Bible a unique book, setting it apart from all others. Many books contain words that are true and uplifting, but the Bible is the only book with the distinction of being “God-breathed.”

Our Rule and Guide

Second, the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. Why did God give us the Scriptures in the first place? They were intended to teach us what to believe and how to live. The apostle writes that Scripture is “profitable” (has value for) for doctrine (what we are to believe), for reproof (pointing out error in our lives), for correction (redirecting our lives), and for instruction in righteousness (to teach us right living) (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible is not a book of science, history, math, or biology, although it contains some of all of these. It is a book of religion with a two-fold message: it tells people how to be saved, and it tells saved people how to live. Its primary function is to introduce us to Jesus Christ. Then it becomes a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

The Bible's first purpose is redemption, revealing how God proposes to bring sinful man back into fellowship with himself and to use him in his service. This message runs like a scarlet thread from Genesis to Revelation. The Old Testament predicts Christ. The Gospels present Christ. The Epistles point back to Christ. And the Revelation points forward to Christ's return and reign.

The Bible reveals God in the person of the Holy Spirit, empowering and directing people to Christ in God's mission of evangelism and world redemption. Jesus said to the skeptical Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:39-40). And John states his purpose in writing as this: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

The second purpose of the Bible is to instruct us in right living. A few years ago, a comedian appearing on the *Johnny Carson Show* commented on a current televangelist scandal: "I understand that television evangelists are trying to develop a code of ethics for their profession." Then he lifted a Bible high above his head, waving it and saying, "I thought they already had one." They do, and so do we. Our code of ethics is the Holy Scriptures. They are the rule and guide for our faith and practice.

Some people say, "My conscience is my guide," but unless your conscience has been regenerated by the Son of God and educated by the Word of God, it is not a safe guide. So let your conscience be your guide, but let God guide

your conscience. Others look to the church as their authority: they believe that the church came before Scripture and, is therefore, above Scripture. This, of course, is not true. The church did not produce the Bible. The Holy Spirit produced the Bible and gave it to the church.

The Psalmist said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). That’s what Jesus did, and that’s what we should do. When tempted by the devil at the outset of his ministry, Jesus quoted Scripture as his guide for right and wrong (Matthew 4:1-11; Deuteronomy 6:13, 6:16, 8:3). When questioned about divorce, he sought the answer through Scripture (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 1:27). When criticized for breaking Sabbath laws, he justified his actions by offering an example from Scripture, indicating that his actions were in keeping with the Scriptures (Matthew 12:1-3; 1 Samuel 21:6). And when he cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12-13), he quoted Isaiah 56:7 as a guide for what the house of God should be like.

So we affirm clearly that the Bible alone is our authority. Martin Luther’s response at Worms in 1521, when he was asked to recant his writings, should be ours:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason (for I trust neither pope nor council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since to act against one’s conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me.²

Captivity of conscience to the Word of God, that is, to the absolutes of God’s authoritative teaching in the Bible, is integral to authentic Christianity.

It's All You Need

Third, the Scriptures are the sufficient Word of God. They contain all that we need to know about God. Paul declares that the Scriptures were given “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly [adequately] furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17).

Winston Churchill once remarked that when a new book appears, one should read an old one. Never a truer statement was said than when it comes to Scripture. Other books may be read with great profit, but no other book is necessary. Although this does not discourage other sources of knowledge, they are secondary to Scripture. The Bible may not tell us all that we *want* to know, but it does tell us all that we *need* to know. It alone is adequate to teach us and guide us in the ways of God.

Augustine once said that the “Bible is a book in which an elephant can swim or a lamb can wade.” When we are young in the faith, babes in Christ, it is milk to nourish us (1 Peter 2:2). When we are more mature, it is meat to sustain us (Hebrews 5:14). Regardless of our age or stage in life, the Bible is sufficient for our spiritual needs, for it is a lamp to guide us as we walk through life (Psalm 119:105), a mirror in which we see our true selves (James 1:23), a surgeon’s knife that lays bare our deepest being (Hebrews 4:12), and a sword with which we defend ourselves against the enemy (Ephesians 6:17).

We do not need the Book of Mormon, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, or church traditions to give us more light. The Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, are sufficient, and we are competent.

Can I trust the Bible? Absolutely. Although it has been translated from Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic into hundreds of languages and copied and recopied by hand thousands of times, the Bible is still absolutely reliable. The same Spirit of God that inspired it has preserved it for us so that it is

completely trustworthy for its intended purpose, i.e., to bring us to the Savior and to teach us what to believe and how to live.

Critics have assailed it. Governments have banned it. Skeptics have mocked it. And tyrants have sought to defame it, but none has been able to destroy it. And when the stars in the heavens are but cinders, in eternity it will still stand as the inspired, authoritative, sufficient and eternal Word of God (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25; Isaiah 40:8).

Let me end where I began, with the Truett professor in China where a man said to her: “I want to know more about the Bible. I am not a believer, but it has had such an impact on the world that it must contain something important.”

It does: it is the Word of God. And whenever and wherever it is received and believed, people and nations are changed.

Chapter 3



Man

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe that man was created in the moral image of God, — was placed under law, but by voluntary transgression brought himself and his posterity into a state of sin, and that they are thereby doomed to death, temporal, moral, and eternal.

(Article 4)

We believe that man in his fallen and unregenerated state, is dead in trespasses and sins, and that notwithstanding all his natural amiable qualities, the love of God is excluded from his heart. (Article 5)

Every Man's Story

Genesis 1-3

What is man? Is he a fallen angel? Is he a risen ape? Or is he a special creation of God? The answer is important. Unless we know what we are and where we came from, we will never understand who we are or why we exist. To get an accurate answer, we must turn to Scripture. It tells us that man was created by a special act of God. He was made in God's own image and is the crowning work of God's creation.

The creation of man is simply stated in the Bible. "So God created man in his own image . . . and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into

his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 1:27; 2:7). This came as the climax of God’s creative work. The creation of man was not an afterthought with God, but the goal of his work in creation.

The whole of God’s truth concerning man may be summed up in three statements:

- Created by God.
- Alienated by sin.
- Regenerated by grace.

“We Are All Fruit”

First, God created man. Genesis tells us that God formed man out of the dust of the earth and then breathed into him the breath of life and that man became a living soul. He created man in his own image and gave him dominion over all creation. We are, then, both dust and divinity.

The Scriptures not only tell us of our origin but also give us our position in creation. God has “made him a little lower than the angels” (Psalms 8:5). To be sure, a little lower than the angels is far better than being a little higher than the apes!

This is actually a poor translation of the original language. The Hebrew word translated “angels” is “Eloheim,” one of the most common names for God in the Bible. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God (Eloheim) created the heaven and the earth.” So, in reality, mankind is made, not a little lower than the angels, but a little lower than God himself! We are made in the image of God — next to God.

God wanted fellowship with human beings, so he made us different from the other animals. Human kinship with beasts is an old lie: we are not kin to the animals. We are kin to God. We may be made from dust, but we are kin to deity.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? In what way are we like him? We are like God in that we are rational, moral, and emotional beings. We are like God in that we have intelligence: we can think, we can reason, we can make decisions, and we can remember.

Persons act on intelligence; animals, on the other hand, act on instinct. Put a group of monkeys in a room full of typewriters, and no writing that reflects intelligence will ever result. Why? They don't have intelligence like ours. Have you ever tried to teach geology to an elephant or astronomy to an eagle or theology to a dog? It can't be done, but you can teach all three to the most primitive person from the darkest jungle, because he has the light of intelligence in him. One of the most successful football coaches in history, Lou Holtz, once said, "If you want to know something, don't ask the monkey. Go to the organ grinder."

We are like God in that we are thinking, rational beings. The human brain is the most complex mechanism in the world. Some people have compared it to a sophisticated computer, but technology hasn't come close to duplicating its capabilities. Gerhard Dirks, noting 50 inventive ideas from studying the function of the human brain, commented on its complexity: "If we could invent a computer that would duplicate the capabilities of the human brain, it would take a structure the size of the Empire State Building just to house it."

We are also like God in that we are moral beings. We have a conscience, a sense of right and wrong – and the capacity to choose between the two. A bull may gore his owner, a horse may trample his rider, or a lion may maul his trainer, and feel no guilt over what it did because it does not know the difference between right and wrong. But we not only know the way things are, we know the way things ought to be. We have a conscience that tells us that some things are right, while some things are wrong.

People are the only creatures that both laugh and cry

because we are the only ones who know the difference between the way things are and the way things ought to be. We are the only creatures who blush because we are the only ones capable of being embarrassed by our actions.

We are like God in that we are emotional beings. Not only is man the only creature who laughs, weeps, and blushes, but he is also the only one who commits suicide, because he is the only one capable of being bored with his existence. The capacity for boredom is a sign of humanity's high heredity. We realize that there is more to life than animal existence. We need the fellowship of God, and our lives are incomplete without him. As Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee."

Our dignity and worth as a person does not depend on what we do, where we live, what we possess, or who our ancestors are – but instead depends on the fact that we have been made in the image of God. It is on the basis of this that God condemns murder in the Scriptures (Genesis 9:6).

The movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, is the story of a young lady of Greek ancestry who falls in love with an ordinary American man. Her father has difficulty accepting him, for he had always wanted his daughter to marry a Greek, because Greek customs were so different from others. Finally, at the wedding, the father who frequently traced words back to their Greek origins said, "Miller, [the boy's name was Ivan Miller], in the Greek means 'apple'. Our family name means 'orange'. So we have apples and oranges. They are different, but in the end, we are all fruit."

Human injustice and racial prejudice arises, and people forget that we are all made in the image of God. Every person in the world — regardless of education, racial background, economic or social status — is therefore of intrinsic worth.

You are the crowning glory of God's creation. You were

made to be a child of the King, and that makes you somebody. You may be living below your status as a child of the King, but you have potential, nonetheless.

What's Wrong With the World?

Second, man has been alienated from God by sin. After God created Adam and Eve in his own image, he placed them in a beautiful garden where he made provision for mankind's every need. The freedom of choice was followed by one stipulation. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Then, suddenly something went wrong. The tempter appeared in the form of a serpent without explanation or identification. The Hebrew word translated as "serpent" comes from a root word that means "the hiss" or "whisper." The word "subtle" means "smooth" or "cunning." The tempter comes to Eve as a smooth talker whispering in her ear.

He begins by questioning God's goodness and love. He did not point to God's bountiful provision but to his one prohibition. When Eve mentioned the reason why God had given the command, Satan countered by calling him a liar: "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Rather, he suggests that when God prohibited man from eating the fruit, he was depriving him of his full potential: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

In this experience, we see the very nature of sin. Man was made a little lower than God (Psalm 8:5), but he has ambitions to be like God himself. Sin is the determination to go our way instead of God's way. When man, through

selfish ambition, seeks to be God in his own life and will, he sins. Sin is dethroning God and enthroning self.

The choice Adam and Eve made to disobey God started the entire human race on a downward spiral. The Scriptures say, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

I am not responsible for what Adam and Eve did any more than I am responsible for what Julius Caesar did, but I am affected by their behavior. When Adam and Eve sinned, they let loose the forces of evil on the world, and I, like they, have sinned.

When the *London Times* asked a number of writers for essays on the topic “What’s Wrong with the World?” G.K. Chesterton submitted the shortest and most to-the-point reply:

Dear Sirs:

I am.

Sincerely yours,

G. K. Chesterton

Mankind has come a long way from the days when God made him to have dominion. In fact, we have subdued everything in the world and headed for space looking for other worlds to conquer, but there is one thing we have not been able to subdue — ourselves. God gave us the capacity to control and govern, but we have failed to govern ourselves. Herein lies the root of the human dilemma.

Pascal wrote, “Man is both the glory and the scum of the universe.” We explore, but we also exploit. We educate, but we also eradicate. We produce, but we also pollute. We made the scalpel as well as the shrapnel. Human beings invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, human beings also entered those gas chambers upright with the Twenty-Third Psalm or the Lord’s Prayer on their

lips.

Man is both the golden boy and the black sheep of our world. He is the unquestioned master of the earth's resources and the undoubted mastermind of most of the world's ills. Whatever is wrong with the world is certainly not the fault of giraffes or bumblebees. It is due to us.

What went wrong with mankind? God endowed us with the power of choice. He didn't create robots programmed to worship and obey him. He gave mankind a free will — the ability to choose — and people, as we know from Genesis 3, deliberately chose to disobey God, to sin. The result? The image of God has been marred and defaced, and man is alienated from him.

Slain From the Foundation of the World

Third, man is regenerated by grace. When man sinned, he was separated from God. The fellowship was broken; the image was marred. Adam and Eve died physically many years later; however, the moment they chose to disobey God, they died spiritually. They were no longer innocent. They were sinners lost from God.

They were driven from God's presence, for holy God cannot condone sin. Their sin had separated them from their God. Furthermore, their bodies became subject to the ills and pains of life. But while God hates sin, he loves the sinner. And even in the garden, before he pronounced judgment upon man, he promised redemption (Genesis 3:15). Therefore, this verse is called the "gospel before the gospel"; it foreshadows the Redeemer.

We are sinners by choice and by practice. Sin has its origins in our unbelief, self-assertion, disobedience, and pride. The sins of the ages have drawn compound interest in war, poverty, hate, immorality, drugs, drunkenness, and the like (Romans 1:28-32).

As G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "Whatever else is or is

not true, this one thing is certain – man is not what he was meant to be.” But we are not doomed to stay as we are. We can change! We can experience new energy and power. We can be made new by God’s power working in and through us. It is up to us. The choice is ours.

God made plans for our re-creation from the foundations of the world. Our redemption was not an afterthought with him (Revelation 13:8). Jeremiah went to the potter’s house. There, he watched the potter shape the piece of clay, but there was something in the clay that resisted the potter’s dream for it. So it was marred and broken in his hand. Jeremiah said, “I thought he would pick up the broken pieces, throw them away, and start over with some new materials; but instead, he picked up the pieces that were broken, and he used them and shaped them and made it again.” The vessel was marred in the potter’s hand, and so he made it again into another vessel (Jeremiah 18:1-6). That’s what God does. That’s what he wants to do now. Even though our lives are broken, God has a way of putting them back together again if we’ll just let him. Will you let him? The choice is yours. Will you repent and believe the gospel?

Chapter 4



Salvation

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe that Christ died for sinners, and that the sacrifice which he has made, has so honored the divine law that a way of salvation is consistently opened up to every sinner to whom the Gospel is sent, and that nothing but their voluntary rejection of the Gospel prevents their salvation. (Article 6)

We believe that the conditions of salvation are repentance for sin, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to his word: and that salvation on these terms is freely offered to all; but so deep is the depravity of man that none would comply with them but for the regenerating grace of God. (Article 7)

So Great a Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-3

This is the good news we all need. Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day! Because of who he was and what he did, the way of salvation is now open to everyone. The conditions are that we repent of our sins and put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is salvation? It is deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. The Bible says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and later adds, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

All of us are different in many ways, yet we are alike in one way: we are all sinners and in need of salvation. That salvation has been provided for us through Jesus Christ.

His salvation sets us free from both the power and penalty of sin. Sin gets us in its grip and won't let go. A cork placed near the surface of water will float to the surface. If pressed down 10, 50, or even 100 feet below the surface and then released, it will rise again; but if the cork is pressed 200 feet below the surface, it cannot rise because the pressure exerted by the water is too great. So it is with us. The deeper we go into sin, there is less probability we will ever rise again.

Sin by its very nature becomes habitual (2 Samuel 11-12). Drugs, alcohol, pornography, abusive behavior, profanity, sexual immorality, and anger are all addictive and destructive.

As the old Southern gospel song goes:

Sin will take you further than you want to go.

Slowly but wholly taking control.

It will teach you more than you want to know.

Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay.

Sin will cost you more than you want to pay.

That's the inevitable result of sin when it gets a grip on our lives – but there is hope. We can be set free from both its power and its penalty.

Ruth Harms Calkin expressed it beautifully when she wrote:

Lord,

There are countless things in my life,

That are inexcusable.

There are things unaccountable.

Things unexplainable.

There are things irrefutable.

And things irresponsible.

But it comes to me as unutterable relief

*That because of your amazing love
Nothing in my life is unforgivable.*

That's salvation in Christ! But the Bible poses a troubling question to us about it. It asks, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). The question is set in the context of a warning. The writer of Hebrews tells us that God has sent his Son to be our Savior. He begins by telling us who Jesus is and then describes what he has done. He identifies him as the heir of all things, as the maker of heaven and earth, as the express image of God's person, and as the one who holds the universe together. Then he tells us what he did: "...and when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

The phrase "sat down" suggests a completed action. When the ushers finish taking the collection in a worship service, they have completed their assigned task, and they sit down. When the choir finishes the special music in a worship service, they have completed their assigned task, and they sit down. Just so, when Jesus had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. He had completed his assigned task. He made it possible for us to be free of the power and penalty of sin.

The significance of Jesus lies not just in what he taught, but also who he was and what he did. Scores of people are willing to accept Jesus as a great teacher, but they are not willing to accept him as a great savior. Episcopal Bishop George Craig Stewart recalled this story about a time that he joined a group of men in a railroad smoking car. Religion became the topic of conversation, and one man said, "Want to hear my religion, sir? It is the Golden Rule — simply the Golden Rule."

"Want to hear my astronomy, sir?" replied Bishop Stewart. "Twinkle, twinkle little star — simply that."

Astronomy is more complex than that. And God's gift

of salvation is more than the Golden Rule – Christ had to die for our sins, and, in order to be saved, we must repent and trust him.

He has provided a great salvation. In what respects is his salvation great?

- It is prompted by a great love.
- It is accompanied by a great power.
- It offers us a great escape.

Incomprehensible Love

First, our salvation is prompted by a great love. The story of *Dominic and Eugene* speaks of a brain-damaged brother who is a devout Roman Catholic. He loves his church and he loves people. Life is pleasant, and he is very happy until his dog is killed. Then he becomes very angry with God. He goes to church and confronts the priest with his anger and bitterness, and the priest responds with pious platitudes. Not impressed with the priest's sanctimonious ways, Eugene turns and walks away. As he does, he sees the crucifix hanging on the wall and says, "If I was God, I sure wouldn't let them do that to my boy."

Neither would I, but thank God I'm not God. In contrast to what I would *not* do, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The hymn writer Frederick M. Lehman, expressed it best when he wrote:

*The Love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.*

The most moving stanza in the hymn is the final one. Interestingly, it was penciled on the wall of a narrow room in an asylum by a man who was considered demented. The profound lines were discovered after his death. Consider them carefully:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Tho stretched from sky to sky.
(chorus)
O, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.¹*

We have no way of knowing the actual torment the person who wrote those words experienced, but we do know this — while in the asylum, he made life's greatest discovery: that is, the love of God.

There are three things to me that are incomprehensible. I do not mean that there are only three things I do not know; I mean that there are three things I cannot comprehend. The first is eternity: I cannot comprehend time without end. The second is space: how could we travel forever through space and never reach the end? The third is the love of God for a lost and sin-cursed world — especially in the light of man's indifference and the way he has trampled God's love beneath his feet. It is because of that great love that we have a great salvation.

Making Something Beautiful Out of Something Rotten

Second, our salvation is accompanied by great power. It has the power to change, to convert, and to set us free. The Scriptures say, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Some people go through life bearing a “victim’s mentality.” They always blame someone else or something else for the way they are. For example, “I’m black, or brown, so it’s hard for me to go anywhere in life.” “I was molested as a child by my uncle.” “My father was an alcoholic.” “My mate abused me.” “We were poor.”

I know these things are real and make life difficult — but God is greater. None of us can afford to blame the past indefinitely. No matter what our past circumstances may have been, we are still responsible. We do not have a license from God to lie down and vegetate. God can still lift us up and put us to work in his service.

In the movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, a young Greek woman falls in love with an average American man. She is distraught over her Greek heritage and their unusual customs, but her mother tries to console the daughter by telling her not to let the past dictate who you are; instead, let it be a part of who you are.

We need to let God take the bad things that have happened to us and turn them into something good. They can actually make you a better person.

