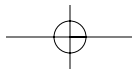
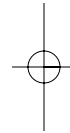
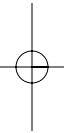
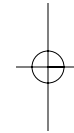
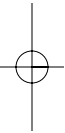
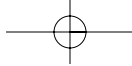


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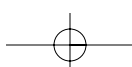
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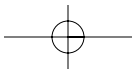
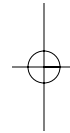
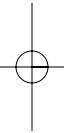
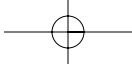
POLITY



**Biblical Arguments on How
to Conduct Church Life**

Edited by
MARK DEVER

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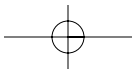
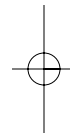
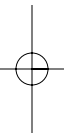
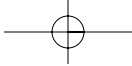
Church order and the ceremonial of religion,
are less important than a new heart;
and in the view of some,
any laborious investigation of questions
respecting them may appear to be needless and unprofitable.

But we know,
from the Holy Scriptures,
that Christ gave commands on these subjects,
and we cannot refuse to obey.
Love prompts our obedience;
and love prompts also the search which may be necessary
to ascertain his will.

Let us, therefore, prosecute the investigations which are before us,
with a fervent prayer,
that the Holy Spirit,
who guides into all truth,
may assist us to learn the will of him whom we
supremely love and adore.



—*John Leadley Dagg*



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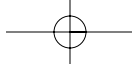
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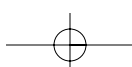
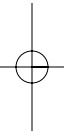
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Editor's Preface

In this book, we begin again a conversation. We rejoin a discussion largely abandoned a century ago. It is a discussion about what the Bible teaches about how we as Christians should organize our lives together in churches.

For years, many have assumed that the Bible has nothing to say about such matters. Others have simply forsaken careful investigation and argument about these matters, preferring instead simply to do what others do, or what is popular, or whatever seems to work.

But generations before us believed and preached and argued and published differently. They believed that God had revealed in Scripture all that we need for every aspect of our Christian lives, not least of which is the life we are called to live together in our churches.

This collection of books can be read in different ways. It can be read as a whole, in order, watching something of the chronological development of arguments. It can be read in its various parts, finding one of the manuals of particular interest, or use. Some who are pastors may even decide to reprint portions and use them in your own church. This volume can be read through the indices in the back, finding a certain topic, or a biblical passage.

This volume is to be a treasury for researchers and for pastors, for professors and for church leaders. Volumes out of print for a century or more are again made available, voices long gone again lifted, arguments once common returning to instruct the minds and burden the hearts of new generations of readers.

The volume is a collection of ten works printed from 1697 to 1874. They are arranged in chronological order, with each author's life treated briefly by Greg Wills in his introductory essay, and with the article from William Cathcart's 1881 *Baptist Encyclopedia* inserted as a kind of contemporary introduction before the piece itself.

This book is an attempt to reintroduce some old discussions in our midst. It is a collection largely of 19th century musings on what the Bible teaches about the church, and how that should be practically worked out in our midst. The authors do not all agree with each other on every point nor do we agree with them in every particular (W. B. Johnson, for example, clearly writes under the social prejudices of his day). All these authors, though, are agreed that the Bible should instruct us on how we live out our lives together

in churches, in everything from admitting members to practicing corrective discipline.

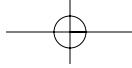
We have chosen to reprint not one, or even two, but ten documents, stretching over a period of almost 200 years, but concentrating heavily on works from the first three-quarters of the 19th century, when Baptist churches were flourishing, along with printed arguments about how they were to be run. Manuals which are currently in print (e.g., Brown, Pendleton, Dagg) have not been included. Instead, an effort has been made to find and incorporate other earlier books and treatises which were influential in shaping the church life of an earlier generation.

This work has been in constant danger of falling between two stools—of trying to be serviceable for the purposes both of the professor and of the pastor, of the academy and of the church. The concern for academic rigor has encouraged our reading and re-reading, carefully selecting and historically introducing the pieces included. And yet our over-riding concern for the recovery of these treasures for the church has led us to some other decisions. Some spelling has been modernized. We have re-typeset, and thus re-paginated all the works. We have produced an amalgamated table of contents, and a set of indices to the volume as a whole. Our desire is that the professor and the student would find this a helpful compendium; the pastor and church member an enlightening conversation partner in Biblical explorations. Whether we have achieved either of these goals it is up to the reader to determine.

In an undertaking so large it is impossible to thank all of those who have aided the effort. This effort has been financed by a few anonymous contributors, and by a partnership of three churches: the First Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, Alabama; Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D. C.; and Cornerstone Baptist Church, Elgin, Texas.

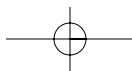
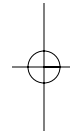
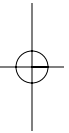
A number of people have been particularly helpful in thinking through this collection and making it a reality. Chris Vizas, Rhea Thornton, Tom Harrison, Tom Ascol, Jim Elliff, Bruce Keisling, Sean Lucas, Tom Nettles and Paul Roberts have all provided needed assistance. The other modern authors—Greg Wills and Al Mohler—have been my conversation partners on these matters for the better part of two decades. Greg Gilbert and Shannon Mitchell labored diligently over the manuscript to insure accuracy and readability. Rachel Croft provided needed faithful staff support. Finally, a special word of thanks must be given to Matt Schmucker, the director of the Center for Church Reform, who has done everything from edit copy to help find finances for the project to help see this vision of the church lived out at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C.