Famous author and storyteller Will Campbell walks with a cane. He says that one of the good things about the cane is that it allows him to tell one of his favorite stories:

The cane was made for me by a neighbor who was what we would call illiterate. But he knew something about aesthetics; he knew what was pretty; what really finally mattered. He tore

down an old abandoned barn many years ago and discovered that some of the rotting timbers were made of wild cherry. He put them aside, and when he was old, he made things that were at once beautiful and useful for those he loved. Fortunately, I was one of them. It is a fine metaphor for the Gospel — taking something rotten and making something beautiful of it.²

The Scriptures say, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

The word “blotted” is a vivid word meaning literally “to erase.” This goes back to the days when ink contained no acid. Modern ink contains acid, and it literally bites into the page. To remove it, you must almost rub a hole in the paper. But ancient ink had no acid in it; it simply lay on the page and dried. To erase the writing, a person needed only to wipe it away with a wet sponge.

That’s what God does with our sins: He wipes them away. We need that. We don’t need to turn over a new leaf in life; we need to have the old pages wiped clean. We cannot tear out the pages of life as though they never existed – and time does not fade our record. It is always there to face us unless it is wiped clean by the power of Jesus Christ.

Never give up on yourself or anyone else. When you say that a situation or person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in God’s face. God can work wonderful changes in our lives if we will let him.

Time Doesn’t Shout, It Just Runs Out

Finally, our salvation offers a great escape. The question from the Scriptures is, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3). The implica-

tion, if we accept it, is that we will escape the consequences of our sin. If we neglect it, we won't.

The Scriptures remind us repeatedly of our accountability to God. They say, "...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," and "...everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10,12). They warn us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Long before these words were written, the writer of Ecclesiastes warned, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

We view with contempt a judge who is overly lenient with offenders. If he should "slap the wrist" of a person who was guilty of a heinous crime, we would cry "impeach him!" In fact, during a general election, an incumbent judge was labeled "Judge Softy" by his opponent because of his leniency with convicted criminals. He was not re-elected. Justice must be served. So it is with God. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

God is no softy, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). And "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). So it comes to this — with Jesus Christ, you are saved and on the way to heaven. Without Christ, you are lost and on the way to hell.

This then is the great salvation that comes through Jesus Christ.

*Life is short,
Death is sure,
Sin, the curse,
And Christ, the cure.*

One word in our text (Hebrews 2:1-3) points out why men and women are finally lost: that word is *neglect*. Men

and women are lost – not because they intend to be. No one would deliberately intend to be lost or to miss heaven. No, it is due to neglect. People do not have to blaspheme God to be lost. They don't have to raise a clenched fist in God's face. They need only to neglect the great salvation that God provides.

Perhaps the worst natural disaster (in terms of lives lost) ever to happen in the United States was the great tropical hurricane that struck Galveston Island on September 8, 1900. The city, the fourth largest in Texas at the time, was literally leveled to the ground – and 6,000 of the 45,000 inhabitants died. There were so many bodies strewn about that those who were able-bodied spent 20 hours a day digging out the dead. But there weren't enough men to dig graves and no means to preserve the bodies. Fear of an epidemic hung over the wreckage, so hundreds of bodies were put on a barge and carried miles out to sea. Soon though, the survivors were horror-stricken to find the tide washing the dead back onto the beaches. After that, the only solution was to pile bodies and debris together and burn it all. The burning pyres steadily lighting the sky with a hideous glow were seen in all directions. The smell was nauseating, and the knowledge of what was burning made it even harder to bear. Even today, more than 100 years later, workers still find the skeletal remains of bodies when digging gas lines or foundations for new buildings.

What made this tragedy so great is that it could have been avoided. The U.S. Weather Bureau had issued a warning to vacate the island because a hurricane was coming. But Galveston had endured storms before and survived, so most people paid no attention to the warnings. Besides, they looked up to the clear sky, felt the warm breeze, and thought that the hurricane might change its course.

All day long, a stream of traffic moved back and forth across the iron bridge, the only connection between Galveston and the mainland. At night, the soft breezes be-

came a strong wind, the wind turned into torrential rains, and the rains into a hurricane with measuring winds at 130 miles per hour. Then the hurricane became a tidal wave with water reaching nearly 16 feet. The iron bridge that connected Galveston with the mainland snapped like a matchstick. With the only way of escape gone, some 6,000 people perished. Neglect caused physical death. Neglect will cause spiritual death also.

In Hemingway's, *The Sun Also Rises*, Bill asks Mike, a dissolute party animal, how he went bankrupt. "Two ways," Mike replies, "Gradually and then suddenly."

That's the way people are lost – gradually and then suddenly. Don't let it happen to you. Don't neglect this great salvation made possible through the death of Christ on the cross: repent and believe now. Adolph Coors IV, of the famous beer family, who was converted to Christianity, was fond of saying, "Time doesn't shout; it just runs out, and sooner than you think." Time is running out for all of us. Don't neglect so great a salvation.

Chapter 5



The Church

Bill of Inalienable Rights - 1840

*Each Church...being the free house-hold
of Christ.... (Article 1)*

The Family of God

1 Timothy 3:14-16

A friend and I were having breakfast at a restaurant and engaged in a conversation with the waitress. We soon learned she had a one-year-old son and was going through a divorce. One of the contributing factors was that her husband would not go to church with her. My friend said, “Next time, make sure you marry a Christian.” She replied, “Oh, he’s a Christian, he just won’t go to church.”

I hear a lot of talk about a churchless Christianity. To me, that is like talking about a homeless person. It is a tragedy at best and not the way things should be.

The Bible knows nothing of a churchless Christianity. When people know Christ as Savior, they not only want, but also need to assemble together to worship, study, fellowship, and minister. The Bible records that Jesus instituted the church. In Scripture, Christ clearly identifies himself with his church, and he takes that identity seriously. In early Christian history, Saul was “breathing out murderous threats” against the church. Although Saul had probably never seen the historic Jesus, Jesus said to him, “Why

do you persecute *me*?” Then he proceeded to identify himself: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” Jesus’ identity with his church was so real and personal that for Saul to persecute the church was the same as persecuting Jesus (Acts 9:1-5). What he did to the church he was doing to Christ himself. One reason we need to identify with the church is because Jesus has so clearly identified with it.

Many analogies are used in the Bible to describe the church. Sometimes it is called the body of Christ, sometimes the building of God, sometimes the bride of Christ. My favorite analogy is of the church as the family of God. The apostle Paul refers to it as such when he instructs Timothy on how he should behave himself in “the house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15).

This is also a favorite analogy of early Texas Baptists. When they met to organize the first associational meeting, they listed among their Bill of Inalienable Rights that “each church is forever free and independent of any and every ecclesiastical power formed by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ” (Article 1).

The word “house-hold” means “family.” So the church is the family of God. This suggests that it is to be a loving and accepting family where people who have been born again can be nurtured to full maturity in Christ. The church is not a building, although it may meet in one. It is not an organization, even though it may be organized. It is not an audience, although it may comprise one from time to time. It is a close, intimate community of redeemed people. It is a brotherhood united under the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the living family of the living God.

The central unifying element of the church is our common commitment to God as Father through faith in Jesus Christ. The church did not arise simply from people having feelings for one another: it resulted from people having a commitment to God. There is no sense in talking about the brotherhood of man without first talking about the fa-

therhood of God. And there is no need to speak of the fatherhood of God without first talking about faith in Jesus Christ.

The horizontal relationship between persons is always derivative, not primary. The vertical relationship of God and man must come first, followed by the horizontal relationship with one another. We are not frozen together by formality; we are not rusted together by tradition; we are not wired together by organization; we are drawn together by commitment to God as Father through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be the church in this sense? Three things:

- We are related through Christ.
- We are responsible to Christ.
- We are representatives of Christ.

Standing Up for My Brother

First, as a church, we are related to one another through Christ. The Scriptures say, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). It is this simple: if God is your Father and God is my Father, then we are family — we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Pharisees were title-seekers. They loved to be called “Rabbi.” In a reproof of them, Jesus said, “Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matthew 23:8).

Some of us can remember the time when church members referred to one another as “brother” and “sister.” In fact, one of the rules of decorum to govern the first Baptist association in Texas was, “The appellation of Brother shall be used in the association by members in all cases.” We may not necessarily need to reclaim the terminology, but wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could reclaim that spirit of family in our churches?

At the last church where I served as pastor, I closed the service on Sunday nights by inviting the children to come to the front to visit with me. I sat on the steps of the platform, and when they had gathered around me on the floor, I would interview those that celebrated a birthday that week. I would ask them their names, ages, birth dates, what they received for their birthdays that they liked best, and then I asked them to share with the congregation a verse of Scripture they had memorized.

One Sunday night as the children gathered around, I asked, “Who has celebrated a birthday this week?” One of the girls’ hands shot up like a flag. I called her to my side and asked her name. She gave me that. I asked her age, and she gave me that. I then asked for her birth date and discovered that she did not have a birthday that week. In fact, her birthday was months away. So I asked, “What are you doing here?” She replied, “I am standing up for my brother.”

I learned from this young girl that her younger brother had celebrated a birthday that week, but he was afraid to be interviewed by the preacher. She didn’t want his birthday to go unnoticed, so she was standing up for him. I said to the congregation, “If ever there was a place we need to stand up for our brothers and sisters, it’s the church. If ever there was a time that we need to stand up for our brothers and sisters, it is now. If you feel alone and in need of love, you will find people here who will kneel down with you or stand up for you. That’s what it means for a church to be a family.”

Whether we need comfort or courage, we ought to find it in the house of God. It’s a place where we are to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2); to be understanding of one another; to confess our faults and sins to one another; to pray for one another (James 5:16). We are to be servants to one another, to wash one another’s feet (John 13:14-15). And when you do, don’t use ice water to freeze them or

hot water to scald them: instead, use warm water to comfort and soothe them.

And we are told to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) – not always an easy thing to do, for it takes both grit and grace. In its early days, Baylor University was divided into two departments — the male department and the female department. They were located a mile apart, and each had its own faculty. Rufus C. Burleson was president of Baylor, and Horace Clark was principal of the female department. A strong disagreement developed between Burleson and Clark over who had the final authority over the female department. The rift soon permeated the entire community – and was so bitter that men armed themselves. And it appeared for a while that the matter might be settled with guns.

A.E. Lipscomb, one of Burleson’s followers, published an inflammatory pamphlet attacking the friends of Professor Clark. The action was denounced as unchristian by the Clark following and resulted in Lipscomb being expelled from the Independence Baptist Church. When the moderator announced the vote, Burleson, who was also pastor of the church, stood, thrust his finger in the face of the moderator, and then threatened him.

The story goes that General Sam Houston, also a member of the church, was present at the meeting, and witnessed the proceedings with surprise and astonishment. Burleson had baptized him in 1854 and he was loyal to Burleson in this long and unfortunate controversy.

That evening, General Houston was sitting in the law office of a friend when Burleson entered the room and offered the general his hand. Houston rose, crossed his arms behind him, and told Burleson that he had witnessed many passionate outbursts and discourtesies in debate while living among the Indians, serving in the United States Congress, as commander-in-chief of the army of Texas, as president of the Republic of Texas, and as past governor of the

state. Then he scolded, “But in all my public life, I have never seen such improprieties in the proceedings of anybody as you were guilty of this morning in the Baptist church when you shook your finger in Brother Ross’ face, charged him with dishonorable conduct, and told him that nothing but his gray hair protected him from personal violence. You baptized me in Rocky Creek in 1854, and in your company I have spent many happy hours in social and spiritual enjoyment. For many years, I have been your devoted friend. But, Brother Burleson, after witnessing your conduct this morning, you must excuse me, but I cannot, and I will not, take your hand until convinced that you have sincerely repented.”

Burleson was not prepared for such a rebuke and bowed out of the office and went home. A few weeks later, Reverend James A. Stribbling came to Independence to conduct a protracted meeting. All the services seemed to be dead, a mere formality, and nobody responded to the preaching. Stribbling called on Burleson to lead in prayer during one of the services. Extending the request for Burleson to pray, the preacher used this language: “Brethren, this meeting is not progressing as I, and I trust you all, have prayed. We are not right before God or he would send a blessing. Let us all get down on our knees and join with Brother Burleson in an earnest prayer that God will remove all obstacles in the way, and send us down from heaven such a blessing as our souls are not able to contain.”

Instantly, most all the Christians knelt down. Then suddenly Burleson fell on his face before God and the congregation, confessing his sin and asking for forgiveness. God answered, and the windows and doors of heaven were thrown wide open, and the blessings of God descended on the town that had been torn asunder by the waves of internal strife for years.

Following the service, Houston approached Burleson and said, “Brother Burleson, here is my hand. Hold it while

time lasts. Here is my heart. I will love you with its last pulsation.”¹

That’s what speaking the truth in love is all about — repentance, restoration, and revival. Anger, bitterness, conflict, and contention will hinder the Spirit from working anywhere, anytime. We cannot permit them to go unchecked in our family or our fellowship. We can harm one another through both silence and abrasiveness. We must be careful how we use both.

How does the unbelieving world see the church? Do they see us as a quarreling, dysfunctional family? Do they see us divorced from one another? Or do they see us as we ought to be, a loving family where people are loved and cared for?

The Only Crown in Christianity

Second, as a church, we are responsible to Christ. Jesus called the assembly, “my church.” That little personal pronoun “my,” taken seriously, would solve some big problems in churches. The church belongs to him. No pastor, deacon body, council, committee, or convention owns it. It is not responsible to them; it is responsible to him.

Our Texas Baptist forebears were careful to state that the local church was autonomous. Article 1 of the 1840 Bill of Inalienable Rights states, “Each church is forever free and independent of any and every ecclesiastical power founded by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ.” That included every council, convention, association, board, agency, and individual.

And when the first state convention was formed in Texas in 1848, they again affirmed that: “The convention shall never possess a single attribute of power or authority over any church or association. It absolutely and forever disclaims any right of any kind, hereby avowing that cardinal principle that every church is sovereign and inde-

pendent.”

The autonomy of the local church does not mean that the church is free to do anything it wants to do. It means that it is free to do what Christ wants it to do. It is his household, his family. And if it is to be free to do what he wants it to do, then there can be no group or individual, no board or bishop, no council or convention, between it and him. The only crown in Christianity belongs on the head of Jesus Christ, who earned it by wearing another type of crown.

Pastors, above all people, should remember that. They should not be heavy on “pastoral authority” when, in reality, the authority belongs to Jesus. They are not to usurp his place. There is a difference between leading and driving. Pastors are to lead under God’s guidance, but they are not to drive. With some pastors, it comes down to a matter of ego, and someone has suggested that the letters of ego stand for “edging God out.”

Baptists are fiercely independent. They believe that because of the priesthood of the believer and the competency of the individual soul, no one should stand between them and the Lord, either collectively or individually. Baptists may not mind failing to get their way, but they do mind not getting their say. So the true church, the family of God, must be free to discuss and decide things. The church has no place for a dictatorial ruler, whether it be an elected convention leader or a local church pastor.

“Too Fat to Fly”

Finally, as a church, we are representatives of Christ. God’s plan for the local church is always centered in evangelism. Those brought to Christ are thus born into the very place where they can be nurtured and disciplined. This avoids the “slippage” we often see when para-church organizations try to do the work chiefly assigned to the local church.

Churches face two dangers: concentrating only on their

own kind of people or neglecting evangelism altogether. Some churches concentrate solely on their own kind of people. Lesslie Newbigin, who spent 35 years in India as a missionary, returned to his native England to find that it had become a foreign mission field. A few years after retiring, he found himself substituting as the chair of his denomination's local council. One item on the docket for a council meeting was the demise of a 120-year-old slum church across from the walls of Winsom Green Prison near Birmingham. The congregation was reduced to 20 members, and it seemed that the church would inevitably be closed. But Newbigin could not reconcile himself to seeing the church closed. He told the council, "If the church abandoned such areas in order to settle in the relatively easy circumstances of the suburbs it would forfeit the claim to be a missionary church."²

But that is exactly what many churches have done. They have deserted the mission field to find a more comfortable place. We need more of the spirit of C. T. Studd, missionary pioneer to the Congo, who gave up wealth to follow Christ to the mission field. He penned these words, which reflected the abandonment that he experienced for Christ:

*Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell.
I want to run a rescue shop
Within the yard of hell.*

We must not be guilty of building barriers when Jesus tore down the walls of distinction between people and welcomed all into his family.

The other danger is neglecting evangelism altogether. The great Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, once told the story of a flock of geese that was starting to head south to escape the gusts of winter winds. The first night they landed in a farmer's yard and filled themselves with corn. The next morning they flew on, that is, except for one. "The

corn is good,” this big goose said. “I will stay and enjoy it another day.” The next morning he decided to wait still another day and another after that, enjoying the delicious food. Pretty soon, he had developed a habit. “Tomorrow I will fly south,” he said.

Then came the inevitable day when the winds of winter were so severe that waiting longer would mean death in the frozen wastes. So he stretched his wings and waddled across the barnyard, picking up speed as he went – but, alas, he was too fat to fly!

Many churches have become fat and prosperous and have lost their ability to fly. They are satisfied to sit and soak and sour rather than to soar. They do it at the cost of disobedience. Jesus said, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). It’s evangelize or fossilize: those are the only two options. We represent him, and we must leave the barnyard to do it.

Fred Craddock, retired professor of New Testament and Homiletics at Emory University, tells a story about growing up in Tennessee. Craddock’s father did not go to church. In fact, he was very critical of the church. Once in a while, the minister would come by and try to talk to the elder Mr. Craddock, but it did no good. He would say, “I know what you fellows down there at the church want. You want another name, another pledge. Right? Isn’t that the business you are in? Another name, another pledge?” It always embarrassed Craddock’s mother, who would retreat to the kitchen to cry.

The last time Fred Craddock saw his father was in a veteran’s hospital. He then weighed a slight 74 pounds. The doctors had inserted a tube so he could breathe, but he couldn’t speak. Around the room, flowers were everywhere – on the table, in the windows, and even on the floor. There were potted plants, cut flowers, and every sort of

floral arrangement. There were even flowers on the bedside table that is used for serving food. That was just as well since he couldn't eat anyway. Cards accompanied all the flowers, identifying who had sent them, and each one of them read something like this — Men's Bible Class, Women's Fellowship, Children's Division, Youth Fellowship. Every organization you could imagine in the church had sent flowers along with stacks of cards from members of the church. Craddock's father saw him looking at the cards. Unable to speak, he picked up a pencil and wrote on the side of a tissue box, a line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story." Fred Craddock read it and asked his father, "Dad, what is your story?" The speechless old man took the box and wrote a confession: "I was wrong! I was wrong!"³

Don't wait until it is too late for you to discover the church. It is interested in more than another name on the roll and another pledge: it is interested in you as a person. It is the family of God. If you belong to him, then you need to belong to it.

Chapter 6



Priesthood of the Believer

Bill of Inalienable Rights - 1840

Each member shall forever have a full and free right to exercise his or her own discretion in contributions to the support of missions, general benevolence, etc. and in other matters that may not lead to immorality. (Article 2)

Our Inalienable Right

1 Peter 2:5-10

When the forefathers of our country framed the Declaration of Independence, they spoke of certain inalienable rights — among them were life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

When our Texas Baptist ancestors laid the foundation for working together to win Texas to Christ, they also spoke of certain inalienable rights. They listed two in their Bill of Inalienable Rights: “Each church is forever free and independent, of any and every ecclesiastical power formed by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ” (Article 1); and “Each member shall forever have a full and free right to exercise his or her own discretion in contributions to the support of missions, general benevolence, etc. and in other matters that may not lead to immorality.” (Article 2)

As believers, we have certain God-given rights. One is the right to equal, direct, and immediate access to God through Christ without an intermediary. This is called “the priesthood of the believer.”

Our priesthood is possible through Jesus Christ. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, he has not only become our Lord and Savior, but also our High Priest. He is the only one through whom we need to approach God.

In Jesus’ day, the temple was the central place for worship in Jewish life, and the heart of the temple worship was the inner sanctuary, where the Jews believed that in some special way God dwelt. It was a large room divided by a huge veil. One part of the room was known as the holy place and the other was considered the Holy of Holies. Priests went daily into the holy place to offer sacrifices for the people. The high priest went once a year into the Holy of Holies, which represented the immediate presence of God, to offer a blood atonement for the sins of the entire nation.

The inner sanctuary was surrounded by a series of courtyards where the people gathered to worship. When a Jewish male worshipper entered the temple, he would pass through the courtyard of the Gentiles, then a courtyard of women, into the courtyard of the Israelites – but he had to stop there. He could not enter the courtyard of the priests. He could go no closer to what was considered to be the presence of God. Only the priests could enter the holy place, while only the high priest could go behind the veil into the Holy of Holies.

Among the miraculous things that happened when Jesus died on the cross was that the veil in the temple, that huge curtain separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies, was “rent in twain from the top to the bottom,” signifying that the way into the presence of God was open to all people (Matthew 27:51). Note that the veil was not torn from bottom to top, as though torn by man. It was

torn from top to bottom as though torn by God reaching down and tearing it, signifying that all believers had equal “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

The author of Hebrews writes that through his death, Jesus provided a new and living way for us to go behind the veil into the very presence of God (Hebrews 10:20). When the flesh of Christ was pierced on the cross, the very heart of God was laid open to us. When the Savior died, the veil of his flesh and the veil of the temple were torn in half. God and man could then stand face to face.

In Jesus, then, we have the one person who opens up the way to God for us. The veil that symbolized our separation from God is gone, and all people now have direct access to God. God is an “equal opportunity” God. We can all go to him.

Through what Jesus experienced on the cross, we are now “kings and priests” unto God (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9). This means that every believer is now his or her own priest with direct and immediate access to God. To reach God, there is no intermediary other than Jesus Christ.

But you might ask, “Doesn’t everyone believe this?” The answer is *no*. Any religious group that appoints priests as intermediaries between man and God as the official interpreters of God’s will and word to the people does not really believe in the priesthood of the believer.

So, what does it mean to be our own priest?

- We have direct access to God.
- We have equal responsibility before God.
- We have personal accountability to God.

The Great Invitation

First, the priesthood of the believer means that we have direct access to God. The Scriptures are clear: “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5), and we are invited to come

boldly into the very presence of God through the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 4:16). There is no special class of people through whom we approach him. He alone is the way.

In practical terms, that means we pray directly to God. Someone asked Nelson Fanini, a Baptist leader in Brazil, “Should I pray to God or to Mary?” His reply should answer any question about to whom prayer is directed: “When you’re sick, do you call your doctor or do you call his mother?” Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven.” How could this be more direct? Study the prayers of the New Testament, and you will see that, without exception, all of them were addressed directly to the Lord (Acts 4:24; 7:55-59; 9:4-6, 11-13). Not once did the people pray through or to anyone except the Lord himself. That’s the way we are to pray.

We have a right to interpret Scripture for ourselves. In the early days of Texas, the Roman Catholic Church was the only Church recognized as legal by the Mexican government. People were prohibited from reading the Bible. The lay people in the Roman Catholic Church are taught that they can read the Bible, but the church is to interpret it for them. As an analogy, they believe that the church is to the Bible what the Supreme Court is to the Constitution — its official interpreter.

Some in our Baptist denomination are not far from that belief. They would have you believe that you should not just believe the Scriptures, but believe their interpretation of the Scriptures. They want to tell you what the Bible means, what it tells you to do, and what God’s will is for you – a dangerous concept.

It is heresy to believe that the Word of God has to flow through others before it reaches you. God’s Word does not come to you through me or any other person. Our forefathers died to keep the idea of the individual priesthood alive. Every person must read and interpret the Scriptures for himself.

Herschel Hobbs expressed this truth this way:

Even to the casual observer, it is evident that all Baptists do not dot every ‘i’ and cross every ‘t’ in exactly the same way. There is no such thing as ‘the Baptist faith’ or ‘the historic Baptist faith.’ These phrases imply a creedal faith, something which Baptists have always avoided. There are certain basic things generally held by Baptists today as through past years. But underlying all of them has been the principle of soul competency in religion.

This fact is inherent in the principle of the priesthood of believers. It is not surprising, therefore, that Baptists should have their differences. The amazing thing is that there are so few. But what should be their attitude where such differences do exist? So long as these differences do not deny the authority of the Scriptures or the lordship of Jesus Christ, they should be resolved in Christian love. Each person should speak the truth as he or she sees it—in love. And each person should grant that right to the other.¹

We believe that the Scripture is sufficient without the addition of tradition or some sort of official interpretation. The Holy Spirit is with you as you read the Word of God, and he can teach you better than any pastor, priest, pope or prelate the meaning of God’s Word. That’s what we should be — priests reading the Bible for ourselves and letting God’s Spirit illuminate his Word to us.

The Berean Christians serve as an example in this regard. Having preached at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul moved on to Berea. He says of them, that the Bereans “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received

the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Searching the Scriptures to determine what is true is every Christian’s job – and opportunity. You are not to come under the authority of some pastor or bishop or teacher or council who tells you what God wants you to know. You are to receive his message and search the Scriptures to determine the truth.

We must never become a people of a creed, and thus never let a man-made statement become more important to us than the Bible itself. We believe in no creed but the Bible and no lord other than Jesus Christ. And we are our own priests.

The New Testament recognizes and emphasizes that the Spirit of God equips certain people for a teaching ministry. He has provided gifted leaders and teachers for churches to make real to our hearts the truth of Scripture. We ought to avail ourselves of the ministry of these gifted leaders (Ephesians 4:11), but they are not necessary for our understanding of the Bible. We do not have to receive God’s Word from any other person. We must purge ourselves of the idea that the Bible is a dark and difficult book. It is written for people like us, and we can understand it if we study it correctly.

The priesthood of the believer is the basis of congregational governance in the local church. If each one of us has the right to approach God directly, then we should also have the right to participate in governing the church. The two are inseparably bound together.

How Is Your Priestly Service?

Second, the priesthood of the believer means that we all have equal responsibility to God. One of the real tragedies of the church is that many have separated what we call the clergy from the laity. We have made a distinction

that the Bible does not make. Every believer as a priest has the responsibility to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

By design, Christianity is a grass-roots religion meaning that it begins and ends with people who are personally in touch with God. Therefore, all of us should be personally involved in doing the work of God. Every believer is to be a minister.

Little by little, lay involvement in our churches and in our denomination has declined, and we are more and more being led by church staff members. Whether we mean it to be that way or not, they are doing the work of God for us. Slowly, we have evolved from a grass-roots denomination of the common people with no class distinctions to churches with two classes: pastors and lay people.

As a matter of principle, Baptists have always rejected such distinction, insisting that we are all lay people, one common class of God’s people. And the only distinction we recognize between pastor and people is one of function, not class.

In the late 1800s Baptist theologian John Leadley Dagg warned against making a class distinction between a pastor and people in a church or giving the pastor authority over the people. In *Manual of Theology: A Treatise on Church Order* Dagg wrote, “Immense mischief has resulted from the ambition of the clergy...to counteract its influence, Christ commanded his disciples, ‘Be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.’” Dagg said that elevating the pastor over the people in official authority is “a radical evil.”

Baptists desperately need a revival of lay participation and lay leadership in our churches and in our denomination. It is ironic that for 50 years, we have experienced a 400% increase in the number of professional leaders employed in the churches, and at the same time, we have seen

a 50% decrease in evangelistic effectiveness of our churches. Thus with four times as many religious professionals serving our churches, it takes more than twice as many church members to reach one lost person. Where are the serious laypersons — people who take their Christian priesthood seriously?

It is time for all of us to return to our roots, reemphasizing the crucial importance of laypersons in our churches. We are all priests and we have a service to perform.

I ask you: “How is your priestly service? Are you offering sacrifices to God as a priest should, i.e., the sacrifice of penance (Psalm 51:16-17); the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15); the sacrifice of your possessions (Hebrews 13:16); and the sacrifice of yourself (Romans 12:1-2)? Great responsibility goes along with the privilege of being a priest. The privilege is to approach God directly, and the responsibility is to offer our own sacrifices and service to him.

God Has No Grandchildren

Third, we have a personal accountability to God. The Scriptures declare, “We must all give account of ourselves unto God.” Personal accountability means our relationship with God is one on one — face to face. God holds us responsible for our own actions. The first preacher in the New Testament, John the Baptist, proclaims the doctrine of individualism. With a clear voice ringing from the regions of Jordan and breaking the prophetic silence of 400 years, he said, “Think not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father...’ and now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:9-10).

Being a Jew and a son of Abraham was not enough to make a person right with God. It was not the first birth, but the second birth, that would count with God. It was

not the Jewish blood, but Christ's blood. Each person stands alone, accountable to God.

My wife's oncologist was born in Communist Yugoslavia. She and her family were nominal Greek Orthodox. Her father, a professional man, was arrested and imprisoned by the Communists, and she did not know him until she was eight years old. When she was twelve, her family immigrated to the United States where she grew up, attended medical school, married another physician, and moved to our city.

She had given little thought to Christianity until one day, one of her cancer patients decided to stop taking his treatments and wished to make an appointment to talk with her about his decision. She told the nurse that if he had decided to quit taking his treatments, it wasn't necessary for him to come in to the office. But he insisted on an office visit. After they had talked for a while, he told her that he was tired of living and was ready to go on. Then he leaned over, took her hand in both his hands, and said to her, "I know where I'm going when I die, but I don't know where my doctor is going."

She said for the first time, she began to think about spiritual things. She, her husband and their young daughter began attending church. One Sunday, her husband said to her at the invitation time, "I'm going forward." She protested, "Wait a minute. What about the family?" He said to her, "Sasha, this is an individual matter, not a family affair. You have to decide for yourself. Our daughter has to decide for herself."

Two years later, she decided for herself, then put her faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

L. Nelson Bell, father-in-law of Billy Graham, once reminded us: "The Christian faith cannot be inherited; God has no grandchildren." There is no such thing as religion by proxy — one person acting for another person relative to religion. No one can repent for you. No one can believe

for you. No one can be baptized for you. You must do these things for yourself.

Remember the story of the prodigal son: when he returned from the far country, his elder brother was sullen, pouting, and resentful. Fortunately, when the boy came home, he didn't have to come to his brother first, for if he had, he'd have never made it home. But he didn't have to come through his brother; he came directly to his father. And you can do the same thing with your heavenly Father.

Chapter 7



Religious Liberty

Bill of Inalienable Rights - 1840

Each church is forever free and independent, of any and every ecclesiastical power formed by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ. (Article 1)

Our Cherished Belief

Galatians 5:1

The first Baptist sermon preached in Texas was illegal: to our knowledge, the first Baptist sermon was preached by Joseph Bayes in 1820. He came to Texas from Missouri with Moses Austin and 32 other families to find a new home. The group camped on the Louisiana side of the Sabine River to await permission to enter Texas, but Bayes, who had preached since he was 16, did not wait for permission to enter Texas: he crossed the Sabine and began to preach. At that time, religious liberty in Texas did not exist. Roman Catholicism was the official religion, and the only one allowed. The law stated that no public preaching or exhorting would on any account be permitted. Moreover, the Mexican constitution specified that the “religion of the Mexican nation is, and will be perpetually, the Roman Catholic Apostolic.” So, all non-Catholic preaching was against the law.

Mexico wanted people of good character — no drunkards, thieves, idle loafers, or profane swearers — and ex-

pected all settlers to become Mexican citizens, abide by Mexican law, speak the Spanish language, and become Roman Catholics. Marriages could only be performed by Roman Catholic priests at a cost of 25 dollars. In addition, a person had to be Roman Catholic in order to own land; for many people, this posed no problem. Many people, including Sam Houston, felt that to own a Texas ranch was worth converting to Catholicism, but not to Christ.

Baptists found the lack of religious freedom to be a problem, however. Religious liberty has always been one of our cherished beliefs — the right of every person to worship God according to the dictates of his or her own conscience without interference from others, especially government officials.

So Bayes continued to preach. Eventually, he was arrested in San Felipe for preaching illegally and taken to San Antonio to stand trial. On the way, he beat his captors and escaped to Louisiana. Both Bayes and his son returned to Texas to fight with Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto, where the state not only won its independence from Mexico, but also gained religious liberty.

The first Baptist church in Texas was also illegal. Mexican law said that it was illegal to form a church in Texas. In 1832, Daniel Parker arrived in Texas from Illinois to apply for a land grant from Stephen F. Austin; he learned of this law and interpreted it to mean that a church could not be *formed* in Texas, but one might be formed somewhere else and imported into Texas. Therefore, he returned to Illinois and in 1833 formed a church with seven members. Then he and the other church members traveled to Texas where they settled in Austin's colony. They soon moved to the Nacogdoches area where the church was still illegal but further removed from immediate threat of Mexican authority.

Baptists have always been willing to break the law, to suffer torture and imprisonment, and even to die if neces-

sary, in order to worship and preach the gospel according to the dictates of their own consciences. They have been law-abiding people, except when man's law conflicted with God's, in which case, they have chosen to obey God's law rather than the laws of man.

Baptists believe in the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ (Romans 14:9; Matthew 23:10; Ephesians 1:22), the Bible alone as the rule and guide for our faith and practice, and that through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, every believer is competent to read and understand the Scriptures for himself. Therefore, one of our cherished beliefs and perhaps our greatest contribution to society is the conviction that every person should be free to worship God according to the dictates of his or her own conscience.

What was true in Texas in the early 1800s has been true throughout history. Whenever and wherever the church and the state have been joined together, people have lost their religious liberty. It was the union of religion and government that put Daniel in the lion's den. It was religion supported by the government that nailed Jesus to the cross and had the Apostle Paul imprisoned and eventually executed.

In Switzerland our Anabaptist forebears, Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel, were imprisoned for preaching believer's baptism instead of infant baptism; such teaching was contrary to that of the government-established church. Through the help of friends, they escaped and once again took up the task of evangelism. Grebel died and Manz was recaptured and sentenced to death by drowning. On January 15, 1527, he was drowned in the Limmat River. His crime? Nothing more than trying to be true to his conscience and propagate what he believed to be the truth of God.

In England, the first Baptist churches were formed in the early 1600s. No religious freedom existed in England at the time. The Church of England was the state-supported

church and the King of England was the head of the Church of England. Thomas Helwys, a Baptist pastor, wrote a book in 1612 in which he asserted the doctrine of full religious liberty: *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. He sent a copy of the book to England's King James I, along with a blunt reminder that the king was not God, but a man, and that God alone had authority over the souls of men. For his courageous stand, Helwys was imprisoned and left to silently and privately waste away. In 1616, he died in the infamous Newgate Prison.

Baptists and other dissenters were excluded from holding public office, were required to attend services in the Anglican Church, and were forbidden from preaching without a license. Despite persecution and harassment, early Baptist preachers and writers continued to boldly demand liberty of conscience for themselves and all others. In the tumultuous years that followed, it was estimated that as many as 3,000 dissenters died in jail during the reigns of King James I and his son, Charles I.

It was during this difficult time that the pilgrim fathers fled England for America, many of them seeking religious liberty. Among them was Roger Williams. A graduate of Cambridge, Williams was a brilliant, conscientious, and scholarly ordained Anglican clergy, and he is considered the father of religious liberty in America.

Williams did not find freedom of religion in America. The Massachusetts Bay Colony, where he originally settled, allowed for religious liberty, but only for the government sanctioned church. Williams had rejected ecclesiastical tyranny in England, and he was unwilling to submit to it in New England. He denied that the colonial authorities had jurisdiction over a man's relationship to God and began to argue for absolute separation of church and state and for freedom of conscience.

For his stand, he was threatened with arrest and deportation from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the win-

ter of 1636. Williams fled into the wilderness and took shelter among the Indians. Williams had consistently befriended the Indians, and they in turn protected him. In the spring of 1636, Williams and several friends formed the nucleus of Providence Plantation in the region that is now Rhode Island. The new colony from its outset provided for democracy, religious liberty, and separation of church and state. Sometime prior to March 1639, Williams and several other persons formed a Baptist church at Providence. Most scholars believe that this was the earliest Baptist church in America. Later, Williams secured a charter from King Charles II for Providence Plantation, where, for the first time in America, complete religious liberty was allowed.

Another sufferer for conscience was Henry Dunster, president of Harvard University. Upon the birth of his fourth child, he publicly announced his belief that infants should not be baptized, but that baptism should be reserved for believers only. Denial of infant baptism was a crime in Massachusetts. For his conviction and refusal to have his child sprinkled, he was deposed from office in 1654.

The persecution of Baptists and others who were not part of the “official” churches continued until the American Revolution and the adoption of the Constitution with its Bill of Rights. The first of those Rights said, “Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” For the first time in America as a nation, religious liberty was guaranteed and would no longer be left to the whims of human authority. It had been written into the law. Baptists, and all other religious groups, were free at last.

However, Texas belonged to Mexico when Baptists first arrived and Mexico did not allow religious liberty. The lack of religious liberty was, in fact, one of the grievances that Texans stated in their Declaration of Independence from Mexico. It was not until Texas won its independence

that religious liberty was guaranteed in the new Republic of Texas.

What does it mean for us to have religious liberty? Four things:

- We are free to believe or not believe in God.
- We are free to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience.
- We are free to support the church of our choice.
- We are free to propagate our faith.

Share the Gospel, Not Shove It

First, religious liberty means that we are free to believe or to reject the gospel. Prepositions are never more important than when it comes to religious liberty. Religious liberty means we have freedom *for* religion, *of* religion, or even *from* religion. A person may be a Christian, a Jew, a Moslem, or an atheist without fear of reprisal. Baptists, as believers in religious liberty, have always been unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil. We believe that every human being has the right to worship God or not, according to the dictates of his or her conscience, and, as long as he or she does not infringe upon the rights of others, we respect and defend that right.

The late Philip Armstrong, general director of Send International, told of a church that sponsored an interfaith panel of Jewish and Christian leaders. After a heated discussion among panel members, one rabbi reportedly said to the Christian leader, “Now we understand what you believe about Jesus Christ and that you want us to accept him as our Messiah. Our question is, will you still love us if we don’t?”

Genuine respect for human freedom and religious liberty means that we will love you even if you don’t accept our faith.

Our contention is not for mere toleration, but for abso-

lute liberty, for there is a difference between toleration and liberty. Toleration is a concession. Liberty is a right. Toleration is a gift from man, while liberty is a gift from God.

Everywhere in Scripture this freedom is emphasized. God created a free Adam and Eve. That meant they were free to go away from him. In Jesus' life and ministry, that freedom was recognized and allowed repeatedly. The rich young ruler came to Jesus asking for the way of eternal life. When Jesus explained the cost of discipleship, the young man turned, not willing to pay the cost, and walked away; Jesus let him go. He respected his freedom too much to do otherwise.

That was Jesus' style. He never coerced, bribed, deceived, or threatened people. He simply made the offer clear and respected their freedom of choice. We, his followers, are to present the gospel and then to show complete respect for the personality and choices of the ones to whom we have spoken. There must be no force involved, only the power of love. People must be completely free to make their own decisions after the gospel has been faithfully presented to them. Any undue pressure, no matter what the form, if brought to bear, will ultimately be self-defeating. Coercion can only result in people becoming hypocrites, not genuine Christians.

Through the centuries various groups have used the threat of violence to gain converts. No true Baptist would ever take that approach. Persuade, yes; coerce, never. The gospel is to be shared, not shoved.

The Only Worship He Wants

Second, religious liberty means we are free to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience. No one should compel us to worship, and no one should forbid us to worship.

Worship is at the heart of our faith. Jesus said to the

woman at the well, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father *seeketh* such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

As it is used here, the word “seeketh” is also found in a number of other places in Scripture. It is used of Herod seeking the Christ child after the visit from the Magi (Matthew 2:13), of the shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep safely in the fold and searches after the one lost sheep (Matthew 18:12), and of Jesus’ mission to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10).

With the same singleness of purpose that Herod sought the newborn Messiah, that the shepherd seeks his lost sheep, and that Jesus seeks after the lost, so God seeks after people to worship him.

But worship cannot be forced. Someone once said that the main thing God asks for is our attention. That can’t be compelled.