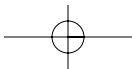
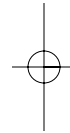
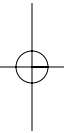
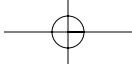
May God always be reforming all our churches according to the Word of God, to the glory of God alone. Amen.



SECTION I

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS





The Noble Task: The Pastor as Preacher and Practitioner of the Marks of the Church

By Mark Dever

If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

—I TIMOTHY 3:1

The Puritan divine Thomas Taylor observed that “the carriage of the saint through this life is like the journey of a traveler going home through a strange country.” One of the more salutary effects of travel is the energizing of our minds by sights and sounds which are strange to us. Travel increases our understanding, and broadens our sympathies.

Travel also affects our understanding of home. However many things we may learn in our travels, none are so interesting as those things which we see for the first time when we return home. We may think that all has changed, when in reality only we have.

In 1831, two French aristocrats, Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville were sent to America by the French government to inspect the American prison system. For nine months, these friends travelled in what still seemed the New World. De Tocqueville published an account of his trip in 1835, which was soon translated into English and became something of a phenomenon as the book *Democracy in America*. De Tocqueville’s reflections on his tour around the country showed Americans themselves in ways which they had never seen before.

Perhaps inspired by de Tocqueville’s journey, in the Spring of 1835, the Reverend Doctors F. A. Cox and J. Hoby came on deputation from the Baptist Union in England to the United States and Canada to examine the state of their Baptist brethren across the sea. They published their report in April, 1836 in London under the title “Baptists in America.” On their travels, they landed at New York, journeyed down the east coast, attended the triennial convention meeting in Richmond, headed back up into New England

through upstate New York into Canada, and finally made their way down the Ohio valley.

What they found when they came was a widely scattered group of brethren in the midst of a deep and often acrimonious struggle over the issue of slavery. The churches, particularly in the south, were composed of both black and white members—that was almost always to say, slave and free members.

When Dr. Cox preached at the First Baptist Church in Richmond, he was struck by the three divisions of the 2,000-plus congregation seated before him—“the white population occupying one side, the black, the other, and ministers of the gospel from distant parts, crowding the centre.”¹ The following day, he visited the Virginia Baptist Seminary in Richmond, which had just begun four years earlier, and which already had 60 students in it, all without previous education, and all preparing for the ministry. The four year program included Latin, Greek, mathematics, logic, rhetoric, natural and mental philosophy, theological, and other pastoral studies. These studies, along with three hours of manual labor daily, were taken to be sufficient preparations for the ministerial life of Virginia Baptists in 1835.

At the Triennial convention, they saw such towering ministerial persons among the Baptists of the time as J. B. Jeter, W. B. Johnson, Spencer H. Cone, and a noted guest, the Presbyterian minister W. S. Plumer. When a report was given on Indian missions, a Cherokee pastor was presented to the convention. The assembled brethren questioned him, through a translator, and rejoiced at the satisfactory answers he gave. The Methodist and Presbyterian pulpits of the city were given over to the visiting Baptist ministers.

Cox and Hoby found that many of the Baptist ministers were ill-educated (often to the delight of their hearers). Baptists (being strict congregationalists) had no such thing as denominational standards for those wishing to serve as pastors of their congregations. So the number of Baptist pastors could be much more quickly increased in frontier areas than could those of Presbyterian or even Methodist churches. Nevertheless, the number of churches still far exceeded the number of ministers and, therefore, it is not surprising to find that ministers frequently served more than one church at a time.² They were poorly paid,—though still better paid, thought Cox and Hoby—than Baptist ministers in England. Though work and sufficient support were widely to be had, the number of what we would today call bivocational pastors was very high. Many if not most preachers in Baptist churches on Sunday mornings could be found working a second job as a

¹F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *Baptist in America* (London: T. Ward and Company, 1836), 32.

²E.g., Mr. Lindsey Coleman, pastor of churches around Charlottesville, VA in the 1830's, Cox and Hoby, *Baptist in America*, 38; cf. *Ibid.*, 300, 495.

laborer, or plowing their fields through the week. This was the life of Baptist ministers in America as it was found by two English visitors in 1835.

We today must admit that the founders of our churches, institutions, and indeed of our convention of churches are strangers to us, as much if not moreso than were transatlantic visitors two hundred years ago. Not merely for the fact that few of us know much about any of these founders—though that is true—but more simply, because they would seem strange to us, were they to appear today and be folded into our offices or our homes, and, no doubt, into our churches this coming weekend. Can you imagine any of the writers in this volume at your church this Sunday? They would seem strange to us, and we would seem probably even more strange to them.

Much, of course, would not be strange. Essentially, we recognize the same Bible, preach the same cross, and hope in the same resurrection. More particularly we continue to meet on Sundays, sing, pray and preach, to vote as congregations and to baptize only confessing believers.

But much, too, would be different. Leaving aside simple technological changes like microphones, taped accompaniment, electrical guitars, air conditioning and overhead projectors, others changes, too, would be significant.