A Baptist pastor from Texas once offered this definition of worship: “Worship is when you exchange hearts with God. You leave with his, and he leaves with yours.” How can that be forced? It cannot. Matters of the heart must of necessity be free. We can force outward conformity but not inner commitment.

George W. Truett, in his famous sermon “Baptists and Religious Liberty” delivered on the steps of the Capitol at Washington D.C. on the occasion of the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in May 1920, said:

“It is the consistent and insistent contention of our Baptist people, always and everywhere that religion must be ever voluntary and un-coerced, and that it is not the prerogative of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of

worship, or to pay taxes for the support of a religious organization to which they do not belong and in whose creed they do not believe. God wants free worshipers and no other kind.”¹

“A Good One Has God”

Third, religious liberty means we are free to support only the religions we believe in. We have an obligation to provide financial and other support for God’s work through his churches. Not only do the Scriptures teach this truth (Malachi 3:10), but also the earliest Baptist Articles of Faith in Texas, which state: “We believe that all the pecuniary burdens of the church should be borne equally by all, according to the ability that God has given.” We should not be taxed to support a church we do not agree with, and when the church and state are wed, that inevitably happens. Tax money is to be used for public purposes, not to support religious institutions.

Wise old Benjamin Franklin stated it best: “I judge the difference between a good religion and bad religion — it is the bad one that needs the government to prop it up. A good one has God.”

Horace Greeley, the famous American editor (1811-1872), once received a letter from a woman seeking his advice concerning her church. She wrote: “Our church is in dire financial straits. We have tried everything to keep it going: a strawberry festival, an oyster supper, a donkey party, a turkey dinner, and finally a box social. Will you please tell us, Mr. Greeley, how to keep a struggling church from disbanding?” Greeley answered her in a message of two words: “Try Christianity!”²

That’s sound advice. The work of Christ is worthy of our support, but our gifts must be voluntary.

The First Line of Attack

Finally, religious liberty means that we are to be free to preach and teach, to evangelize and propagate our faith. The first line of attack against religious freedom is always at the point of evangelism, so the fight for religious freedom has been, in part, a fight for the right to propagate the gospel. To allow preaching and evangelism to go unchecked is to endanger established government-supported religious organizations.

The Jewish Sanhedrin, with the power of Rome behind it, ordered the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus again (Acts 4:18), but their words went unheeded. The council might as well have told the stars not to glow, the tide not to flow, and the winds not to blow, as to tell these men not to talk about Jesus. Talking about Jesus was their very purpose for living.

For their determination to propagate their faith, Felix Manz was drowned, Thomas Helwys was imprisoned, Roger Williams was banished, and Joseph Bayes was arrested. And persecution for sharing the gospel continues: for example, in 2001, Baylor students Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry were arrested in Afghanistan simply for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the mid-1950s W. E. Sangster, a British pastor, began to lose his voice and ability to walk due to a terrible disease. He realized the end was near, so he threw himself into writing and praying. Eventually, Sangster's voice failed completely, and his legs became useless. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he took a pen and shakily wrote his daughter a letter. In the letter, he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout 'He is risen!'—but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and *not want* to shout!"³

In the same way, it would be terrible not to have religious liberty, but it would be worse still to have religious liberty and not believe the gospel, not worship regularly,

not give support to the church of your choice, and not share the gospel we claim to believe. To do these things freely is a cherished Baptist belief.

Chapter 8



Evangelism and Missions

Union Baptist Association Constitution - 1840

The grand and leading object of this Union shall be to promote a united effort among the Churches and to extend and encourage the preaching of the pure Gospel within the bounds of this Association by all reasonable and lawful means.

(Article 2)

Our Missionary Mandate

Luke 24:45-49

After a stirring sermon on missions, a deacon said to the pastor, “If you don’t quit preaching on missions, you’re going to kill this church.” The pastor responded, “No, a church doesn’t die that way, but if it does, we’ll nail a sign over the door that says, ‘Blessed are they that die in the Lord.’”

Far from killing churches, missions and evangelism are the lifeblood of churches. They are, in a sense, the heart and soul of churches. It is when churches neglect missions and evangelism that they die. The church in Jerusalem is a case in point. After his resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples what has been called The Great Commission. He commanded them to go into the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20), but history records that the church in Jerusalem was slow to accept this missionary mandate. The believers seemed to be content to worship the Lord, learn from the apostles, and fellowship with one another. There is no record, however, that they ever actually sent missionaries. It was the church at Antioch that accepted the challenge and sent the first missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). Thus, the center of influence and spiritual power shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Something similar happened in early Texas Baptist history. In pioneer Texas, there were two kinds of Baptist churches — missionary and anti-missionary churches. The anti-missionary Baptists were those churches that had been strongly influenced by Calvinistic teachings, going to such an extreme on predestination that they opposed mission work. In 1840, representatives of four churches met at Washington on the Brazos to attempt organization of the first Baptist association. They worked for four days to create an abstract of principles of beliefs on which the association could be founded; but in spite of their diligent work and prayers, they could not agree. The meeting dispersed without Baptists being able to unite in an association. The principle cause: the anti-missionary churches wanted the association to be anti-missionary, or at least to make missions optional.

What happened to these two types of churches? The missionary churches met again four months later and formed the first missionary Baptist association in Texas. Its purpose was to “promote a united effort among the churches and to extend and encourage the preaching of the pure gospel” in order to win Texas to Christ. The very next year they appointed three missionaries (by then there were 9 churches with a total of 384 members), sending them out to win the lost and establish new churches. They paid each one \$250 a year; one of the missionaries, Z.N. Morrell, said that it cost \$300 a year to feed and care for his horse.

Through the years, the missionary Baptists have grown both in numbers and ministry. As a result, thousands of missionary Baptist churches and missions exist throughout Texas. They cooperate to support scores of ministries and institutions, including schools, universities, seminaries, hospitals, child and elder care agencies. The anti-missionary Baptists, on the other hand, have no universities, no hospitals, no childcare institutions, no institutions for the aging, and just a handful of small churches, located chiefly in East Texas.

A Baptist church that is not missionary at the heart of its being, from the tip of its toes to the top of its head, is out of step with what most Baptists believe. We Baptists are Great Commission people. We have been infected with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and missions and evangelism are in our blood. The only Christ we know is the Christ of the gospel, and he embraced the “world” in his plan of salvation. Spurgeon was right when he said: “The question for me is not, are the heathen lost without the gospel, but am I saved if I have the gospel and fail to give it to them.”

Someone once asked Dr. Samuel Johnson what was the best argument for prayer. “Sir,” replied the doctor, “there is no argument for prayer.” He did not mean that prayer is sophistry and delusion. He meant that everything in life is the argument for it. So if anyone should ask, “What is the best argument for missions?” the answer quite simply is, “There is no argument for missions. The total action of God in history, the whole revelation of God in Christ — that is the argument.”

The Scriptures speak repeatedly of this truth. Luke records that Jesus appeared to his disciples following his resurrection. Some of them thought he was a ghost, so he showed them his hands and his feet and invited them to touch him and see that he was flesh and blood. Then he asked them for something to eat and ate with them to further convince them that he was really alive. With his resur-

rection confirmed, he then reminded them that the Scriptures had said that the Messiah would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead on the third day and that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

He then reminded them that they were witnesses to these things. They knew of his crucifixion and resurrection firsthand. Now they were to wait for the Holy Spirit to empower them as effective witnesses (Luke 24:45-49). In Acts, Luke then adds these words from Jesus: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

These verses emphasize our Lord’s missionary mandate. His work of redemption was finished and now the propagation of the gospel must be done. It would be the responsibility of his disciples to carry the gospel to all men everywhere.

There are three things we need to remember about our missionary mandate:

- It is personal in application.
- It is global in scope.
- It is eternal in consequence.

Be a Preacher or a Reacher

First, our missionary mandate is personal in its application. Having reminded his disciples that his death, burial and resurrection were foretold in Scriptures, Jesus said, “And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). Then he reminded them that when the Holy Spirit came, they were to be his witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. In short, they were witnesses and they were to be witnesses. The essence of missions and evangelism is telling what you have seen and heard firsthand. It is bearing witness to our

own experience.

This is not the first time these disciples had heard Jesus talk about this kind of work. His first call to them was, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). In time, he sent his disciples on a special preaching mission. He told them where to go, what to say, what to take, how to act, and how to deal with rejection (Luke 9:1-6). Later, he sent another 70 out on a similar mission with similar instructions (Luke 10:1-24). So the idea of being missionaries and witnesses was not new to them.

Then, as well as now, some people have received a special calling from God to become ministers and missionaries. One of the persons who came as a student to Truett Seminary was a 60-year-old lawyer who had been a Justice of the Peace. He was 40 years old when he first felt the call to ministry, but he did not respond. The conviction would not go away, and then, 20 years later, he closed a lucrative law practice to do what God had been calling him to do.

Another student was a veterinarian who had struggled with God’s call for years. When he discovered his allergy to cats, he was convinced that God was pushing him out of his comfort zone, so he sold his practice and moved his family to Waco to prepare for full-time ministry.

In a recent revival meeting, I was asked to autograph a book for Gene Miller, a Methodist pastor. The friend who made the request said that God had called Gene at the age of 17 to preach, but he did not answer the call. The tugging did not go away, and finally, at the age of 76, he answered God’s call and is now the pastor of three part-time Methodist churches. He said, “I am now doing what I should have been doing since I was 17.”

Are you doing what you’re supposed to be doing? Have you received a special call from the Lord to be a pastor or a missionary? It is not too late for you to answer the call. But even if you do not have a special calling to the

ministry, you are still to be a missionary. Every Christian is to be a missionary if only to the supermarket.

Bill McCartney, former head football coach at the University of Colorado and founder of Promise Keepers, a ministry designed to encourage men to be more committed to Christ, their churches, and their families, said, “I’m not a preacher, I’m a reacher.” We are all to be one or the other of these.

Many of our churches and their members are neither preaching nor reaching effectively. Mike Galli, managing editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote that he once asked some evangelical publishers why they didn’t carry biographies of great Protestant missionaries. The answer was worrisome: “Evangelicals no longer read missionary biographies or books about things that happen overseas in funny-sounding places. Instead, we spend our money and our time buying and reading historical romances, apocalyptic thrillers, and self-help books by the millions.” Galli then told about the great missionary Hudson Taylor, who once wrote that “he was unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge.” So he went out to distant places and gave his life to bring others to Christ. And so did thousands of men and women who followed his example.

We must be careful of popping into the nearest praise service packed with Christians rejoicing in their own security while the world around us perishes without Christ.

Regardless of what others may do, we must be faithful to the missionary mandate. Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision International, did great work among orphans in Vietnam in his latter years, although he was in ill health. In explaining his commitment, he said that when he was in college, a young ministerial student refused to go to pastor a church because he considered it too small for him. Bob said he prayed at that time, “Lord, when better men

than I ought to do a job and won't, let me do it."

The work must be done. The mandate is personal. We must all do our part.

Get Outside Yourself

Second, the missionary mandate is global in scope. The Lord's instructions to both his disciples and to us are specific: "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

The word "nations" is a translation of the Greek word "ethnos." It means "all tribes," "all races," "all cultures," "all people." It is sobering to realize that most people groups have received the gospel at the hands of someone alien to them. A Jew brought the gospel to Rome; a Roman took it to France; a Frenchman then took it to Scandinavia; a Scandinavian took it to Scotland; a Scot evangelized Ireland; and the story goes on and on until the gospel reached us.

Now we must see to it that the gospel is taken to the rest of the world. But we are to begin at our Jerusalem. We are to start where we are. We are to think globally but act locally. The Lord brought the people of the world to the church in Jerusalem in the beginning of the Christian movement (Acts 1:8), and he is doing it again. In the larger metropolitan areas of Texas, as many as 100 languages are spoken in the public schools. Practically every race, culture, tribe, and nationality on the face of the earth can be found in Texas. The demographics of Texas are changing rapidly, and soon there will be no "majority" racial or cultural group in Texas. All will be "minorities."

The fact is, you don't have to travel somewhere to be a missionary; just get outside yourself. Yet, we must continue to see that all persons everywhere in the world know about Jesus. Indeed, evangelism and missions are both local and global.

Behind Eternity's Curtain

Finally, our missionary mandate has eternal consequences. In Revelation, the Lord pulls back the curtain of time and allows John, the author of Revelation, to look into eternity. He sees Christ sitting on a throne surrounded by a great multitude from every nation, kindred, people, and tongue in the entire world. As they worshipped and praised him, one of the elders asked John who these people were. His reply was that he didn't know. The elder responded, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

The multitudes surrounding Christ represent the redeemed of the ages. They are those who heard the gospel, turned away from their sins to face the Savior, and experienced his forgiveness and cleansing. How did they hear the gospel? They heard it from those who obeyed the missionary mandate and preached repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' name.

The key to their being in heaven was that salvation was preached "in his name" (Luke 24:47). The Bible is clear that that's the only way of salvation: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We're living in a day of pluralism. Some people would have us believe that one religion is as good as another, that all roads lead to God, and that it doesn't matter what you believe. Don't be taken in by these notions. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The gospel is simple and clear at that point.

Souls are at stake in this mandate. It is only as we proclaim the gospel that men and women can come to the Savior and find eternal life. Robert Arlington, an English mis-

sionary to Africa, once said, “If I could live in England again, I would have a box for a chair, another box for a table, and I would sleep on the floor before I would let the heathen die without Christ.”

That’s exactly what people will do if we do not take the gospel to them — die without Christ. Our missionary mandate involves the souls of men and women. It has eternal consequences.

To share the gospel with our world is not only a responsibility, it is a privilege given to us by the grace of God (Ephesians 3:8-12). The question is, “Will we take it seriously? Will we evangelize our state and our world?”

Lewis Shuck, an early Baptist missionary to China, as a child heard a missionary plea for gifts to win the world for Christ. When the offering plates were passed, he placed in the plate a piece of paper on which he had written, “I give myself.” The first and greatest gift any of us can give is to give ourselves to carrying out the missionary mandate.

Early Texas missionary Baptists at one time referred to the anti-missionary churches and associations as “do-nothing churches” and “do-nothing associations.” That’s what we will be if we don’t take our Master’s missionary mandate seriously — do-nothing churches filled with do-nothing Christians.

The movie *The Patriot* was the story of Ben Martin, a colonist who fought for American independence in the Revolutionary War against England. When the rebellion started, he opposed it. He had fought in the French and Indian War and had seen and even been a part of the killing of innocent people. What he had done so haunted him that he wanted nothing else to do with war. Martin remained a loyal subject to the king until the British murdered his younger son. He became guilt-ridden because he had opposed the war and refused to participate in it. His sister-in-law said to him, “You’ve done nothing of

which to be ashamed.” Martin replied, “I’ve done nothing — and for that I am ashamed.”

If we neglect missions and evangelism, when we stand before the risen Lord to give an account of our discipleship on the last day, we too shall have to say, “I’ve done nothing, and for that I am ashamed.” Would it not be better to give ourselves unreservedly to sharing Jesus with the world and hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

Chapter 9



Cooperation

Circular Letter - 1840

To the sister Churches and Brethren in western Texas, who have not joined with us in this bond of union, we can only say, come and unite with us, we will meet you with tearful eye, and melting hearts. It could not be expected, my dear brethren, that thrown together as we have been from the various Baptist Churches throughout the United States, we could at once harmonize upon all points of doctrine. Those Churches themselves entertain shades of difference in their opinions upon these subjects. But remember, on the great articles of our faith and practice, we do not differ as Baptists. Should our little Churches therefore be tenacious about these non-essentials, they will remain disjoined, and thus broken in fragments they will perish away.

Working Together in Unity

Acts 15:1-29

Will Rogers once said, “I don’t belong to an organized political party; I’m a Democrat.” Baptists could never say that they did not belong to an organized Christian movement. We are one of the most organized religious denominations in the world. But we have not always been that way. Baptists were slow to organize for fear that someone would lord it over their churches. They had struggled so long and hard to escape the oppression of civil and reli-

gious powers that they were not about to risk the autonomy and independence of their churches by forming another hierarchy.

The first unit of organized Baptist life was the association. In England, ministers in a given area began to associate together for the purpose of discussion and fellowship. From an association meeting held in Nottingham came the Baptist Missionary Society, formed in 1792, which sent William and Dorothy Carey to India as missionaries. This was the beginning of the modern missions movement. The society consisted of individuals, not churches, and membership was based on gifts to the society.

In America, Baptists had their beginning in 1639 with the formation of the First Baptist Church, Providence, Rhode Island. The Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed in 1707. But it was not until the Triennial Convention (so named because it met every three years) was organized in 1814 that Baptists in America organized beyond the association – and it happened then only out of necessity. In 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson and Luther Rice were Congregational missionaries on their way to India. They knew that once they arrived, they would encounter the British Baptist missionary, William Carey, and would have to defend their practice of baptizing infants by sprinkling. Traveling on separate ships, each independent of the other, they began to read their New Testaments in order to prepare their defense. Mid-ocean, all three became convinced that Baptists were right! The Bible taught baptism by immersion of believers only. When they docked in India, they asked to be baptized and thus became Baptists.

The Judsons remained in India as missionaries, while Rice returned to the United States to organize mission support for these first Baptist missionaries from America. The result was the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions, most often known as the Triennial Convention. Baptists

were beginning to realize that they could do more collectively than separately, but even then, the Triennial Convention was an organization of individuals – not churches.

When Baptists banded together in the first association in Texas in 1840, they faced some of the same fears and struggles. Their intentions were the best. They stated in their Constitution: “The grand and leading object of this union shall be to promote a united effort among the churches and extend and encourage the preaching of the pure gospel within the bounds of this association by all reasonable and lawful means” (Article 2).

They also wished to safeguard the autonomy of the churches, affirming this in what they called the “Bill of Inalienable Rights.” Article 1 stated: “Each church is forever free and independent, of any and every ecclesiastical power by men on earth, each being the free house-hold of Christ...”

How could they work together in unity and still preserve their autonomy? How could they harmonize on all points of doctrine? They had joined together in Texas from various Baptist churches throughout the United States, and those churches held differences of opinion on points of doctrine. There was one way that this diverse group of Baptists could work together: that was to establish Articles of Faith on which they could all agree, and then accept one another on what they considered “non-essentials,” i.e., that on which they did not agree. Judge R.E.B. Baylor, who wrote a circular letter to the churches following the formation of this first association, said, “Should our little churches therefore be tenacious about these non-essentials, they will remain disjointed, and thus broken in fragments. They will perish away.”

Thus, with what were considered the “essential” doctrines described, and the independence and autonomy of the churches guaranteed, Baylor pled for unity through the acceptance of one another even though they disagreed on “non-essentials.” This was a necessity in order to survive

on the frontier. So great was their concern for God's work and for one another that they put aside their minor differences and would often ride a 100 miles on horseback – and consider it a privilege to do so – in order to support one another's meetings.

That's how free people have always been able to work together. The New Testament churches were on the verge of splitting over the question of salvation. Paul and Barnabas had great success in winning Gentiles to Christ on their first missionary journey, but that success brought to a head the most crucial problem of the early church — the terms of admission of Gentiles into the Christian fellowship. Some would accept Gentiles into the Christian community on the basis of repentance and faith alone. Others felt that the Gentiles must be circumcised and first accept the Law of Moses. So believers from various churches convened in Jerusalem to discuss the issue. After open debate in true democratic fashion, a decision was reached: Gentiles were saved by grace, through faith, without the works of the law. Kindly but firmly, the Christians attending the meeting in Jerusalem resolved that issue for the churches once and for all (Acts 15). The members of the meeting drafted a letter that set forth their views and encouraged Christians who had divergent views on non-essential matters to accept and cooperate with one another.

The working out of three ancient principles was and is the basis for unity among free people:

- In essentials, unity.
- In non-essentials, liberty.
- In all things, charity.

Things on Which We Can Agree

The first principle of cooperation and unity is: "In essentials, unity." The Jerusalem Conference concluded that salvation was by faith alone, apart from works of the law.

On this, the participants agreed.

The Scriptures ask, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The implied answer is, “No.” So as we walk and work and worship together, there will always be essentials we must agree on. Clearly, some things are not negotiable. But what are these things? While not everyone will agree even on what the essentials are, let me venture four suggestions.