Some changes that in retrospect look like not much more than technological changes, were given greater import at the time. For example, controversy raged in the mid-nineteenth century about whether indoor baptistries should be built. Before you say that this is ridiculous because our distinction as Baptists has never been so much about where one is baptized, but about who is baptized, you must stop and remember that we have fought pitched battles about how one is baptized. So would an indoor baptism be sufficiently like the baptisms in the New Testament? As always, the main force holding back the acceptance of indoor baptismals was not theological concern, but the simple objection to novelty, “We’ve never done it that way before.”

Still other controversies raged throughout the Baptist family. The Campbellite controversy over what we called baptismal regeneration devastated many Baptist congregations in the Ohio and Tennessee River valleys. Questions over whether preachers should be paid for preaching divided still other Baptist churches from their sister congregations. Landmarkism won the day in many churches in the middle part of the country; and dispensationalism among many ministers, too.

And in the nineteenth century, Baptist life greatly changed. Nationally, Baptists organized for missions and then split into sectional conventions. State conventions arose, with denominational papers assisting and being assisted by them. Urbanization began in earnest. Average baptismal age began to lower, even as the average age for earning one’s own living

³Greg Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1875–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

increased. Landmarkism, indoor baptisms, hymnals with music and altar calls came in; Calvinism and church discipline went out. Choirs and American flags had not yet widely arrived by the end of the century.

We forget how much ground the 19th century covers. We tend to associate Isaac Backus (1724–1806) with the 18th century and E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) with the 20th century, and yet both were a part of the 19th—Backus had what were perhaps his most celebrated years, and Mullins lived most of his life in the 19th century.

Today, in churches where the pastor is seen, as one Baptist professor put it several years ago, as the “anchor man in the television show of life,” what would the assembled ministerial authors think about us and what we understand as our message and our responsibilities?⁴ What would they think of how we structure our churches and practice our lives together as Christians? What would they think of what we say, and what we do? In these essays, and in this collection of re-printed works, we travel back to then and them so that we can understand our times and ourselves better.

THE PASTOR’S ROLE

What were pastors to do? What was their role understood to be? Pastors were to preside over the sanctioned worship of God. Fundamentally, that meant that they were to teach orthodox doctrine and to oversee the purity of the church. Preaching and the ordinances were what Baptist ministers were about. This is much of what Baptists ministers said and did in the days in which these pieces were written.

What is the essence of “the noble task” which belongs to the minister? The answer given to that question reflects an understanding of the church. One popular English minister has recently taught that “‘Church’ is a collective noun. We know about collective nouns: one sheep is a sheep, but a whole gang of sheep is called a ‘flock.’ One cow is a cow, but a whole bunch of cows is a ‘herd.’ One goose is a goose, but a whole band of marauding geese is called a ‘gaggle.’ So it is with ‘Church.’ One Christian is a Christian, but a number of Christians gathered together is called a ‘Church.’”⁵ Is that all a church is—a gaggle of Christians, a small group Bible study, or a chance meeting of believers in the produce section at the local supermarket?

Historically, Baptists would strongly disagree with this loose understanding of the church. They would line up far more closely with the French reformer, John Calvin, who wrote that “Wherever we see the Word of God

⁴Darold H. Morgan, “Changing Concepts of Ministry Among Baptists,” in *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land*, ed. W. R. Estep (Fort Worth: Evans Press, 1976), 141.

⁵Steve Chalke, *More than Meets the Eye* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 111.

purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."⁶ So Baptists have understood the Bible to teach that "the noble task" involved correctly preaching the Word and correctly administering baptism and the Lord's Supper—more correctly, in fact, than Calvin did.

REFORMATION ROOTS

In some ways, the basic social fact to come out of the theological turmoil of the reformation of the 16th century was that the church was not co-extensive with the state. This was a revolutionary realization. It upset both states and churches, and its consequences rumbled through every European nation that embraced the reformation.

In Great Britain, those dissenting from the state church had various views on the relation of the church to the state. The largest groups—the so-called "three old denominations"—were the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and the Baptists. They were largely at one with their Anglican brothers, except for matters of church government, including especially the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Presbyterians and Congregationalists agreed with the Anglicans, over against the Baptists, that the children of church members were to be baptized (though they restricted that privilege more than the established church had done). Baptists advocated the idea that only believers themselves were the proper subjects of baptism. Congregationalists and Baptists agreed that the church's final government was entrusted to the assembled local congregation. Presbyterians thought that it resided in a series of courts, and supremely in the national general assembly, with elected representatives from the churches. The Anglicans continued to defend their traditional Episcopalian government, though usually by arguing that church government was a matter of theological indifference, and that it was the responsibility of the secular government to order it.

Though these arguments may seem obscure, they, in fact, had much to do with bringing about real changes in the way people understood and lived out their Christian faith. Once baptism had been recaptured as something for believers alone, that forced the issue on churches that others were also raising—who decides who is admitted to church membership?

Baptists were the thorough reformers, who knew that they were called to follow the biblical pattern of church life, and so "display the glory of a true church and its discipline," as Benjamin Keach put it.

At the heart of these churches is, of course, the ministry of the pastors. The pastors are the ones who are usually most involved in understanding the

⁶John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 11 (Philadelphia: The Minster Press, 1960), 1023.

Bible's teaching on the church and in interpreting it to the congregation. Understanding their role is helpful to understanding the churches they led.

So what exactly was the understanding of the ministry of the generation of the pastors who wrote, read and practiced the kind of churchmanship shown in the pieces reproduced in this volume? Their role had two main components, reflecting these two marks of the church—preaching, and presiding over the life of the church (as we see it symbolized in baptism and the Lord's Supper).

THE PREACHING OF THE MINISTER: THE RIGHT PREACHING OF THE WORD

Of course, basically, these Baptist ministers were preachers.

Spencer Cone (1785–1855), popular Baptist pastor in New York City, said to young preachers that “There are two courses before you as a preacher: make yourself familiar with classic authors, study the popular taste, bring forth well-written essays, use the Bible as a fine collection of texts, and fill up your sermons from other sources; or Give yourself chiefly to the study of the Bible, bring forth the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear, ‘Present the Word.’ In the first course you will make yourself popular; in the other you will be useful to the souls of men, and please God. Take your choice.”⁷ In fact, Cone suggested that the Baptist minister should be greeting every morning with the practice of Bible reading, meditation and prayer until a passage strikes him, and that he should then fashion it in his mind into a sermon ready to be given whenever he might be called upon to do so that day. He said that young preachers should learn how to preach in the same way that country girls learn to milk—try constantly till success.

As Cox and Hoby traveled south, they noticed that not only did the weather become hotter, but so, too, did the preachers. Our journalists noted, “While the most finished compositions may tend to refine the taste and instruct the understanding, those which have less pretension to accuracy, but come at once from the heart, if not unstudied yet unpolished, seem conducive to the greatest moral effect.”⁸ “The style of preaching is plain and energetic—less instructive, perhaps, than impassioned.”⁹ Throughout the 19th century, Baptist preaching shifted from being more extemporaneous, imaginative, and emotionally charged to being more careful, controlled and polished. But more than the manner of preaching changed.

The preaching matter of sermons from earlier centuries may seem some-

⁷Edward W. Cone and Spencer W. Cone, *The Life of Spencer Houghton Cone* (New York: Livermore and Rudd, 1856), 420.

⁸Cox and Hoby, *Baptist in America*, 492.

⁹Ibid., 496.

what strange to many today. The content of many of the sermons bore much more in common with English Protestant sermons of two centuries earlier, than they do with many sermons preached by Baptist ministers in America in our own times.

Writing in 1854 to his good friend Spencer Cone, John Dagg asked if his views had changed with reference to “the doctrines of grace.” Cone wrote back with typical clarity, “not a jot.”¹⁰ But what was true of Cone at mid-century was not true of increasing numbers of Baptist ministers.

Though the situation in the North was somewhat different,¹¹ in the South, the dominance of Calvinism among Protestants (with the marked exception of the Methodists) continued well into the nineteenth century.¹²

¹⁰Cone and Cone, *Life of Spencer Houghton Cone*, 468.

¹¹In 1830, W. T. Brantly, Sr. (1787–1845), sensing this move away from the stricter Calvinism of John Gill, wrote, “The temper of our institutions in the present day, is most practical, and this we cannot regret; but in the hurry of practice we may forget the respect due to principles; in the ardor of anticipation, we may overlook dependence and humility; in those expansive charities which look out for the salvation of all men, we may fail to bestow a becoming consideration upon that mercy which insures the salvation of some. We may possibly become so anxious to draw our fellow men into the folds of Christ, by our own election, as to forget the election of grace,” Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” *The Columbian Star*, 1 (August 8, 1829), 91. By the account of Basil Manly, Jr., Newton [Mass.] Theological Institute by the early 1840’s had a large proportion of its students (perhaps even a majority) who were Arminian. Francis Wayland wrote to J. W. Alexander a letter dated Nov. 10, 1854, in which he stated, “I agree with your Presbyterian doctrine very well on most points. . . . I differ from you in some respects. You make the gospel system more rectangular and closely articulated than I. You see clearly, where I only have an opinion,” quoted in Francis and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland*, vol. 2 (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1867), 175. In light of this kind of evidence, Tom Nettles’ statement that “the last half of the nineteenth century saw an almost imperceptible and very gradual alienation from thoroughgoing Calvinism on the part of Baptists in the North . . .” (Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 48.) seems understated, and perhaps inaccurate. Calvinism was waning in the north both before the second half of the nineteenth; and by the second half of the nineteenth century, a great many Baptists in the north would have self-consciously thought of themselves as non-Calvinists. See David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptist* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 140. “A few persons may now be found in most of our congregations, who are so well informed, and who pay so much attention to the preaching they hear, that they are able to detect any unsoundness in the doctrines advanced; but this is not so generally the case with the great mass of our members as it was in a former age. At present, the modes and manners, and the eloquence of their ministers, engage more of the attention of our people, than their doctrinal expositions; and most of all, they look for those attractions which are pleasing to young people, and which will collect large assemblies, and enable them to compete with their neighbors in numbers and style. With this end in view, nothing that will sound harsh or unpleasant to very sensitive ears must come from the preachers; the old-fashioned doctrines of Predestination, Total Depravity, Divine Sovereignty, etc., if referred to at all, must be by way of circumlocution and implication. . . . As a general thing, now, our people hear so little in common conversation, in their every-day intercourse with each other, on doctrinal subjects, before, at the time, and after they become church members, and are so much accustomed to vague and indefinite references to them, that, different from former years, they have but little desire to hear them discussed. Indeed, many of them should sit very uneasy under discourses in which the primordial principles of the orthodox Baptist faith should be presented in the style of our sound old preachers of bygone years,” *ibid.*, 142–143. On this whole question, see Wills, *passim*, but esp. 106–108; Paul Harvey, *Religious Cultures and Social Order* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 152.