The first nonnegotiable is the lordship of Christ. The theme of the first Christian sermon following the resurrection was “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 2:14-39). The lordship of Christ served not only as the initial confession of the churches, but also the eventual confession of all creation (Philippians 2:9-11), as well as the essential confession of a Christian (Romans 10:9-10). On this we agree.

The inspiration and authority of Scripture are nonnegotiable. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Scriptures are authoritative for our lives, since they are inspired by God. They are the rule and guide for our faith and practice. On that, we are united.

The way of salvation is nonnegotiable. The way to be saved is established in the simplest and clearest way in Paul’s and Silas’ response to the Philippian jailer’s question: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts 16:30-31).

Salvation is a gift of God. It comes by grace through faith. It cannot be earned by being good or by being religious (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:11). It cannot be inherited (John 1:13; 3:5). It cannot be purchased (Acts 8:20). It is not a status we achieve. It is what we freely receive when we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To be saved, we must turn from every effort to save ourselves and trust wholly in Jesus Christ, who died for our

sins, was buried, and was raised again on the third day. That is essential.

The priesthood of the believer is nonnegotiable. The priesthood of the believer is the belief that every Christian has the right to approach God directly in prayer, in confession of sin, and in understanding and interpreting Scripture for himself or herself. It is the belief that no human stands between the believer and God.

Jesus Christ has become our High Priest, and through him we now have access to God without the necessity of other human intermediaries (Hebrews 4:15-16; 1 Timothy 2:5). Beyond this, he has made each of us a priest unto God (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6).

For this belief – the right to be our own priest – Felix Manz was drowned. For this right, Balthasar Hübmaier was burned at the stake. For this right, John Bunyan languished for twelve years in Bedford prison. For this right, Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. For this right, 3,000 dissenters died in prison during the reign of King Charles II of England. And for this right, for ourselves and for others, we must stand.

On these essentials we must be unified. In my opinion, they are not negotiable.

We've Got to Think

The second principle of cooperation and unity is “In nonessentials, liberty.” The Jerusalem Conference concluded that the Gentile converts should not be pressed into observances that were not essential to salvation. If it were not necessary, it would not be required.

While absolute freedom is absolute nonsense, so is absolute uniformity. We must allow room for honest differences in matters not specifically set out in Scripture.

For example, I hold personally a high view of Scripture. I believe, as Peter said, “...no prophecy of the scrip-

ture is of any private interpretation [i.e., of private origin]. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). But even if you agreed with me on the essence of Scripture, it would not necessarily mean that we agree on all matters of the Bible. We might be equally sincere and devout and equally committed to Scripture, yet still differ on many issues and emphases.

While attending a meeting of our denomination, I boarded a shuttle bus and took a seat across the aisle from a pastor from one of the New England states. I looked at my bus schedule and quipped, “I’ve got some millennium charts easier to read than this.” The pastor replied, “Yes, but not nearly as accurate, I’ll bet.” I agreed and immediately felt a kinship with him.

A few minutes later, however, I heard him tell the person sitting next to him that he had just returned from a nearby atomic testing ground where he had participated in a peace vigil. I thought to myself that I would never do such a thing. We could agree on the millennium — the thousand years of peace — but we would not agree on immediate peace. On war and peace, some Baptists are pacifists, others are nuclear pacifists, and still others defend a just war.

On the sanctity of life, some Baptists argue that all abortion represents murder, while others would allow abortions under certain circumstances, i.e., in order to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape and incest. Baptists also hold various views on the role of women in the church. Some Baptists believe women should not teach or in any way hold authority over men in a church, while others believe that they should be ushers and deacons, and still others believe they should serve as pastors.

What am I saying? Simply this: we must be honest and humble enough to admit that we don’t know everything and that our opinion is not the final word on every

issue. We must not confuse scriptural reliability with our fallibility. The record of God is perfect, but our understanding of it is not.

As a teenager might say, we must “give each other some space” in those areas where there can be honest differences of interpretation. We must allow for liberty in the nonessentials. That’s the Bible way, and that’s the Baptist way.

Love, in Spite of Differences

The Jerusalem Conference concluded that the customs of Jewish believers were to be respected out of Christian love, but that all Christians would not be required to observe these customs. The conference participants appealed to charity and reason. They trusted the Holy Spirit to do his work.

In this we see the third principle of cooperation and unity: “In all things, charity.” If we cannot agree on all things, how can we be salt and light to the world as Jesus commanded? We can be by how we live together and how we love one another in spite of our differences.

Baptists have long been fiercely independent and at times downright cantankerous. S. A. Hayden, editor of *The Texas Baptist Herald*, serves as an example of this. Hayden was a caustic writer who accused Baptist leaders of such things as fraud, misappropriation of funds, receiving unusually large salaries, and lording it over the churches. The charges were investigated, but no evidence was ever found to support any of Hayden’s claims.

Hayden became such a nuisance that he was denied a seat at the annual session of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He left the convention to form the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas, taking with him hundreds of churches. But many of them eventually returned to the fellowship of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Hayden filed a lawsuit against Texas Baptist leaders, and

the case even reached the Supreme Court of Texas. The court finally ruled that Baptists could handle their own affairs without the court's interference.

Hayden made enemies of everyone, but in particular J. B. Cranfill, who was editor of *The Baptist Standard*. Cranfill grew up in West Texas and always carried a .45 pistol in his hip pocket. He said he would feel as undressed without his pistol as he would without his pants.

Cranfill and Hayden ended up riding the same train en route to the 1904 Southern Baptist Convention held in Nashville. The two men engaged in a shootout on the train – and both men missed. (This shows that Baptists are perhaps better at shooting off their mouths than anything else.) Cranfill was so embarrassed over the incident that he offered to surrender his ministerial credentials to the First Baptist Church of Dallas, where he was a member, if the church found him guilty of impropriety. The only response to Cranfill's offer was a statement issued by one of the members, indicating that he hoped that if Cranfill were disciplined, it would not be for shooting, but for missing.

The Cranfill-Hayden incident illustrates that even devout persons can serve as poor examples of Christian charity and love. With all our individuality and independence, we must not forget that Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). It is not enough for us to love God and love the lost world. We must also love and accept one another — even when we differ.

Two men can be brothers without being identical twins. We don't have to see eye-to-eye in order to walk arm-in-arm. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We should not fear holding different opinions as long as we do not adopt an “unbrotherly” attitude.

John Newton, who wrote great hymns like “Amazing Grace,” offered this perspective on how Christians should deal with differences among themselves in a letter to a fel-

low pastor: “What will it profit a man if he gains his cause, and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble, tender flame of the Spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made?”

In *Lawrence of Arabia*, there is a scene where the English hero of the movie tells his Arab counterpart that if the desert tribes do not unite and cooperate as a nation, they will forever be destined to be a silly and inconsequential people.

That’s what the people of God must do: cooperate. We must cooperate or disintegrate into being an inconsequential people. Early Texas Baptists knew that – and hopefully we do.

Chapter 10



Baptism and The Lord's Supper

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe that Christ left two sacraments for his Church to keep, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and that the Scriptural qualifications for baptism, are repentance and faith, and that this is properly administered only by immersion, and that baptism is a pre-requisite for the Lord's Supper. (Article 8)

Sermons in Symbols

Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

At the time Ann Sullivan was asked to become young Helen Keller's teacher, the 6-year-old blind and deaf girl was virtually unmanageable. Miss Sullivan said to a friend, "I saw clearly that it was useless to try to teach her language or anything else until she learned to obey me."

Likewise, the first lesson in Christian discipleship is obedience. Until we learn to obey Christ, there can be no real fellowship with him; but once we do, understanding, strength, and power flow into our lives from him.

Never was there a person who seemed to care less about ritual and ceremony than Jesus. By practice and by teaching, he emphasized a simple, direct, personal relationship with God as Father. Born into a world where religion had become a labyrinth of rules and rituals, he instead empha-

sized relationships. He reduced the commands of God to two: love God with all your being and love your neighbor as you love yourself. And he reduced the rituals (generally termed “ordinances” by Baptists) that his followers were to observe to two — baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism was to be the initial ritual in our Christian experience. The Lord’s Supper was to be continual.

There are three truths in Scripture concerning these ordinances that we need to understand:

- They are divine in origin.
- They are symbolic in meaning.
- They are central in importance.

Where They Came From

First, the ordinances are divine in origin. That is to say, they came not from the hand of man, but from the heart of the Savior. By both example and precept, he taught us the place and importance of both baptism and the Lord’s Supper in Christian life.

At the outset of his ministry, Jesus himself was baptized, setting an example for us. Matthew writes:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17).

And then, at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized when he said, “Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Obeying this command from its very beginning, the early church practiced baptism. After Peter's first sermon, this commentary was made: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42).

In the same manner, Jesus both observed and commanded the Lord's Supper. On the night he was betrayed, he met with his disciples to celebrate the Jewish Passover. As they were eating, the Scriptures say, “Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28).

Interpreting the meaning of the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul said, “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you...” (1 Corinthians 11:23).

Clearly, baptism and the Lord's Supper are divine in their origin. They were given to us by the Lord himself.

What Do They Mean?

Second, baptism and the Lord's Supper are symbolic in their meaning. The importance of these two ordinances cannot be overestimated. Both center on the cross: the

Lord's Supper shows what happened to Jesus when he went to the cross; baptism shows what happens to us when we go to the cross. When Jesus went to the cross, his body was broken and his blood was shed for the sins of the world. When we go to the cross, we who were dead in sin die to sin and are raised to walk in the newness of life.

Both are symbols. Neither has saving power. Baptism is a symbolic act of confession and identification. And just as a wedding is symbolic of marriage commitment, so baptism is symbolic of our Christian commitment.

So what does baptism symbolize? It symbolizes death, burial, and resurrection. The Scriptures say:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

Translated, the words “like” and “likeness” are decidedly different Greek words. In Romans 6:4, the word “like” means “just as” or “exactly like.” In the fifth verse, the word “likeness” means “similar” or “resembles.” What Paul says here is that we have been planted (buried) in a way that is similar to or resembles that of Christ and that we shall be raised from the dead exactly as Christ was.

In Colossians, the apostle Paul wrote once again that we are “buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

In keeping with this symbolism, Rufus C. Burleson, president of Baylor University and the pastor of Independence Baptist Church where Sam Houston was baptized,

had a baptistery carved in the rocky bed of Kountz Creek in the shape of a coffin. When a person presented himself as a candidate for membership in the church, he was required to give evidence of his conversion. Thus when Sam Houston presented himself as a candidate for baptism and stated how God had changed his heart, and was approved by the church as a proper subject for baptism, “he was buried in baptism by Elder R. C. Burleson.”¹

Three things are involved in baptism as a symbol. For one thing, it must be by immersion. The Greek word translated “baptize” is *baptizo*, which means, “to immerse, to submerge, to dip.” By the time the Scriptures were translated from Greek into the English language, all denominations, except the generally despised Separatist groups, baptized by sprinkling. So, the word was transliterated as opposed to translated, thus making an English word from it. If they had actually translated the word *baptizo*, the Great Commission in English would have read, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost...”

Burial can be symbolized only if a person is completely submerged, for that’s what we do when we bury people — we put them under. Baptism in the New Testament was always by immersion. There’s no record in history of anyone being baptized by sprinkling until 251 A.D., when Novation, who was ill, was baptized. At that time, this was called “clinical” baptism because it was reserved for those who were sick or could not be immersed due to some condition. Gradually, through the years, sprinkling replaced immersion as a matter of convenience for most Christian denominations. Not until 1311 A.D. did the Council of Ravenna declare sprinkling to be legal as baptism for anyone, regardless of physical condition.

If it’s a symbol, then it must be for believers only. And if it symbolizes our Christian experience — as does baptism — then the experience must come first. That’s why *no* record

exists in Scripture of anyone ever being baptized, without first saying “they believed” (Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 8:36-37; 16:30-33; 18:8).

Infant baptism does not appear in Scripture at all and is not mentioned in history until shortly before the end of the 2nd century when Tertullian of Carthage opposed it as an innovation. The belief that baptism was essential to salvation and that infants who died unbaptized were lost, facilitated the growing practice of infant baptism. However, no significant Christian leader advocated it prior to Augustine (354-430 A.D.).

Finally, since baptism is a symbol, it must not be thought of as a means of grace. Because baptism is prominent in our Christian experience, people have from early times tried to invest it with saving power. One of the most famous baptisms in Texas history was that of Sam Houston, hero of Texas independence. After a long spiritual quest, he made his profession of faith at the Independence Baptist Church, Independence, Texas, at the age of 63. Reportedly, he walked forward, took the hand of Pastor Rufus Burleson, and said to him, “Pastor, today I give you my hand and with it, I give my heart to the Lord.”

On November 19, 1854, he waded into the chilly waters of Little Rocky Creek to be baptized by Burleson. A widely circulated story reports that as Houston emerged from the water, a friend remarked, “Well, General, now your sins are washed away.” Houston replied, “I hope so. But if they were all washed away, Lord help the fish down stream.” The general knew better, and so do we: the blood of Christ, not baptism, cleanses us of sin (1 John 1:9).

As early as the 1st century, some teachers tried to inject something other than grace through faith into the plan of salvation, but all these suggestions were rejected by early Christians. By the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, however, baptismal regeneration came to be widely accepted. Baptism came to be regarded as a sacrament, a means by which

a person received God's grace. Although the idea of sacramental baptism cannot be substantiated by Scripture, it still persists in Roman Catholicism and, to a degree, in many branches of Protestantism.

Likewise, the Lord's Supper is symbolic. While baptism symbolizes our death and burial, the Lord's Supper symbolizes the death and burial of the Lord, with the elements representing his body and his blood.

Because the Lord's Supper, like baptism, is central to the gospel message, people have sought to invest it with saving power. The Roman Catholic Church believes in "transubstantiation": that is, when the priest says the proper words and the worshiper partakes of the elements, they become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Some other denominations hold to "consubstantiation," the belief that the Holy Spirit is present with the bread and wine, and the Spirit of the Lord is received when the worshiper partakes. Baptists have consistently denied both of these views, insisting that the Lord's Supper is merely symbolic.

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper has no saving power. There is no reason offered by Scripture to believe that the Lord's Supper is anything other than symbolic.

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

Finally, baptism and the Lord's Supper are of central importance to Christian faith. As Jesus began his ministry with baptism, so we should begin our discipleship with baptism. And we should continue to observe the Lord's Supper until the Lord returns. Because baptism and the Lord's Supper are both centered in the gospel, we will never outgrow our need to observe them; and as long as we observe them in the proper manner, we will never drift from the heart of the Christian faith. They are, in a sense, anchors to the gospel.

Moreover, they are both individual acts and group acts. Upon hearing the gospel, the Ethiopian eunuch asked if he could be baptized. Phillip answered, “If thou believest...” (Acts 8:37). This represents an individual act. Relative to the Lord’s Supper, Paul said, “Let a man examine himself” (1 Corinthians 11:28) – also an individual act. But baptism and the Lord’s Supper also represent group acts; for instance, the Ethiopian’s entourage had accompanied him, and the Lord’s Supper was to be observed in fellowship with other believers.

In the early 1850s, J.R. Graves (1820-1893) founded a movement known as Landmarkism. Followers of Landmarkism believe that Baptist churches have existed from the time of the New Testament, and their unbroken history makes Baptists the only true church. Graves also insisted that the ordinances were “the sole prerogative of a local church and should be closed or limited to the membership of that church.”²

Early Baptists, however, did not hold that belief. At the first meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, a communion service was held on Sunday afternoon, a popular practice in societal and associational meetings even before that time. When the Baptist Convention of Texas first met in 1848, observance of the Lord’s Supper was a featured part of the gathering and continued to be in the future.³ Our Texas Baptist forebears seemed to view the Lord’s Supper as a time of Holy Communion with God as well as with one another.

In the early part of the 20th century, Alexander Whyte, pastor of St. George’s Church, Edinburgh, told of attending a service of communion conducted by John Duncan, another well-known Scottish preacher. During the service, Duncan noticed a woman, with tears streaming down her cheeks, shake her head as the elders passed her the cup. Duncan stepped down from behind the table, took the cup from the elder, and then passed it to the woman, saying,

“Take it, woman, it is for sinners.”⁴

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are for sinners who have been saved by God's grace. When we participate and partake in the right spirit, we not only recall our sins, we also acknowledge our faith in the Savior.

Once while listening to George W. Truett preach, R.C. Buckner, founder of Buckner Baptist Benevolences, wrote on the back of an envelope:

Whatever is dutiful,
Is always beautiful,
No matter what people may say;
And the voice of the Lord
May be heard in his word,
By all who are glad to obey.

We never hear the voice of God more clearly or personally than when we obey him by being baptized and by remembering his sacrifice through the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 11



Stewardship

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe that all the pecuniary burthens of the Church should be borne equally by all, according to the ability that God has given. (Article 9)

Baptized Billfolds

Matthew 23:23

Perhaps the most famous baptism in early Texas Baptist history was that of Sam Houston, at that time a United States senator. Before his conversion and baptism, he was generally known as “Big Drunk” because of his legendary drinking bouts and rowdiness. In 1840, he married Margaret Lea of Alabama, a devout Baptist preacher’s daughter, who prayed for him and witnessed to him consistently. While living in Washington as a senator from Texas, Houston regularly attended a Baptist church whose pastor was G.W. Samson. Houston considered joining that church, but decided instead to make his public confession of faith back home in Texas. So, at the close of the service during a revival meeting held at the Independence Baptist Church, 63-year-old Sam Houston affirmed his faith in Christ and asked to be received into the church.

On November 19, 1854, with hundreds of people gathered around, Houston waded into the chilly waters of Little Rocky Creek to be baptized by Rufus C. Burleson, pastor

of the Independence Baptist Church and president of Baylor University. The usual place of baptism for the Independence church was north of town at Kountz Creek, where a secluded pool had been carved in the shape of a casket just for that purpose. The location was changed, however, because some mischievous neighborhood boys filled the pool with tree branches and other debris.

When asked if he wanted to put away his fine leather wallet before entering the water, Houston declined, insisting that it be baptized as well. So it was that in Little Rocky Creek, with its clear water streaming over limestone and banks lined with stately oaks, “one of the greatest religious leaders of early Texas baptized the greatest political leader of early Texas, wallet and all.”¹

Baptists have always believed in baptizing billfolds. In fact, a baptism that does not touch a person’s pocketbook has probably not touched his soul either. Obviously Houston’s baptism touched both, for thereafter he gave generously to the church at Independence, paying half the minister’s salary. He also supported Baylor University, where he served on the Board of Advisors, and gave generously to various missionary causes.

Many early Texas leaders were generous “givers.” Rufus Burleson spoke of an occasion during a session of the Baylor University trustees when there was a pressing need for \$500. (At that time, Baylor’s president received a salary of just slightly more than \$300 per year.) Trustee T.J. Jackson stepped forward to subscribe the entire amount. According to Burleson, “This gave offense to every other member of the board. They said he was ‘greedy,’ and insisted on giving a part, or all of the amount, themselves.”

Incidentally, while preaching at a revival meeting in Minden, Louisiana, I related the story of Sam Houston’s conversion. In attendance was the editor of the local newspaper, who was a history buff; he later brought me a copy of a letter written by Sam Houston to George W. Baines,

his pastor from Huntsville, Texas. Apparently, Houston had fallen behind in his pledge to the church because, at the time, he was in Washington serving as senator from Texas. The pastor wanted Houston to pay his pledge, with the addition of 8% interest. Houston replied as follows:

Huntsville

23 Nov. 1857

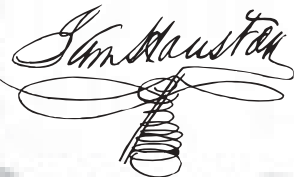
My Dear Brother Baines,

You will find enclosed your note, and if you will renew it for the same amount of \$300 and send it to Mrs. Houston, I will be obliged to you. You perceive that I knocked off the interest for six years at 8 percent per annum amounting to one hundred and forty dollars. This I am not loth to do as you have the luck to minister to Congregations who think you can afford to preach to them gratis. If you do not devise some plan to change their practices, they will think that you ought to pay them a good salary for attending church when they could stay at home on Sunday and thusly be in greater readiness for the week's work. I am not alluding to charity, tho I think the scriptures enjoin that as one of the brightest Christian traits of character, but I allude to plain old fashioned honesty of paying what they subscribe. They ought to know that paper currency will not pass in Heaven. It must be the coin which is only issued from an honest heart. Cotton fields, and Cotton Bales will find no market in Paradise.