¹²R. T. Kendall observes that “the Southern Baptist Convention was born into a Calvinistic climate, and this theological atmosphere pervaded Southern Baptist ideology in its infancy,” R. T. Kendall, “The Rise and Demise of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention” (Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 1.

This is evidenced by the theologians they read, the pastors' and professors' writings, the denominational journals and indeed by many of the written remains of early and mid-nineteenth century Baptists.¹³

In genteel Charleston, Richard Furman (1755–1825) was the beloved pastor of the First Baptist Church from 1787 until his death in 1825. His theological system was strongly Calvinistic.¹⁴

Jesse Mercer (1769–1841) was a prominent Baptist pastor, polemicist and educator in Georgia. In 1829 a friend of Mercer's, the Rev. Cyrus White, had been "accused of propagating arminian sentiments."¹⁵ Mercer was clearly shocked that any respectable Baptist would be teaching such a doctrine. However, as he read White's views in order to refute the calumny, he was disappointed to find that White did indeed hold unorthodox opinions of the atonement. This unorthodox opinion was that Christ's death was a general atonement for the sins of the world, thereby merely making possible (not securing) the salvation of whoever might believe. For this Mercer castigated him as having "departed from the acknowledged Faith of the denomination." Mercer wrote to White "Surely, if you have not departed from the characteristic doctrine of the denomination, and gone to general provision, and free-will ability, your book most miserably belies you!"¹⁶

Patrick Hues Mell (1814–1888), professor at Mercer and later Chancellor of the University of Georgia, and an author of one of the works herein reprinted, is another commanding figure in nineteenth century Southern Baptist life. Mell served as Clerk of the Georgia Association (1845–1851), Moderator of the Georgia Association (1855–1870, 1874–1886), Clerk of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1845–1855), President of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1857–1871, 1877–1886), and President of the Southern Baptist Convention (1863–1871, 1880–1886). Throughout his life as a celebrated parliamentarian and professor, he also sustained a vital interest in what Baptist preachers preached. In 1850, out of his concerns for "the doctrines of Grace," he issued *Predestination and the Saints' Perseverance Stated and Defended*. In 1868 he again went to the press with a polemical speech given at the Georgia Baptist Ministers' Institute—"Calvinism." In both of these Mell vigorously defends these doctrines out of a concern that they were not being preached enough by the younger ministers of the day.

Controversies, too, reveal the times. Controversy erupted around Pro-

¹³"That Baptists are Calvinists is readily admitted," Editors in "Orthodoxy, Again," *The Southern Baptist* 3 (May 24, 1848), 426.

¹⁴Robert Gardner mistakenly proves Furman's Calvinism by citing an article by his son, Richard B. Furman, written in 1849 for *The Southern Baptist Review* (Robert G. Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg: Pioneer American Baptist Theologian" [Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1957], 190). See instead Richard Furman, *Conversion Essential to Salvation* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1816).

¹⁵Jesse Mercer, *Ten Letters, Addressed to the Rev. Cyrus White, in Reference to his Scriptural View of the Atonement* (Washington, Ga.: Printed at the News Office, 1830), i.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

fessor James S. Mims (1817–1855). Though there is more on this controversy in Greg Wills’ article in this same volume, it is instructive simply to note the presumption of theological agreement that was the context of the controversy. Mims was Professor of Theology at Furman University from 1843 until his death in 1855. From editorials in *The Southern Baptist* (of Charleston, South Carolina) and the *The Guardian* (of Richmond, Virginia) throughout 1848, one gathers that the editor of *The Guardian* thought that a speech (or speeches) made by Mims showed him to be unorthodox in his view of imputation (apparently he held Andrew Fuller’s theology).¹⁷ The editorial committee of *The Southern Baptist* successfully defended Mims. They wrote:

If the Philadelphia Confession of Faith may be regarded as setting forth the views of the Baptist denomination (and perhaps it does so as faithfully as any Confession) still, we hesitate not to say, that very few of our ministers adopt it in full. We are altogether free to confess that it contains statements which do not meet our approbation.¹⁸

They went on to state that Fuller’s views are a more “adequate expression” of the views of most Southern Baptist ministers. While these disputes between “Gillites” (as the editor of *The Guardian* seemed to be) and “Fullerites” were common, they evidence perhaps more theological unity than diversity. Both sides agreed that humans were totally depraved and would only be saved by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the elect—the only question was how that imputation was to have occurred.

Another too often neglected source of information about church life in earlier centuries among Baptists are the autobiographies of the period. Two of the most theologically detailed reminiscences are those by David Benedict (1879–1874) and J. B. Jeter (1802–1880).¹⁹ Recalling the Virginia of his youth in the 1820’s, Jeter wrote that “Presbyterians and Baptists were quite ready to assert and defend the doctrines of election, and the certain salvation of all believers; nor were they slow to attack what they considered Arminian errors.”²⁰ While they did not give “undue prominence to

¹⁷John A. Broadus mentions this controversy in his *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* and represents Mims as being opposed to Calvinistic views of imputation. Cf. John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 101.

¹⁸“Orthodoxy, Again,” 426.

¹⁹Benedict, *Fifty Years*; and Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life* (Richmond: The Religious Herald, 1891). Such literary reflections were commonly written by well-known elderly ministers. Dagg composed one at the request of his family in 1878, his *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg*, D. D. (Rome, Ga.: J. F. Shanklin, Printer, 1886). S. G. Hillyer (1809–1900), Dagg’s son-in-law and a prominent Georgia Baptist minister, wrote his *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1902). Hillyer recalls that “our fathers” believed in total depravity and election. In fact, “. . . our early Baptists believed, with great harmony, in all the ‘doctrines of grace’ . . .,” *Reminiscences*, 231.

²⁰Jeter, *Recollections*, 21.

their distinctive views,” the Baptists of fifty or sixty years ago “believed, and were ready to fight for, ‘the five points,’ . . . Baptists of the present day . . . are less carefully indoctrinated than were the fathers.”²¹

In 1857 John L. Dagg wrote that “The general agreement of Baptist churches, in doctrine as well as church order, is a fact which gives occasion for devout gratitude to God.”²² Benedict, three years later, recorded the situation differently. The extreme orthodoxy of the early 19th century Baptists, by mid-century had given way to doctrinal “laxity and indifference,” he writes. By mid-century, increasing theological diversity was accepted among Baptist ministers in New England; on a lesser scale, that was also increasingly the case in the deep South.²³

Even in the more theologically conservative South, James P. Boyce had sounded an alarm in his speech “Three Changes in Theological Education,” delivered at Furman University in 1856. Boyce stated that in the past the denomination had been “fully agreed in its doctrinal sentiment,” but that such unanimity of sentiment no longer prevailed.²⁴

The distinct principles of Arminianism have . . . been engrafted upon many of our churches; and even some of our ministry have not hesitated publicly to avow them. That sentiment, the invariable precursor or accompaniment of all heresy—that the doctrines of theology are matters of mere speculation, and its distinctions only . . . technicalities, has obtained at least a limited prevalence. And the doctrinal sentiments of a large portion of the ministry and membership of the churches, are seen to be either very much unsettled or radically wrong. Sad will be the day for this University, should such sentiments ever

²¹Ibid., 313, 317.

²²John L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 301.

²³Benedict notes this. He wrote that New Englanders were Calvinists, but not “so strongly as were those in New York, Philadelphia and further South,” *Fifty Years*, 137.

²⁴W. W. Richards maintains that “Calvinism was waning among Baptists in the South by the time Boyce was born in 1827,” and that “by mid-century it was no longer a dominant force among the majority of southern Baptists,” Walter Wiley Richards, “A Study of the Influences of Princeton Theology Upon the Theology of James Petigru Boyce and His Followers with Special Reference to the Work of Charles Hodge” (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), ix, 78. This seems somewhat exaggerated. While Richards is correct about the trend away from the Calvinism of the Philadelphia Confession, it is misleading to say that Calvinism was no longer a dominant force among the majority of Southern Baptists by mid-century. Gardner’s footnotes in his dissertation on Dagg show the great dominance of Calvinism among Southern Baptists of this period. On the other hand, R. T. Kendall has stated that “the diminishing of strong Calvinism within the Southern Baptist Convention . . . consciously began shortly after the turn of the [twentieth] century,” Kendall, “Rise and Demise,” iv. Kendall seems to look for written remnants of Calvinism in Baptist theology, which can certainly be found well into this century, rather than accurately surmising the predominant system of theology at the time. Tom Nettles maintains a similar position: “This consensus in the Doctrines of Grace was perpetuated in Southern Baptist life through the second decade of the present [twentieth] century,” *Grace*, 50. Nettles is led to this conclusion by the questionable inclusion of people such as F. H. Kerfoot and E. C. Dargan as Calvinists.

obtain prevalence in your board, or receive the sanction of any of your theological Professors. . . . A crisis in Baptist doctrine is evidently approaching, and those of us who still cling to the doctrines which formerly distinguished us, have the important duty to perform of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. Gentlemen, God will call us to judgment if we neglect it.²⁵

In order to fight this theological slippage, Boyce propounded the idea of a seminary based on an “abstract of principles” to be subscribed to by all the professors. When this document was composed three years later, Basil Manly, Jr. drew largely from the Calvinistic First and Second London Confessions. During his years of teaching theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Boyce’s suspicions of the declining orthodoxy of the day were confirmed. E. E. Folk, a student of Boyce’s, recalled that “. . . though young men were generally rank Arminians when they came to the Seminary, few went through this course under him without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views.”²⁶

The general concern about a diminishing orthodoxy was heard from the columns of *The Guardian* to the pamphlets of Mell, from the addresses of Boyce to the history of Benedict. The popularity of Andrew Fuller’s restatement of Calvinism combined with the declining interest in theology generally in the pulpits left Baptist preaching open to be radically altered by other influences among Baptists in the South and West.

The dominant teaching and preaching of the earlier part of the century was clear and unapologetic on the points of human depravity and divine election, of irresistible grace and perseverance—doctrines which tell little of what I must do, and much of what God has done. This is what most of those earlier generations considered the right preaching of the Word. And this is where they might find many of our own sensitivities in the pulpit, sensitivities to our unregenerate hearers’ desires—unchurched Larry and Terry, if you will—so strange.