Mrs. Houston writes in affectionate regards to Sister Baines, yourself and family.

Truly Thine,

Sam Houston



Every Christian needs to have his/her wallet baptized as Houston did, for giving through our church is part of our Christian duty.

There are three truths about giving we need to consider:

- Giving is an obligation of Christian discipleship.
- Giving is an affirmation of divine ownership.
- Giving is a demonstration of personal stewardship.

You Ought to Do It

First of all, giving is an obligation of discipleship. Jesus was never shy or hesitant to talk about money. Sixteen of Jesus' 38 parables dealt with the subject of money. One out of 10 verses in the Gospels treat the subject. The Bible contains some 500 verses on prayer and even fewer on faith, but more than 2,000 on money and possessions. The reason? Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Perhaps Jesus' most definitive word on giving came about when he reproved the scribes and Pharisees for their legalistic approach to religion, as they would tithe on more trivial matters yet neglect things like justice, mercy, and faith. To them he said, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23).

When Jesus used the word "ought" relative to tithing, he implied that it was a moral obligation, a sacred duty. The word "ought" is seldom used in Scripture. We are told we "ought" to pray and not faint (Luke 18:1). We are told we "ought" to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). And here we are told that we "ought" to tithe. So to Jesus and the apostles, tithing was equally important, along with praying and obeying, as Christian obligations.

Long before Jesus spoke of tithing as an obligation of Christian discipleship, God had declared it a standard for his people. Through the prophet Moses, he said, "And all

the title of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30).

And through Malachi, God said:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it
(Malachi 3:10).

When we ever catch a vision of true discipleship, we will know that giving is very much a part of it.

Time Will Tell

Secondly, giving is an affirmation of divine ownership. A steward is a person who is entrusted with managing the affairs of another. All that we possess is a trust from the Lord: how we use it, and how we give it, is an affirmation of his ownership.

The Scriptures clearly and repeatedly affirm, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). So basic is this teaching that it is repeated, literally verbatim, five times in the Scriptures — three times in the Old Testament and two in the New (Exodus 9:29; Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26; and 1 Corinthians 10:28).

These are not the only instances or ways this truth is stated in the Scriptures. The apostle Paul told Timothy to charge those who are rich not to be proud or trust in their wealth, but rather to trust in the living God "who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). And the Lord said, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). These verses imply

that God owns everything and whatever we possess has been given to us as a result of his graciousness.

One Sunday, Bishop Edwin Hugats drove this truth home in his sermon. Following the worship service, he was invited to dine in the home of one of his wealthy parishioners. After lunch, the host suggested that they take a walk. They strolled through the man's beautiful gardens, looked across his fertile fields ripe with grain, and admired his fine cattle. Then, standing before his huge barns, the man said to him, "Now, Bishop, do you mean to tell me these things do not belong to me?" The Bishop replied, "Sir, ask me that question a hundred years from now."

Time will tell who the real owner is. The apostle Paul said, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). So, at best, we are stewards, trustees, and business managers of God's world.

Once we see God as owner and ourselves as trustees, it becomes easier to give back to him. We believe the inventor has a right to the fruit of his genius. We believe the investor is entitled to a fair return on his investment. We believe the laborer is worthy of his hire. Surely then, we must believe that God – the creator and sustainer of all things – has a claim on our possessions.

R. G. LeTourneau was a successful Christian businessman, who, early in his career made a promise to God that he would give at least 90% of his income to God if God blessed him. For 33 years, he faithfully followed this practice. He explained his amazing stewardship point like this: "It is not a question of how much of my money I'm going to give to God, it is rather how much of God's money I am going to keep for myself."

Solomon expressed what should be our own attitude when he wrote, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given

thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

It all belongs to him. We must not forget that.

You’re Writing Your Biography

Finally, giving is a demonstration of personal stewardship. The Book of Acts records that Judas – having received 30 pieces of silver in return for betraying the Lord – bought a farm with the coins. In contrast, Luke records that Barnabas sold his farm and gave the money to the work of the church (Acts 4:36-37). Luke was convinced that what a man did with his money was an indication of what he does with his heart. Barnabas viewed himself as a steward of all he possessed and demonstrated it through his giving.

In 1815, the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. A recent biography of the duke claims an advantage over previous biographies in that the author discovered an old account ledger indicating how the duke spent his money. Knowing about the duke’s spending habits, claims the author, offered far greater insight as to what the duke considered important than reading his letters or speeches. If someone wrote your biography or mine on the basis of our checkbooks or income tax returns, what might they say about us?

Studies indicate that when giving declines in churches people say it’s due to the high cost of living. No way! It’s more like the high cost of living the way we want to live. Researcher Sylvis Ronsvalle, who has studied church giving, said this: “If you want to know what we learned in 25 words or less, giving is down because we don’t love God as much as we love a lot of other stuff.” Have we forgotten who we are and what we are: stewards of the Lord?

After the Bali bombing in 2002, it was discovered that the terrorists who committed the atrocity were based at a religious school in Malaysia – and that students were “prod-
ded” to donate part of their salaries to help kill Americans.

The only force in the world greater than hate is love. And when we love God with our hearts, minds, and souls, we don't need to be prodded to give. We must simply be taught, encouraged, and given an opportunity.

When the grace of God touches our hearts fully, we will give ourselves as well as our money to the Lord. The apostle Paul declared about the Macedonian Christians, "...but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

We must never allow money to become a substitute for giving ourselves to the Lord. In Channing Pollock's play, *The Fool*, there is a scene in which a woman speaks of her furs as "a substitute for my husband's time, love and companionship."

The husband's father reacts by saying, "I don't know what you women want. A man works his heart and soul out to give you things, and still you are not satisfied."

The wife replies, "Maybe she would like a little heart and soul." That's what the Lord wants — our hearts and our souls. Stewardship is not the church's plan for raising money; it is God's plan for developing people.

Lieutenant Clebe McClary was a young Marine who grew up in South Carolina, completed his college education, and was working as a coach when he joined the Marines. During a tour of duty in Vietnam, McClary's platoon was ambushed by the enemy. McClary lost one eye as well as his left arm. Moreover, his body suffered so much damage that he subsequently underwent 32 operations to retain the use of his entire left side.

Lt. McClary became a Christian when he returned home. His conversion was dramatic and life changing. Since then, he wears a radiant smile and has a positive testimony for Jesus Christ.

While McClary was in the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, his fellow platoon members sent him a plaque bearing a quotation he had learned from one of his coaches. These

same words were printed on a piece of cardboard that hung on the wall of his *hootch* in Vietnam: “In this world of give and take, there are not enough people willing to give what it takes.”

Are you willing to give what it takes? When God’s grace touches your heart, as it did the hearts of those Christians in Macedonia and the heart of Sam Houston, you will be.

Chapter 12



The Christian and the Social Order

Resolution - 1840

Resolved, That this Association earnestly and most solemnly recommend to the members of the various Baptist Churches throughout the land, the formation of Temperance Societies in their neighborhoods, so that the stream of liquid fire which has desolated other countries, may not blast and wither the rising prospects of this young and interesting Republic, and for carrying the object of this resolution into effect, we pray Almighty God to bless every effort of the kind made by the pious and philanthropic gifts.

(Minutes of the Association, 2nd Resolution)

Two-Handed Religion

Luke 10:25-37

The Scottish preacher and poet, George MacDonald, defined the Christian faith this way: “Hold fast to God with one hand, and open wide the other to your neighbors.” While I prefer to emphasize that it is God who holds our hands, I do not disagree with MacDonald’s point that ours is a two-handed religion. It is the kind of faith that recognizes that life consists of a vertical relationship to God and a horizontal relationship with our fellowman – and that genuine belief leads to the right kind of behavior.

Baptists have always had a strong social consciousness. For example, the minutes from the first meeting of the first Baptist association in Texas reveal that churches were encouraged to form temperance societies in their neighborhoods “so that the stream of liquid fire (alcohol) which has desolated other countries, may not blast and wither the rising prospects of this young and interesting Republic.”

Nineteenth century Baptists abhorred drunkenness but allowed moderate use of alcoholic beverages. In fact, a Baptist preacher in Kentucky developed the process for making bourbon, and out on the frontier, some preachers received a salary in the form of whiskey. But as evidence of alcohol’s destructive power continued to mount, Baptists could no longer accept drinking of alcohol, and their stance changed from one of temperance to total abstinence.

When he came to Texas, Sam Houston, the hero of Texas independence, was soon known as “Big Drunk.” On occasion, his critics would even refer to Texas as “Big Drunk’s big ranch.” When Houston married Margaret Lea, a dedicated Baptist, he made her a promise to no longer drink excessively – and he kept his word. And when he later became a Christian, he became a total abstainer and a leader in the temperance movement.

There were other social issues as bad or worse than the use and abuse of alcohol that Baptists seemed to accept or ignore. For example, such things as slavery (James Huckins and William Tryon, the first two missionaries sent to Texas, owned slaves), lack of women’s rights, and mistreatment of Indians were generally accepted. Like us, these Baptists were products of their day and more often reflected their culture rather than challenge it.

But that’s not the way things should be. We are here to be “the light of the world” and the “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13-14). Part of our mission is to challenge and change society, not conform to it (Romans 12:1-2). According to missionary and scholar Samuel Zwemer:

The Gospel not only converts the individual, but it changes society. On every mission field, from the days of William Carey, the missionaries have carried a real, social gospel. They established standards of hygiene and purity; promoted industry; elevated womanhood; restrained anti-social customs; abolished cannibalism, human sacrifice and cruelty; organized famine relief; checked tribal wars; and changed the social structure of society.¹

Jesus emphasized the social aspect of our faith in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He taught that the great command was to love God with all of your being and to love your neighbor as yourself. A religious teacher, who had evidently failed to do this and was seeking to justify his failure, asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded by telling of a certain Jew who traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road was treacherous, literally an alley where people were often mugged. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level; the Dead Sea, near where Jericho stood, rests 1,300 feet below sea level. So the elevation drops 3,600 feet in little more than 20 miles. It was a road characterized by narrow, rocky defiles and sudden turns, making it the perfect hunting ground and hideout for brigands awaiting unsuspecting travelers.

During his travels along the road, the man was attacked by robbers, stripped of his clothes, and left for dead – the kind of incident that often occurred on this particular road. Not long after, a priest came upon the wounded man, but he walked by on the other side of the road. Then came a Levite who did the same. At last, a Samaritan spotted the man in his wounded condition and stopped to render aid. The Samaritan bound up his wounds, lifted the man on to his donkey, and led him to a nearby inn. There, he gave the innkeeper instructions and enough money to help the man

and promised to take care of any future expenses.

This story is particularly remarkable in that the man who was attacked was a Jew, and the man who helped him was a Samaritan. At that time, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was a major social and racial issue. Jews considered Samaritans little more than a mongrel race, half-breeds resulting from the intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles. In fact, Jews often spoke of Samaritans as “dogs” and even preferred not to walk through Samaria when traveling between Judea and Galilee. Yet in Jesus’ story, it was a Samaritan who stopped to help a Jew when his kinsmen would not.

When Jesus finished the story, he asked the lawyer, “Which of these proved to be a neighbor to the Jew?” The answer was a no-brainer: the neighbor was the man who stopped to render aid. Then Jesus delivered the punch line: “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Clearly, Christianity is intended for city streets as well as church steeples. We are to help people whenever and wherever we find them. That’s the Christian’s social responsibility.

There are three truths in this parable that address our social responsibilities:

- Life is like the Jericho road — it is a place where people get wounded.
- We are to be like the Samaritan — people who help others in need.
- The church is to be like the inn — a place where hurting people can be helped and healed.

The Fraternity of Broken Hearts

First, life is like the Jericho road: it’s a dangerous place where people get hurt. It’s an alley where people can get mugged. As we travel the road of life, we don’t have to look for trouble; it lies in wait for us. Vance Havner used to

refer to “the fraternity of the broken hearts.” In that respect, we are all fraternity brothers: everyone has a problem, is a problem, or lives with a problem.

Adversity respects no one. Whether a person is a super athlete, a budding politician, a Hollywood star, or an average person makes no difference. Adversity can come to anyone and show itself in many forms: death, disease, divorce, difficulty, disaster, or disappointment.

The temptation is to despair when life hurts us – especially if we, like the traveler in this story, are innocent victims. We want to cry out with Christ on the cross, “My God, why?” But usually the heavens are silent.

Another option is open to us, however. As somebody once said: “Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” Trouble can leave us angry, bitter, resentful, and disillusioned – or it can render us tender and mellow. It can make us bitter, or it can make us better. The choice is ours.

Trouble can introduce us to ourselves if we will let it. Through it, we can better understand who we are and who God is. A lady once wrote to me, saying that God had to break her heart and put her through intensive difficulty in order to lead her to salvation. “He,” she wrote, “had to wash my eyes with tears so that I could begin to see.”

Raised in a minister’s home, Art Linkletter left home at an early age and, for a time, rode the trains as a hobo. Eventually, he ended up in Hollywood and became one of the most beloved entertainers in America. Everything seemed to be going great in his life until his daughter, Diane, developed an alcohol and drug problem and committed suicide.

Merely a church-goer prior to that time, Linkletter said, “Until this tragedy, I was a cardboard Christian — just one on the surface — no real substance. Then I reached out to Jesus, and he reached out to me, and my life was changed.”

Few of us make it to Jericho without enduring some cuts and bruises along the way. Life may beat us up, but

we don't have to let it get us down – for there is hope and help in Christ and in his people.

The Five-H Club

Second, we are to be like the Samaritan — we are to help people in need. The Samaritan was not the only man on the Jericho road that day. The robbers were there, the priest was there, and the Levite was there. But the hero of this parable was a man who stopped to render aid to a man of another race, a race that often treated him with ridicule and scorn.

On the road of life, there are always those who beat us up, those who pass us up, and those who lift us up. We are to be like the Samaritan: we are to be spiritual paramedics patrolling the highways of life and helping everyone we can.

Mother Teresa, the diminutive 4-foot 11-inch nun who gave her life to working with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India, was a modern-day Good Samaritan. Her father died when she was eight years old, leaving her mother to alone provide for the family. In spite of their economic hardship, her mother taught her that it was their responsibility to help the poor. She said that often she came home at mealtimes to find strangers at their table eating with them. When she would ask, “Who are these people?” her mother would reply, “They are distant kinsmen.” They were, in fact, just beggars that her mother had befriended and sought to help.²

At the age of 18, Teresa entered a convent. Then, in response to “an inner command,” she left the convent to go to India, where she spent her life helping the poor. But when she asked her superiors for permission to leave the convent for this work, they were reluctant to let her go. Thus she argued, “In the face of every suffering man, woman, and child, I see the face of Jesus,” calling it, “God’s

distressing disguise.”

Edwin Markham’s well-known poem, “How the Great Guest Came,” tells of Conrad, a kindly German cobbler who lived alone. One day, he received a revelation that Christ would be a guest in his home. With this news, his joy knew no bounds. He busied himself, feverishly preparing for the holy visitor, but he was not too busy to help three needy strangers who came intermittently to his door throughout the day — a cold and weary beggar, a hungry woman, and a homeless child. The day sped on, and still the expected guest did not appear. Finally, as the day slipped away, Conrad knelt in puzzled prayer: “Why is it Lord, that your feet delay?” Then, out of the silence came a voice:

*...Lift up your heart, for I kept my word.
Three times I came to your friendly door,
Three times my shadow was on your floor.
I was the beggar with the bruise’d feet;
I was the woman you gave to eat;
I was the child on the homeless street.³*

This is precisely what Mother Teresa meant. Jesus addressed God’s “distressing disguise” when he taught about the importance of ministering to the hungry, the homeless, the sick, the lonely, and the imprisoned: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). When we help others in need, it is the same as doing these things for our Lord.

We must not lose contact with the poor. For example, the leader of an organization for Christian young people wrote to a newspaper asking how he could find a needy family to help with food and presents for Christmas. The newspaper’s religion writer answered with a classic response:

I wanted to ask the young man a lot of questions.

How can a person live in the Delta, one of the poorest regions in America, and not know a needy family? How can a follower of Jesus, especially one so obviously concerned and committed, not know a needy family? Why would churchgoing teenagers in search of a needy family turn to a newspaper for help rather than to one of their churches? I wished the young man could talk to John Wesley. Wesley, the Anglican priest who started the Methodist movement, spent most of his time among needy families. Wesley believed it was just as dangerous to the spiritual life to have no contact with the poor as it was to have no contact with the sacraments.

Our social responsibility extends far beyond the poor – and is, in fact, as broad as life itself. Recently, a health care services director, speaking to a group of health care leaders, said that we should be concerned about “members” of the “5-H Club”: the homeless, the hungry, the hopeless, the helpless, and the hugless. 5-H Club members are everywhere.

Jimmy Allen, in a sermon called “The Tears of God,” preached at Parkway Hills Baptist Church in Dallas, told about a Jewish woman he once met who had endured the atrocities of two Nazi concentration camps. As they talked, he asked, “Alice, in all the things you went through, what do you remember most?” She replied, “The empty windows.” Allen inquired, “What do you mean by empty windows?” This was her reply:

I grew up in Central Europe in a little community that I had been a part of all my life. When they came to get us, I was nine years of age. They told us to get our suitcase and to come down to the city square. So I was walking early in the

morning along those cobblestone streets, down a street I had been on all of my life, in the midst of people I had known all of my life, and I knew they were going to take me away to a concentration camp. And as I walked down the street, every window was empty. Nobody came to the windows to see what was happening to me.

God grieves because we don't look through the windows to see those people all around us who hurt – much less step into the streets to help them.

So it all comes down to a hands-on ministry. As Mother Teresa once said, “the gospel is written on your fingers.” To illustrate, she used each one of her five fingers to emphasize each word as she carefully said: “You-did-it-to-me.” Then she added, “At the end of your life, those five fingers will either excuse or accuse you of doing it unto the least of these. You-did-it-to-me.”

“The Back Row People”

Finally, the church is like the inn in the story of the Good Samaritan — a place where people can be made whole again and a place where bruised and bleeding people can go to be helped and healed.

The idea of the church as a healing place is scriptural. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

The Greek word that translates as “restore” is a medical term meaning “to set in joint,” descriptive of how a doctor treats a person who has a broken bone. He carefully places those pieces of broken bone in the right relationship to one another then uses a splint to hold them in place un-

til they can heal. As a church, that's what we're to do. We are not to deplore people or ignore people; we are to restore them. We are to help set them back in a right relationship with God and with one another so that their brokenness may be healed.

Both inside the church as well as outside the church there are people in need of healing. Participating in a national preaching conference several years ago, a layman, who was a heart surgeon from Mississippi, offered "A View from the Pew." He pointed out that the layperson has an entirely different view of the congregation than does the preacher: "You see the faces of people, but we see the backs of their heads. And often times, we know the problems they bring with them to church."

Then he told how he usually slips into the church after a worship service has begun and finds a seat on the back row. He described those he called "the back row people," the ones who slip in quietly and prefer to remain anonymous during the worship service. They are not inclined to shake anyone's hand following the worship service or even sign a visitor's card, because they don't wish to be visited. They don't want a face-to-face encounter, because their problems might surface as a topic for discussion.

Of course not all persons with problems sit on "the back row." Hurting people are scattered throughout congregations and throughout our communities as well. They hurt in many ways.

Some have serious health problems, such as cancer, heart disease, and AIDS. Some are divorcees. Some are children of divorcees. Some are those who have had abortions. Some are people who have had extramarital affairs. Some have experienced the death of a neglected parent. Some may have experienced a suicide in the family; suicide always leaves many things unexplained. And some have alcohol and drug problems.