I have been in conservative Southern Baptist churches where I have heard the most dreadful wages of sin being presented as physical death, and Our Lord’s agony in Gethsemane presented merely as an example of how to deal with stress in traffic. If many of our ministers today so little understand the problem, it is no wonder that they speak so little of the cure. If the content of our singing has changed from the love of God to our love for God to our loving to love God to our loving to love “Him,” is it any wonder

²⁵James P. Boyce, “Three Changes in Theological Education,” Unpublished Manuscript, Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1856. For a contemporary assessment and application of Boyce’s concerns in this speech, see Timothy George, “Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the Service of the Church,” *Review and Expositor*, 1988.

²⁶Broadus, *Boyce*, 265.

that we find the sermons of the generation of Baptist pastors who first raised our denominational structures strange? In these ways—in the contents of our hymns to the contents of our sermons—we should labor to be re-introduced to these old friends. If only because they are standing in a different place than we are, they may show us parts of the Bible more clearly than we've seen them before.

This is the context of the content of the sermons which shaped Baptist churches in the past. It was a preaching which was vigorous, God-centered, self-denying and thoroughly and carefully expositional. So much for the preaching of the minister.

THE PRACTICE OF THE MINISTER: RIGHT ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORDINANCES

If this is what Baptist ministers preached in the 19th century, what did these ministers do?

In brief, they spent time organizing for mission efforts with their brethren, and gave themselves to training the younger generation of pastors. They preached constantly, read much, studied their Bibles, remembered their church members, visited the sick, and befriended people. In short, they did much of what pastors do today.

Something, however, which they regularly did then (many of them every week), but which is rare today, is this—they practiced corrective church discipline. Among other things, that means that they excluded people from membership in their churches based upon sin in their lives or errors in their belief. And not only did they do so, but they considered such discipline essential for the church. This is what they meant by the “right” in the phrase “right administration of the ordinances.” To baptize or offer the Lord’s Supper to those without a credible profession of faith was understood to be a mis-administration of the ordinances which Christ left to mark out His church.

In his book *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785–1900*, Greg Wills has brought to light that crucial change between the generations of our great-grandparents and our grandparents—the disappearance of corrective discipline from our churches.

Populism and authority, Wills argues, co-existed commonly and perhaps even happily in churches in that earlier day. But by the end of the 19th century, their earlier practice of religion had become “transformed.” As Wills writes in his introduction:

After the Civil War, Baptist observers began to lament that church discipline was foundering, and it was. It declined partly because it became more burdensome in larger churches. Young Baptists refused in increasing numbers to submit to discipline for dancing, and the

churches shrank from excluding them. Urban churches, pressed by the need for large buildings and the desire for refined music and preaching, subordinated church discipline to the task of keeping the church solvent. Many Baptists shared a new vision of the church, replacing the pursuit of purity with the quest for efficiency. They lost the resolve to purge their churches of straying members. No one publicly advocated the demise of discipline. No Baptist leader arose to call for an end to congregational censures. No theologians argued that discipline was unsound in principle or practice. . . . It simply faded away, as if Baptists had grown weary of holding one another accountable.²⁷

And what was the result? John Dagg asserted that “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”²⁸

Leaving aside the seriousness of the change for the moment, how did it happen? Why the change? Certainly the work of confronting and disciplining was never easy. Basil Manly, Jr., expressed his own “profound grief” over one soon-to-be-disciplined member of the church he pastored.²⁹

Too, by the end of the nineteenth century, urbanization was altering the face of the nation. In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, the nation’s population shifted from being about 28% urban to being just at 40% urban. These growing urban populations brought with them comparative anonymity for those who had recently moved and the consequent ability simply to change churches if they pleased. Baptist preachers might continue to denounce, but they could no longer discipline offenders.

Wills keenly observes that “Church discipline presupposed a stark dichotomy between the norms of society and the kingdom of God. The more evangelicals purified the society, the less they felt the urgency of a discipline that separated the church from the world.”³⁰ “Activism became the crowning virtue of Baptist piety in the twentieth century.”³¹

This change had more wide-ranging effects on the work of the minister than may at first appear. For example, exactly whom was the Baptist minister pastoring? Earlier in the 19th century, it seems clear that he was officially the pastor of a distinct group of people, personally known to him, regularly in attendance, and with the expectation of being held specially accountable. By early in the next century, the minister was officially the pastor of a group of people often far larger than those he would see on a Sunday morning, many of them unknown to him personally, many rarely

²⁷Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 9.

²⁸John L. Dagg, *A Treatise of Church Order* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 274.

²⁹Basil Manly, Jr., Letter to Rev. M. B. Wharton, 1 February 1873, Manly Collection, SBTS; quoted in Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 119.

³⁰Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 10.

³¹*Ibid.*, 133.

if ever in attendance and with no expectation whatsoever of being held accountable to any set of standards other than that of the general culture. The main community of identity began to shift from being the congregation to being the wider society in which Christians lived.

E. Y. Mullins nicely defended the shift in the self-perception of the minister's appropriate sphere of activity. There are two erroneous ideas of the ministry, he wrote, "one that the minister should spend his force in trying to correct public evils; the other that the preacher of the gospel has nothing to do with public life whatever."³²

This change greatly affected the way the pastor's work of evangelism and taking people into church membership was done. Earlier in the century, it was common for a long period of time to elapse between the time someone would apply for "a church relation" and when they were admitted. This probationary period was to allow people time to give sufficient evidence of their salvation. By later in the century, the conversion itself was assumed to be witnessed rather than the confirmation of it. The work of Baptist pastors through the century had subtly though certainly become more public, as souls were mended not by repeated private conferences with families or individuals, but by protracted preaching meetings and impassioned calls to immediate conversion. And his work became more distinct from the people's, as there was no longer a community which mutually covenanted together for accountability. As the regular practice of corrective discipline fell away, the pastor was expected to deal with just a few cases which could cause the church the most public embarrassment. In this change important boundaries were blurred, and the pastor's role was confused—all to the injury of the church.

Considering today a recovery of this understanding of biblical teaching on the role of the pastor, we might be especially interested in Wills' observation that a large part of early Baptist concern with religious liberty was "the freedom to establish pure churches by means of discipline."³³ That concern certainly will not be lost on us today.

Not too long ago there was a Baptist Press article about Jeff Noblit, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Noblit has rediscovered something of this idea which earlier pastors preached and practiced. I have no reason to think that he discovered it through reading anything from these earlier generations; rather, in the press interview, he simply said that he came to it through reading Scripture, the same way that I'm sure these earlier pastors came to it. If such a corporate witness to the Christian gospel is going to be recovered, Pastor Noblit of Muscle Shoals will have difficulty doing it alone.³⁴ It is difficult for a congregation to

³²Cited in Harvey, *Religious Cultures*, 149.

³³Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 32.

³⁴E.g., Cone and Cone, *Life of Spencer Houghton Cone*, 272.

pursue discipline alone. One would best have agreements understood between the churches. So, for example, one church in the 1830's proudly commended itself to a prospective pastor with the boast that it had never taken any members excommunicated from sister churches. Such mutual understandings would be nearly essential for any widespread recovery of church discipline as part of the corporate witness to the gospel.

A Personal Conclusion

A few years ago, I conducted a seminar at a state Baptist Convention on "Getting your church off the plateau." I picked up some typical modern literature to read. In it, the author encouraged pastors to "Open the front door of your church and close the back door." I understood what the author meant. He meant that the church should be more accessible and that we should do a better job on follow-up, assimilation and discipling—all laudable ends. And yet, as I read about opening the front door and closing the back door, I couldn't help but think that if many of the generation of Baptist pastors from a century and a half ago gathered around to read the book, they would locate our church's major problem elsewhere. They might even say that the answer to the endemic weakness in our churches is closing the front door and opening the back door! Closing the front door simply in the sense of being willing to be honest about the cost of discipleship, and being more careful about conversions claimed and members accepted; and opening the back door in the sense of being willing to correct and discipline those who join.

In too many churches today, the centrality of preaching and administering the ordinances has been replaced by an emphasis on other things. We should stop and consider what effects this change is having on our churches and on their faithful and effective witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How did the change from exhortation to efficiency happen among our churches? Ultimately, we pastors must have fallen asleep at our jobs. We must have quietly conspired in allowing our churches to value this world more than the next. We did not oppose the subtle shift away from that emphasis on the hope we have for that day "when earthly labors are complete."

Baptist churches in 1800 were far from utopias. Racism in the culture was too fully present in the church. Too many Christians opposed organized efforts for evangelism and missions. And ministerial education was often lacking. In Baptist life, conservative, nostalgic sentiment has acted in ways both good and bad. On the one hand, it has acted to preserve the gospel among us, and yet it has also acted to preserve unbiblical traditions. Sentiment for the way we have done things defines and divides us in ways it should not and need not. And such practical sentimentality is dangerous because it is so hard to detect.

Impulses are not good, simply because they are conservative. Honesty

compels us to acknowledge that our past is well-supplied with both errors and accuracies. As we look back, however, it is the errors that tend to be emphasized. We are a people who conceive of time in terms of progress and advance. “New” in our minds seems to be associated innately with “improved.” It is the premise of this book that that is not always the case. While there is much to be lamented in our past, there is also much to be recognized and recovered.

According to one 1837 meeting of ministers, beyond overseeing their own souls well, pastors could best promote the purity of the churches by preaching the Word faithfully and exciting and enforcing godly discipline.³⁵ This, in essence, shows a traditional protestant understanding of the ministry, with the cultivation of the marks of a true church being seen to be the primary work of the minister—the right preaching of the Word, and the proper administration of the ordinances (which, especially for Baptists, necessarily includes the practice of church discipline).

This was the “noble task” to which earlier generations of faithful pastors understood God to be calling them.

And what about us? From a century’s remove, can we see how the changes since the 19th century have played themselves out? Have the changes we considered above driven the pastor to be more faithful, or less so, to his calling? Are we more, or less, about that noble task?

If I may address pastors and church leaders particularly for a moment, what responsibility do you and I have for the state of the churches today? If the pastors are not willing to be the ones to stand firm and turn the tide from accomodating pragmatism to Biblically faithful practices, how do we ever expect to see our churches edified, sanctified, the world evangelized and God glorified as He so deserves to be? This is surely the noble task to which we are called. It is to this end that these essays are published and the books herein reprinted. May God use them to His glory in the churches. Amen.

³⁵Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 17.