These people, the heart surgeon said, feel as though

they are the only ones with a particular problem. In addition, the hurt is continual. The devil is all too ready to tell these people how bad they are – and sometimes tell them that they are worse than they really are. Then the speaker said, “One common denominator in all of these is guilt, and Jesus alone is empowered to forgive sins.”

Where can these broken people go to find help? A Houston newspaper columnist recently wrote: “Where can people go to find a friend?” He then answered his own question:

I’ve observed five places: bars, clubs, people in your office, people next door to your home and apartment, and the church. I’ve observed that the crowd is always changing, turning over in bars, clubs, offices and apartments. The only place to find lasting friendships is in a church. I’m not a churchman, but I recommend that you go to church.

So do I. Give it a try, and you’ll find someone there to help you.

Chapter 13



Ministers*

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe that while it is the duty of the Minister to devote himself to the work of the Ministry, it is the duty of the Church to contribute to him of their worldly substance for his support and that of his family. (Article 10)

** I am aware that all who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior are to minister in his name. In a sense, all Christians are ministers. I commented in a previous chapter on the danger of dividing Christians into two classes: clergy and laity. However, I am aware that the Bible speaks of those who have been called and gifted for roles of service in the churches, such as pastors (Ephesians 4:11-12). In this chapter, I use the term “minister” to refer to these persons.*

The Duty of the Minister

1 Thessalonians 2:1-4

Sam Jones was an eloquent, fervent, witty Methodist evangelist who preached in the latter half of the 19th century. Since his law practice had been destroyed earlier by alcoholism, he constantly attacked the vices of society. On one occasion, he took issue with the press, heaping criticism on them. They reacted by saying, “We can’t understand why the evangelist should be attacking us. After all, we made him what he is.” Jones characteristically re-

sponded with sarcasm and irony: “If you made one Sam Jones, why don’t you make another?”

The media, of course, could not “make” a Sam Jones, or any other preacher for that matter. Only God can do that. The apostle Paul, speaking of his own ministry, said this: “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God . . .” (Colossians 1:25). Paul is saying that the ministry was neither something he took upon himself nor was it bestowed upon him by others. Rather, it came by divine mandate. The Lord “made” him a minister – and it is the Lord who makes all ministers.

One reason why Texas became such a great Baptist state was because of the first preachers who settled there — men like Z. N. Morrell – who entered Texas in 1835 to see if it would make a suitable home. Morrell immediately fell in love with Texas, and until the day he died, he said that he had “Texas on the brain.”

By all accounts, Morrell was the greatest pioneer preacher to come to Texas – and perhaps the greatest in America. From the moment he crossed the Sabine, he envisioned that Texas would become a vast Baptist stronghold. Returning to Tennessee to retrieve his family, he said, “My very soul burned within me to preach Jesus.” So with Jesus as his theme, Morrell found a suitable place to preach, called out to people early, and began to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” Once a crowd gathered, he chose Isaiah 35:1 as the text for his sermon: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.”

At the conclusion of his stirring impromptu sermon, Morrell said, “My soul was full and overflowing, and at that moment I believed that text.” That passage became the golden text of Morrell’s life and the persistent faith and expectation of his ministry in Texas.

Morrell brought his family to Texas in 1836 – just as Texas sought its independence from Mexico – and remained

there until his death in 1883.

Many of these early preachers were college and seminary graduates. Some had been lawyers, judges, and congressmen in their home states. They could have held the most popular pastorates in the states, but because of a divine call, they elected to live, labor, and die in Texas, then but a poor pioneer Republic. Most of them came of their own accord, with no church or missionary society sponsorship. They came because God led them to Texas.

When Morrell arrived in Texas with his family, the Texas revolution was just beginning. Entering the state, he met people fleeing for safety who encouraged him not to go on. These were his words:

I was upbraided by everybody I met, and by some cursed as a fool, declaring that my family would be slain either by Mexicans or Indians before we would get far beyond the Sabine. Seldom in life had I turned back, and trusting in God, we travelled on.¹

These early preachers were tireless travelers and workers. Noah T. Byars — who owned the blacksmith shop where Texans convened to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence — estimated that he rode more than 100,000 miles on horseback, formed 60 churches, five associations, and two Baptist schools. For that he was paid \$250 a year as a missionary, although it required \$300 a year to maintain his horse. After a lifetime of service, he entered old age destitute, and the state Baptist convention voted him a pension of eight dollars per month.²

Life for frontier preachers was not easy. To fulfill their preaching assignments, they often rode all day, slept on the lonely prairie at night, and ventured through forests filled with Indians and wild game. There were no roads or bridges, and when they encountered a swollen river, they had no choice but to tackle the current, even in the dead of

winter.

They had countless skirmishes with Indians. They outran them when they could and battled them when they could not. The tales they told of Indian raids would make the blood chill — killing, horse stealing, burning, scalping, and kidnapping women and children were constant dangers. For protection, they often posted guards outside their places of worship; on the inside, men kept their rifles handy as they sang, prayed, and listened.

Aside from the Indians, scoffers existed in many communities. The bread and wine, emblems of our Savior's love, were sometimes administered by mockers out in public. And at times, ruffians would follow close upon the heels of preachers as they left their places of worship, barking at them like dogs.

Rufus Burleson was once preaching a revival in Galveston when a group of gamblers tried to close down the meeting and run him out of town. Many of them went to the service and lit up cigars in an attempt to smoke him out. The place was soon filled with so much smoke that people could scarcely see or breathe. But Burleson held out and finished his sermon. Later, he reportedly said, "They smoked me, and I smoked them. My fire and brimstone was eternal and outlasted theirs."

These frontier preachers were deeply committed to the Lord and the Baptist cause – and held a vision of the greatness that some day would crown the Baptist witness in Texas. On the 50th anniversary of the first association, Rufus Burleson said in a sermon to the Baptist convention:

If our brethren, with only 3 small churches and 3 preachers and 92 members, surrounded by 8 million hostile Mexicans and 60,000 Indians, increased 2,000-fold in 50 years, what may we not do by 1940? Can we not establish a Baptist church and a Sabbath school in every neighborhood in

Texas and girdle the entire planet with Texas Baptist missionaries?

That's vision! And that vision did become reality.

Frontier preachers were devoted to cooperation. They realized that the work was so great that it could only be accomplished if they worked together and supported one another. So with great loyalty and devotion, they labored for the common cause of Christ's kingdom.

There was always a need for more pastors and preachers to minister to the rapidly growing population of Texas. So existing preachers agreed to encourage the more gifted men in churches to give their lives to the preaching ministry – and at times prodded them to do so.

In his book *Flowers and Fruits in the Wilderness*, Z. N. Morrell wrote:

Men entering the ministry in Texas, under my observation, have been very much like horses. Occasionally I have met one that needed the curb and bit in the midst of his feverish anxiety to rush forward, regardless of either propriety or consequences. Then there are others that must be coaxed along, and sometimes put under the spur to drive them forward.³

Of J.G. Thomas – who felt the call to preach, but because he was timid was loath even to pray in public – Morrell said, “Here is a man that not only had to be coaxed, but finally had to be put under the whip and spur, before he could take his place in the team and do his part in dragging the heavy load along.”

Another preacher who needed prodding was lawyer Richard Ellis, who attended a service where Judge R.E.B. Baylor, for whom Baylor University is named, was preaching. At the time, Baylor was a district judge, and later be-

came a Supreme Court Justice of the new Republic of Texas. On his circuit, he held court by day and preached by night. At the close of one such service, Baylor reportedly called on Ellis to pray, and Ellis did so with such feeling and pathos that Baylor immediately left the pulpit, went to Ellis, took him by the hand, and with tears in his eyes, said, “Why do you not preach?” Ellis began to weep, saying, “I ran away from Virginia to keep from preaching.” Baylor replied, “You have been running long enough from the Master: Obey the divine impression you have, take up the cross and preach Jesus to a lost and ruined world.” Ellis accepted the challenge and thus became one of Texas’ most effective preachers.

So important were ministers that when the first association adopted its Articles of Faith, they included in the document an article regarding ministers: “We believe that while it is the duty of the Minister to devote himself to the work of the Ministry, it is the duty of the Church to contribute to him of their worldly substance for the support of his family” (Article 10).

Back then, ministers needed to devote themselves to the work of the ministry – and this remains a need today as well. The church doesn’t need to be a performing arts center or a religious pep-rally. It just needs to be the church. And by the same token, a minister does not need to be a stand-up comedian or ringmaster of a three-ring circus. He simply needs to devote himself to the work of the ministry.

But what is that? What can a church rightly expect of its pastor? If we look to the apostle Paul as our model, we can learn the characteristics of a good minister.

- He ought to preach the gospel faithfully.
- He ought to love the people sincerely.
- He ought to live his faith consistently.

Be a Voice, Not an Echo

The first duty of a minister is to preach the gospel faithfully. The apostle Paul said that he preached the gospel straightforwardly, courageously, and faithfully (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2, 4). That is the sacred duty of every preacher, for it has pleased God through the foolishness of preaching: that is, to save those that believe. It is an awesome and humbling responsibility to stand between God and the masses to deliver his Word, but preachers must do it as a matter of compulsion, not choice. As Paul said, “Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

So, how did our forefathers preach? They preached humbly. In 1848, when the first Baptist convention of Texas convened, the preacher designated to preach the convention sermon, at the last minute, declined. The convention then turned to the alternate preacher, but he also declined. Then, first one and another were asked – and all declined to preach. Finally, Z. N. Morrell accepted the challenge, saying, “I have no reputation to uphold.” And with no prior notice, he preached a stirring message.⁴

They preached biblically. The Scriptures were to them the inspired, authoritative, sufficient Word of God. God’s promises are secured to his Word – not to our opinions, not to our revisions, not to our ideas, but to his Word. We don’t change the Word of God; it changes us. And we don’t need to defend it, we just need to preach it.

They preached plainly. Z.N. Morrell was perhaps the most effective of the pioneer preachers who came to Texas. He was both plain spoken and outspoken. What was said of another could also be said of him: “Never was the plain truth told more plainly by a plain man.” No one can, at the same time, project the idea that he is clever and that Jesus is mighty to save.

They preached courageously. Early Texans referred to

preachers who sacrificed principles for the sake of popularity as “tin-headed.” Being a soft metal and easily dented without breaking, tin made an apt description of the preacher who was soft enough to be marked by the hammer of popularity.

The temptation to play to the galleries, to be a crowd pleaser, is always alluring to the preacher. As one preacher said, “I have responsibility for church worship. I am paid to make sure that all glows, and flows, and steps on no one’s toes.” That’s a tough assignment, and if taken to the extreme, dilutes worship to little more than a worthless show.

Be a voice, not an echo. Be a light, not a reflection. Preach courageously.

They preached with passion. It was said of Noah Hill that:

...his head was full of waters and his eyes a fountain of tears. He preached with zeal and earnestness. He wept freely over lost sinners. And those who heard him in the midst of his masterly exhortations can never forget him. He was sound in doctrine and pressed his conclusions with power. Large numbers repented under his appeal. He preached to the heart.

And of William Tryon, it was said that he was often emotional to the point of tears.

Hopefully, we are not beyond that. If Jesus wept over the “lostness” of Jerusalem, surely we can weep over the lostness of our own city. If we never weep over the lost, it’s doubtful that we will see many of them saved. The Scriptures remind us: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6). When it comes to souls, weeping often precedes reaping.

Finally, the most important thing is that they preached

Christ. The text of Rufus Burleson's first sermon was, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Another effective early Texas preacher, William Tryon, often remarked that a preacher ought to stand behind the cross and never let even his little finger be seen.

That's the preacher's primary job in any era. Gordon MacDonald once said, "The older I get, the more I realize that my sole mission is to bring people to Jesus and leave them there." Our lives become much simpler when we realize that Jesus is the focus of all that we do.

Not Called to Be Sensational, But to Serve

Second, the minister is to love people sincerely. The apostle Paul said of his ministry, that he was like a nursing mother who cares tenderly for her children and like a father who gently guides them (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11). Clearly, Paul's words speak of the loving relationship that ought to exist between a pastor and his people.

There is more to being a pastor than just preaching, but this is all that some pastors want to do, declaring they won't do funerals, perform weddings, or visit hospitals, or have time for counseling. Frankly, a person holding such an attitude has no place in the ministry at all.

One of the first Baptist missionaries to Texas, William Tryon was a graduate of Mercer University, a principal founder of Baylor University, a powerful preacher – and he was a loving pastor. During his pastorate at the First Baptist Church in Houston, the church grew to include more than 100 members, an unusually large number in those days. When a yellow fever epidemic struck the city, Tryon could have left Houston – and lived – but he instead chose to remain among the people he loved and who loved him, danger notwithstanding. In November 1847, Tryon died of yellow fever at the age of 38.

A successful ministry just doesn't happen – it's paid for, and not in one lump sum. A successful ministry is on the installment plan — by daily service — and the more it costs, the more effective it becomes.

God does not call pastors to be sensational, he calls them to be servants. That means pastors must be among the people ministering to their needs. After a while, the shepherd ought to smell like the sheep.

“Give Me Texas for Jesus or I Die!”

Finally, a good minister should live the faith consistently. The apostle Paul told the people of Thessalonica that he was not guilty of deceit, impure motives, trickery, immorality, or greed as he labored among them (1 Thessalonians 2:3). His life was one of integrity.

False ministers and charlatans were among the greatest obstacles on the frontier, for they led people astray and lived in sin. Early Baptist leaders, therefore, organized a “vigilance committee” to prevent imposters from gaining people's confidence in the exercise of ministerial functions. In an attempt to protect churches from unethical men, the committee suggested that no one should be allowed in the pulpit until they provided clear evidence that they were not imposters. The committee members were convinced that ministers should be “of good report among them that are without.”

Z.N. Morrell was the epitome of integrity. Once while working with a group of surveyors, he and a companion traveled west of Corpus Christi on a scouting expedition. They suddenly came upon 12 Indians mounted on horseback and clad in the habiliments of war. They turned and raced toward a grove of trees knowing that the trees offered more safety from the Indians. The race was close, but as soon as they reached the trees, they leaped from their horses and prepared to shoot. As soon as they presented

their guns, the Indians threw themselves over on the opposite side of their horses with nothing but an arm and leg exposed, then wheeled out of range of their guns. Then Morrell mounted his horse and went a few paces into the timber and beckoned, partly in English and partly in Spanish, as though he were ordering a company of men to come out and charge the Indians, making them believe that assistance was close at hand. The Indians quickly turned and rode away.

Morrell then reportedly made this comment:

My mind was not at ease. In the midst of my danger, I had made a willful misrepresentation to the Indians, making them believe there were men at hand, when there were none within six miles of the place. Lie not one to another is a plain command, and I was without question guilty of deliberate falsehood. My comrades then and afterwards made themselves merry at the recital of this scene; but the falsehood mixed with it has always cast a gloom over my mind. Our lives, however, were preserved, and I hope, in answer to prayer, God has forgiven me for any sin I committed while passing through this fearful trial.⁵

Vance Havner once said, “God is on the lookout today for men who are quiet enough to receive a message from him, brave enough to preach it, and honest enough to live it.” That described Z.N. Morrell and many other pioneer preachers.

Rufus Burleson, who was twice president of Baylor University, came to Texas in 1848. He had graduated from seminary in Kentucky, a year earlier. While his classmates were consecrating themselves to various mission fields, he raised his boyish face toward heaven, stretched out both his arms toward the west, and exclaimed, “This day I con-

secrete my life to Texas.” Salvation of persons in the frontier state of Texas had preoccupied him since his college years. He did not come to Texas to be an educator. He came to preach, to win the new state of Texas to Christ. When he landed at Galveston in January 1848, he dropped to his knees in the sand and prayed, “Oh God, give me Texas for Jesus, or I die.” That’s the kind of minister in past generations who made Texas a great Baptist state – and that’s the kind of minister needed for generations to come.

Chapter 14



Last Things

Articles of Faith - 1840

We believe in the final perseverance of the saints by grace unto glory, in a general judgment, and in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, and that the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal. (Article 11)

The Last Days

2 Timothy 3:1-14

The Bible is a book about all time — from the first days to the last days. The first days deal with the creation of all things. The last days deal with the consummation of all things, that final event toward which all creation is moving.

Ironically, we are never satisfied with what God tells us about either the first days or the last days. We always want to know more than he has chosen to reveal.

The Bible's account of the first days relays briefly the creation of all things. In just one chapter of only 31 verses in the book of Genesis, God tells us that he created all things separate and distinct, beginning with the small and moving to the large, and that man is the crown of his creation.

Most people have never been satisfied with God's summaries. For example, Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656), starting with the first known date in the Bible and moving back through the genealogies offered through Scripture,

concluded that creation took place in 4004 B.C. He based his findings on several assumptions: that all generations were included in the Bible, that the ancients measured time as we do (our calendar did not come into existence until 46 B.C.), and that the Hebrew word for day (*yom*) was a period of 24 hours. Still not satisfied, Bishop John Lightfoot (1602-1675) established that creation occurred in the week of October 18-24 and suggested that Adam was created on Friday, October 23, at 9:00 a.m.

If we are not satisfied to accept God's word on the first days, we have been even more reluctant to accept his words on the last days. Fourteen times in Scripture he speaks of the last days — the time when the Lord will return, when the dead will be raised, when the world will be judged, and when the FINAL eternal order will begin. God makes no attempt to tell us in detail about these events — when they will happen or how they will happen, just that they will happen.

Not being satisfied with generalities, people have developed various theories of how these things will come to pass. By taking Bible verses from here and there and piecing them together like bits of a jigsaw puzzle, they have tried to develop a complete, detailed picture of events to come. The problem is that some of the pieces are missing. And so with vivid imaginations and preconceived ideas, people have attempted to fill in the gaps regarding these events and how they will unfold. This has resulted in endless confusion and more division surrounding these ideas than any other Bible teaching. As Robert Klause points out, this subject has been “the most divisive in recent Christian history.”

Concerning beliefs about last days, Baptists have not agreed on any one of the theories that have evolved. George W. Truett, perhaps Baptists' greatest pastor, was a post-millennialist. Billy Graham, our greatest evangelist, is a pre-millennialist. Hershel H. Hobbs, our greatest pastor/theo-

logian, was an a-millennialist.

All of these men believed the Bible is the inspired, authoritative, sufficient Word of God, but they interpreted it differently. Thomas Jefferson once said, “Good people with good intentions and the same facts don’t always agree.” That was never more true than when it comes to the last days.

Christ obviously did not mean for us to have all of the details of future events or he surely would have given them to us in a clear fashion. But he did give us all that we need to know. So rather than speculate and fabricate, we need to concentrate on the basics, the things we know for certain and the things on which we all agree. At least five of them are:

- Christ is coming again.
- The resurrection and the rapture will follow.
- The judgment is sure.
- People will spend eternity in heaven or hell.
- God’s people will persevere to the end.

We Haven’t Seen the Last of Him

First, Jesus Christ is coming again. One thing is certain: the world has not seen the last of our Lord. We have his word on it. In John 14, Jesus, seeking to comfort his disciples after having announced his approaching death, tells them not to be troubled. He explains that in the Father’s house, there is room for everyone, and he will prepare a place for them. Then he states clearly, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

We have an equally clear promise from the angel of the Lord. After Jesus had been crucified, buried, and raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven. An angel spoke to the disciples who were watching Jesus ascend: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same

Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The Bible tells us that his return will be sudden, as “a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:10). It will be triumphant. He came the first time in his humility; he will come a second time in his glory. He came the first time to suffer; he will come a second time to reign. He came the first time for salvation; he will come a second time in judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). And his return will be personal. “This same Jesus...shall so come” (Acts 1:11).

We do not know exactly when he will come, nor do we need to know. He said to his inquiring disciples, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7). That should quiet all speculators. What he does tell us is to be ready when he comes and to remain busy until he comes.

Comfort One Another With These Words

Second, when he comes, the resurrection and the rapture will follow. While in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul had spoken to the church there about Christians being taken [raptured] to be with the Lord upon his return. In the meantime, some of the believers had died and been buried. Those who were alive and remained became concerned about these dead believers. What part would they play in God’s grand scheme of things? Would they share in that great event?

In response to their inquiry, Paul wrote:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and

the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Paul speaks here only of the part believers will have in this grand event, but he clearly outlines the events in their order:

- Christ returns.
- The dead will be resurrected.
- The living believers will be raptured without having to go through the death process.
- We will be with the Lord forever.

He makes no attempt to tell us what part the unbelievers will play in this divine drama, but what he does tell us should be a source of great comfort to all believers.

Not all people believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead. Some believe in annihilation: that is, when people die, they totally cease to exist. Others believe in reincarnation: that is, after death a person returns to earth as another creature. But central to the teachings of Jesus is that our bodies will one day be raised from the grave, and we shall have a bodily existence in eternity.

Looking Forward to Payday

One of the events that will happen next when Christ returns is judgment. Although Scripture teaches that believers and non-believers alike will be judged, in this age of easy-believers, the idea of judgment is not a popular topic. Yet Scripture is clear: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

You might ask this: if salvation is by grace through

faith and not of works, why would God judge us by our works? The purpose of the judgment is not to determine a person's destiny. That is determined by belief or lack of belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The purpose of the judgment is to determine a person's reward in that destiny.

We are saved by faith. We will be rewarded according to our works. No one thing will be considered in the judgment; it will be comprehensive with multiple factors taken into account.

We will be judged on the hidden things of our lives (1 Corinthians 3:13). This both frightens and reassures us, for not only will hypocrisy be exposed, but also those who have been falsely accused will be vindicated. The hidden things will stand out in the white light of Christ's holy presence.

We will be judged by the law of God written in our hearts (Roman 2:15-16).

We will be judged by our knowledge of the truth (Luke 12:48).

We will be judged by the opportunities we have been afforded (Matthew 11:21-22; 2 Peter 2:21).

We will be judged by our words (Matthew 12:37).

We will be judged by the same standards we use in judging others (Matthew 7:1-2).

We will be judged by the way we treat others: with kindness, compassion, or indifference (Matthew 10:42; Matthew 25:31-46). Someone facetiously said, "My greatest fear is that I will be standing by Mother Teresa in the final judgment line, and I will hear God tell her, 'You know, you should have done more.'"

Will there be one judgment, or two or three? Who knows for certain? Does it really matter? We will all be included one way or another and at one time or another. The important thing is to be prepared whenever and however it occurs. One thing is certain: his judgment will be fair. No

one will be able to say, “You didn’t treat me fairly: this is not what I deserve.”

The Great Division

Fourth, people will go to their eternal reward — either heaven or hell. There is no mistaking that Jesus believed and taught that there is a hell. It is a place of suffering, a place of remembering, a place of despair, and a place of no escape (Luke 16:19-31).

Vance Havner said his father was converted by the preaching of a hair-raising sermon that scared him into the kingdom of God. Then he added, “Such preaching is discouraged these days. But it is better to scare men into heaven than to lull them into hell. Better shocked than stupefied!”

Just as surely as there is a hell, there is also a heaven. Abraham was a nomad, living his life in tents. The only foundations his tents had were stakes driven into the sand, and temporary at best. Driven by faith, he looked for a city that had solid foundations, whose builder and maker was God (Hebrews 11:10). He looked for a permanent home.

In Revelation 22, John describes that permanent home for us. In heaven, there will be no more sea – nothing that separates. There will be no tears – nothing that saddens. There will be no death – nothing that grieves. There will be no pain – nothing that hurts. There will be no night — nothing that frightens. Heaven is the home of the redeemed.

Preserved, But Not Pickled

Finally, God’s people will persevere. They will endure and be secure to the end. “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13; Acts 15:11). The Spirit of God comes to live in us when we believe, and that presence enables us to persevere and keeps

us secure until the end. "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation..." (1 Peter 1:5).

The final two verses of the next to last book of the Bible affirm this grand assurance:

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

We are not only saved by grace and sustained by grace, we are secured by grace.

The most important thing is not that we understand all that will happen in the last days. The important thing is that we be ready for the last days by putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, that we remain busy serving him, that we keep growing in his likeness, and that we seek to win everyone we can to faith and trust in him. Someone once said, "Live your life so that when it comes time to die, that's all you will have to do." If you'll put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, if you'll follow him, and obey him, and serve him for the rest of your days, then, when it comes time to die, *that's all you will have to do*. Then the last days will be your best days. That I know for sure.

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Appendix

This appendix contains the documents that resulted from the meeting held in 1840 of the organization of the first Baptist association in Texas –The Union Baptist Association – as printed in booklet form by the Telegraph Press, Houston, Texas, that same year.

Those documents found in the booklet are included in the appendix in the following order:

Cover Page

Minutes of the Union Baptist Association

Articles of Faith

Bill of Inalienable Rights

Constitution

Rules of Decorum

Table of Pastors, Deacons, Clerks, Churches, &c.

Circular Letter

To the extent possible, the spelling, punctuation, and form of the original documents have been followed.

MINUTES
OF THE
FIRST SESSION
OF THE
UNION BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
BEGUN AND HELD
IN THE
TOWN OF TRAVIS,
IN WESTERN TEXAS,
OCT. 3TH,
1840.



HOUSTON:
TELEGRAPH PRESS.
.....
1840.



MINUTES

OF THE

UNION BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

The messengers from the several Churches met at Travis, in the Republic of Texas, on Thursday the 8th day of October, in the year of our Lord, 1840, for the purpose of organizing this Association.

On motion of Brother Trimier, Brother T.W. Cox was called to the Chair.

On motion of Brother Cleveland, Brother Collins was requested to act as Clerk.

On motion of Brother Davis the meeting adjourned until the ensuing day, Friday, at 1 o'clock P.M.— closing prayer by Brother Baylor.

Friday, October 9th, the Meeting met according to adjournment; opening prayer by Brother Cox. Letters were then received and read from the several Churches, the names of their messengers enrolled and their condition noted as exhibited in the after part of these Minutes, (see table).

The Association then proceeded to the election of their officers by ballot. Whereupon the Rev. T.W. Cox was chosen Moderator, Rev. R.E.B. Baylor, Corresponding Secretary, and J.W. Collins, Clerk.

On motion, the Moderator then proceeded to read the Constitution and articles of Faith which were previously ratified by the Churches, for the formation and government of this Association.

On motion, Resolved, That a Committee of three be appointed to draft rules of decorum for the government of this body; whereupon Brothers Baylor, Cleveland and Trimier, were appointed on said Committee.

On motion, Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to arrange the business of this Association; whereupon Brothers Davis, Hall and Baylor, were appointed on said Committee.

On motion, Brothers Trimier, Harvey, and Collins were appointed a Committee on Divine Service.

On motion of Brother Trimier, Resolved, That Brother Tate be received as a representative from the Church at Independence, in consequence of the absence of two of her representatives. Brothers Davis and Tate, were appointed a Committee on Finance.

On motion of Brother Baylor, the Association adjourned until the ensuing day, Saturday, at half past eight o'clock, A.M.; closing prayer by Brother Davis.

Saturday October the 10th, the Association met according to the adjournment—opening prayer by Brother Cox. The roll being called it appeared that the representatives were all present. The Moderator then called for the reports from the several Committees.

The Committee on arrangements made their report which was received, and the Committee discharged.

The committee on rules of decorum, also made a report which was received, and the Committee discharged.

On motion, Resolved, That the Corresponding Secretary be instructed to correspond with any

of the Associations or religious Societies of the United States of the North, and especially those with whom a correspondence may be requested by any member of this body.

The following resolutions were offered by Brother Baylor and adopted.

1st. Resolved, That the various Baptist Churches throughout western Texas be requested to examine with prayerful attention the Articles of Faith adopted by this Association, and that they suggest to this body from time to time, such amendments or alterations as they may deem proper and consistent with the word of God as contained in the Holy Scriptures.

2nd. Resolved, That this Association earnestly and most solemnly recommend to the members of the various Baptist Churches throughout the land, the formation of Temperance Societies in their neighborhoods, so that the stream of liquid fire which has desolated other countries, may not blast and wither the rising prospects of this young and interesting Republic, and for carrying the object of this resolution into effect, we pray Almighty God to bless every effort of the kind made by the pious and philanthropic gifts.

3rd. Whereas some of the Baptist Churches having misunderstood one Article of our Faith, relative to man's free agency, be it therefore

Resolved, That it is the sense of this Association, that a sinner is regenerated alone by the Divine agency of the Holy Spirit of Almighty God.

The following resolutions were offered by Brother Cox, and adopted:

4th. Whereas we believe the Old and New Testament to be the word of God: Resolved

therefore, That we recommend the study of the Scriptures to the Members of this Association, and the brethren generally.

Be it further Resolved, That we recommend as the most suitable and useful periodical publication for our denomination, "The Baptist Banner and Western Pioneer," published at Louisville, Kentucky, and that we recommend Brother J. W. Cox, of Ruttersville, as Agent for western Texas.

5th. Resolved, that this Association recommend Brother R.E.B. Baylor, of Lagrange, as a suitable agent to manage a Book and Tract Depository, and that we request him to use his efforts to establish such a Depository of books and tracts as will meet the wants of our denomination; Resolved further, That we request the various societies and friends in the United States of the North, to give us their aid in this important work, and that the reading public generally, and our brethren in particular, be requested to sustain and patronize the said Depository.

On motion, Resolved, That our next annual meeting be held at the United Baptist Church of Christ ~~at~~ and that the said Meeting shall commence on the Thursday before the second Sunday in October, 1841.

On motion, Resolved, That Brother R.E.B. Baylor be appointed to preach the introductory sermon, and that Brother James Huckins be appointed to preach the Associational sermon, at our next annual meeting.

On motion, Resolved, That Brothers Z.N. Morrell, Wm. H. Cleveland, James S. Davis, Brother Yeaman of Montgomery, and Brother Andrews of Houston, be appointed the Executive

Committee and board of Managers for this Association.

On motion, Resolved, That Brother Jas. Hall be appointed printing Agent, and that he call on the Treasurer for funds sufficient to defray the expense of printing three hundred copies of the minutes of this Association.

On motion, Resolved, That our first quarterly meeting be held at La Grange on Friday before the fourth Sunday in December; our next meeting at Independence, on Friday before the fourth Saturday in March; our third at Montgomery on Friday before the third Sunday in June; our fourth at Travis, on Friday before the second Sunday, in September.

Brother Jas. L. Davis was appointed Treasurer to the Association.

The Committee on finance made their report and were discharged.

On motion, Brother Baylor was requested to write a short address to be appended to these minutes.

On motion, Resolved, That our thanks be given to the God of mercies for the kindness manifested by the good people in this vicinity to our Association during its session.

On motion, The Association then adjourned *sine die*, closing prayer by Brother Baylor.

T.W. COX, Moderator.

Attest, J.W. Collins, Cl'k.

ARTICLES OF FAITH.

ART. 1. We believe in the existence of one God, and that there is a Trinity of Characters in the God-head, — the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet not three Gods, but only one true and living God.

ART. 2. We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are revealed from God, and that they contain the only true system of faith and practice.

ART. 3. We believe in the doctrine of God's sovereignty, and man's free-agency as an accountable being.

ART. 4. We believe that man was created in the moral image of God,— was placed under law, but by voluntary transgression brought himself and his posterity into a state of sin, and that they are thereby doomed to death, temporal, moral, and eternal.

ART. 5. We believe that man in his fallen and unregenerated state, is dead in trespasses and sins, and that notwithstanding all his natural amiable qualities, the love of God is excluded from his heart.

ART. 6. We believe that Christ died for sinners, and that the sacrifice which he has made, has so honored the divine law that a way of salvation is consistently opened up to every sinner to whom the Gospel is sent, and that nothing but their voluntary rejection of the Gospel prevents their salvation.

ART. 7. We believe that the conditions of salvation are repentance for sin, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to his word: and

that salvation on these terms is freely offered to all; but so deep is the depravity of man that none would comply with them but for the regenerating grace of God.

ART. 8. We believe that Christ left two sacraments for his Church to keep, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and that the Scriptural qualifications for baptism, are repentance and faith, and that this is properly administered only by immersion, and that baptism is a pre-requisite for the Lord's Supper.

ART. 9. We believe that all the pecuniary burthens of the Church should be borne equally by all, according to the ability that God has given.

ART. 10. We believe that while it is the duty of the Minister to devote himself to the work of the Ministry, it is the duty of the Church to contribute to him of their worldly substance for his support and that of his family.

ART. 11. We believe in the final perseverance of the saints by grace unto glory, in a general judgment, and in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, and that the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

T. W. COX, Moderator.

Attest, J. W. Collins, Cl'k.

BILL OF INALIENABLE RIGHTS.

ART. 1. Each Church is forever free and independent, of any and every ecclesiastical power formed by men on earth, each being the free

house-hold of Christ. Therefore every ordination and power granted by the Churches emanating as they do, directly from the Church, those who are thus ordained or upon whom such powers are conferred, must be to her forever obedient.

ART. 2. Each member shall forever have a full and free right to exercise his or her own discretion in contributions to the support of missions, general benevolence, &c. and in other matters that may not lead to immorality.

CONSTITUTION.

ART. 1. The name and style of this body shall be the "Union Baptist Association."

ART. 2. The grand and leading object of this Union shall be to promote a united effort among the Churches and to extend and encourage the preaching of the pure Gospel within the bounds of this Association by all reasonable and lawful means.

ART. 3. Each Church and individual member shall have the privilege to send up their voluntary contributions to the Association, or to the Executive Committee for the promotion of preaching the Gospel and for purposes of general benevolence.

ART. 4. Every Church or individual member being left free to contribute or not to these objects, they will be supported therefore by voluntary contributions, and no member shall ever be compelled to contribute by any resolutions or censure whatsoever.

ART. 5. This Association shall have an annual meeting on Thursday before the second Sunday in October, to continue four days or longer at such place as the Association from year to year appoint, provided the first meeting shall be held at Travis, or vicinity on Thursday before the second Sunday in October, A.D. 1840.

ART. 6. There shall be elected by ballot on the first day of each annual meeting a Moderator, Corresponding Secretary and Clerk, who shall hold their offices until their successors are elected.

ART. 7. There shall be a Committee of six appointed at every annual meeting, who with the Moderator, Secretary and Clerk, shall be the Executive Committee, and board of Managers for the Association, and shall hold their offices until their successors are appointed, whose duty it shall be to make an annual report of all their proceedings to the Association.

ART. 8. Each Church shall be entitled to the following number of representatives, viz: those having under twenty-five members, *three* — those having over this number and under fifty, *four*; — those having over this and under one hundred, *five*, and those having over one hundred, *six*, until the whole number shall amount to more than twenty five, after which, each Church shall be curtailed one from this ratio.

ART. 9. This Association may hold adjourned meetings at any time or place.

ART. 10. The Executive Committee shall meet quarterly or oftener on their own adjournments. The Moderator of the Association shall be ex-officio President of the board, and the Secretary and Clerk likewise members of the same.

ART. 11. Any Church of good standing in

the Baptist connection, may be admitted unto this Union by petition.

ART. 12. This Constitution may be amended at any annual meeting by a vote of two-thirds.

T. W. COX, Moderator.

Attest, J.W. Collins, Cl'k.

RULES OF DECORUM.

ART. 1. The Association shall be opened and closed by prayer.

ART. 2. The Moderator shall be considered a judge of order, and shall have the right to call to order at any time.

ART. 3. Any member not satisfied with his decision may appeal to the Association, on the same day, but at no other time.

ART. 4. But one member shall speak at a time, who shall rise and address the Moderator.

ART. 5. The Moderator when addressed by a member, shall signify the same by naming the person.

ART. 6. No member shall be interrupted whilst speaking, unless he depart from the subject, or use words of a personal character; every motion made and seconded shall come under the consideration of the Association, unless withdrawn.

ART. 7. Every subject taken up by the Association shall be decided or withdrawn, before another shall be offered.

ART. 8. When a question is taken up, after allowing time for the discussion of the same, the Moderator shall take the voice of the Association

on the subject, in the way usually adopted by deliberative bodies.

ART. 9. The Moderator shall pronounce the decision by rising.

ART. 10. Any member wishing to retire shall first obtain permission from the Moderator.

ART. 11. No member shall speak more than twice on the same subject without permission of the Association, nor more than once until every member wishing to speak shall have an opportunity to do so.

ART. 12. The appellation of Brother shall be used in the Association by members in all cases.

ART. 13. The names of members shall be called as often as the Association may direct.

ART. 14. The Moderator shall be entitled to all the privileges of speaking, but shall not vote on any question unless the Association be equally divided.

ART. 15. Any person violating these rules shall be reprov'd by the Moderator on the day such breach of order shall have been made.

T. W. COX , Moderator.

Attest, J.W. Collins, Cl'k.

Pastors, Deacons, Clerks, Condition of the Churches. &c. &c.

Names of Churches.	Names of Representatives.	Pastors.	Deacons.	Clerks.	Post Offices.	Rec'd by Baptism.	Rec'd by Letter.	Dis'd by Letter.	Excluded.	Deceased.	Total.	Contributions.	Ch. Meetings.
Church at Travis	Wm. H. Cleveland, John W. Collins, James Hall.	Cox, Davis.	J. D. Harry	J. W. Collins.	Center Hill, Austin County.	1	5	"	"	"	13	\$5	2nd Sunday.
Church at Independence	J. J. Davis, J. McNiell, Thos. Tremmier.	T. W. Cox.	J. J. Davis, John McNiell.	Thomas Trem- mier.	Independ- ence, Wash- ington Co.	2	4	3	"	"	17	\$5	1st Sunday.
Church at La Grange	T. W. Cox, R. E. B. Baylor, I. L. Davis.	Cox, Baylor, Davis.	J. Stevens, Joseph Shaw.	James S. Lester.	La Grange, Fayette County.	3	3	2	"	"	15	\$5	4th Sunday.

CIRCULAR LETTER.

Beloved Friends,—You will perceive by a Resolution in the foregoing minutes that I am required to say a few things to the brethren of the various Baptist Churches. First, then, to those in our Father Land, we would represent our forlorn and destitute condition, and the many trials, and difficulties under which we are laboring. My Christian Brethren, we have been enabled to organize a few scattering Churches in these solitary places, which under the Providence of God have formed our present Association. This Association and these little Churches will form a nucleus around which we may rally. You can now send us helps with some confidence that the way is prepared for them to become instruments in the hands of Providence in advancing the Messiah's Kingdom on earth. We therefore ask your prayers and endeavors that faithful Ministers may be sent to this part of God's moral vineyard for truly the harvest is great and the laborers few. Whilst you are blessed with so many religious privileges we pray you in Christ's stead not to forget us. Be assured that in this country the *pious* and *virtuous* Ministers of Christ will be received by all with kindness and hospitality; and we can truly say that no people exhibit more external respect for the ordinances of religion, or more decorum in the house of God than the citizens of Texas. We also ask you to send us such religious books, tracts, newspapers, and other publications as will instruct, cheer, and comfort us in this land, so far away from those we once loved and still love with christian affection; once more pray for us. To the sister

Churches and Brethren in western Texas, who have not joined with us in this bond of union, we can only say, come and unite with us, we will meet you with tearful eye, and melting hearts. It could not be expected, my dear brethren, that thrown together as we have been from the various Baptist Churches throughout the United States, we could at once harmonize upon all points of doctrine. Those Churches themselves entertain shades of difference in their opinions upon these subjects. But remember, on the great articles of our faith and practice, we do not differ as Baptists. Should our little Churches therefore be tenacious about these non-essentials, they will remain disjoined, and thus broken in fragments they will perish away. Our minutes and proceedings we submit to your prayerful attention, hoping that God by his Holy Spirit will induce you to judge of them with christian charity, and enable you to come to a correct conclusion. It gives us pleasure to add, that so far God has blessed our efforts; many have been added to the Church at Travis, and even while I am writing this, we are urged both by professed christians and the unconverted to stay even for a few days longer in this neighborhood to preach the gospel. Last night we had a most excellent meeting, and great religious interest prevailed; the probability is, that many will be added to the Church; some have already manifested a hope in Christ, and others seem to be inquiring in the good spirit. Farewell dear brethren; that God may bless and preserve you forever more, is the prayer of your christian brother.

R E. B. BAYLOR.





