

Evangelical Forum Newsletter



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July 2006

Where We Might Have Been and Where We Still Must Go

Perhaps the most striking statement I heard at the 2006 SBC meeting in Greensboro was Al Mohler's opening remarks in his dialogue with Paige Patterson on the doctrine of election. He said that were it not for the conservative resurgence in the SBC (1979-1990) we might well have been sitting there debating the ordination of homosexuals into the ministry.

To see the truth of Mohler's words all we need to do is to compare this year's meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention and the meetings of American Episcopalians and mainline Presbyterians (PC-USA). Southern Baptists were discussing the doctrine of salvation, missions, and the practice of church discipline, while mainline churches were debating the ordination of homosexuals to ministry and the sanctioning of "gay marriage."

We need not even look to other denominations. We can look to liberal Baptist organizations that have emerged in the post-SBC resurgence era. The ultra-liberal Alliance of Baptists, for example, has issued a "Report of the Task Force on Human Sexuality."¹ Included in this document are several "Invitations to Actions." The last of these invitations is the following:

We encourage churches to lift up the ideal of covenant—that is, challenging persons, whether heterosexual or same-sex oriented, to express sexual intimacy within the covenant context of a committed, monogamous relationship. One example of that support could be ritual covenant-making between the couple, the couple and God, and the couple and the Christian community.

¹ The complete document is available online at: www.allianceofbaptists.org/assets/aob-humansexuality-report-2005.pdf

It appears that the Alliance of Baptists is willing to jettison the Biblical standards for marriage as a one man and one woman, one flesh union, lasting a lifetime. Keep in mind that around twenty Alliance churches are also affiliated with the BGAV.

One can also look to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which has chosen the "head in the sand" or "don't ask, don't tell" approach to the issue of homosexuality. At this year's CBF gathering it was announced that next year they will hold a joint meeting with the American Baptist Churches (ABC-USA). The ABC has refused to discipline and exclude so-called "Welcoming and Affirming" churches, while allowing conservative churches in its Pacific Southwest Region to withdraw from its covenant relationship with the denomination. It appears to be only a matter of time before open acceptance of homosexuality is par for the course in the CBF as well.

Indeed, we must be very thankful that God was pleased to bring about a time of renewal and reformation within the Southern Baptist Convention. We must admit, however, that the defense of the faith will never be complete on this side of the kingdom. The return to the authority of the Scriptures was only the beginning of true reformation in our churches. Thank God Southern Baptists have taken a clear stand on the Biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage. Now, we must ask what that inerrant Bible says about what the Gospel is. We must go to the places where our commitment to the Bible's authority will take us. ♦

JTR

Purpose: The Evangelical Forum is a network of concerned evangelical Pastors and laymen who desire to see renewal and reformation within Baptist churches in Virginia. We are supportive of friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention and affirm the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000.

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Contributions to support the Forum and this newsletter may be sent to JPBC and marked for "Evangelical Forum."

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Unsolicited articles, book reviews, and comments are welcomed by email or conventional mail.

History, Inquiry, and Predictions for the CBF

By Gregory Tomlin

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was born 15 years ago as a "renewal movement" of "free and faithful Baptists," according to its founder Daniel Vestal. Some 3,000 moderate Baptists, upset with the conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention and the fact that Vestal was not elected its president, flocked to the cause.

Since the group took its ball and went home, they have garnered significant attention in the religious media. Sadly, that attention hasn't come for their efforts to feed the hungry or clothe the poor. Most often, theological imprecision and questionable associations have turned the heads of the religious media and, as a result, the heads of a large number of conservative Baptists. The deletion of the name of Jesus and a reference to the Great Commission in the organization's mission statement last year is but one example of a characteristic theological fumble.

This year, the CBF took steps to rectify the problems created at last year's General Assembly, adopting a new preamble to its constitution that declares allegiance to Jesus Christ, references the "One Triune God," and indicates their desire to see the Great Commission and Great Commandments fulfilled. For the adoption of this statement, CBF participants should be applauded—a compliment the leaders of the CBF assume conservatives are not willing to make. I submit, however, that the statement would never have seen the light of day if participants had not "thrown a flag" and strongly voiced their sentiments that it be developed to define the ill-defined body.

Now, new challenges are on the horizon, among them defining the CBF's relationship with the troubled American Baptist Churches (USA). The two groups announced this year that they will hold a joint meeting for the first time in Washington, D.C., in 2007.

Wounded by the recent schism over the issue of homosexuality—an issue the leadership of the denomination refused to address—American Baptists have found a new partner in the CBF. The two groups should complement one another well. Both claim to be truly Baptist, or champions of "soul and Bible freedom" and the autonomy of the local church. As a result, leaders of the ABC (USA) will not withdraw fellowship from "welcoming and affirming" congregations or those that accept as members practicing and unrepentant homosexuals. And apparently, that is no hindrance to CBF leaders. When I asked CBF media personnel about next year's joint meeting, I was told that no "doctrinal or social litmus test" was necessary for fellowship with the CBF. Excluding any one person or group of people, I was told, would start the CBF down a "slippery slope."

And so, therein lies the problem with the CBF; that is, the failure to recognize that many teachings are firmly rooted on the plateau of orthodoxy and not subject to the whims of personal interpretation. The Holy Spirit does not breed disunity about such matters as homosexuality when they are so clearly defined in Scripture, and the Spirit is not unclear about what action should be taken when sin is present in the local church or in any relationship. Discipleship actually demands church discipline and conformity, not to the words or confessions of men, but to the Word of God. The CBF's refusal to grasp these things casts some rather long shadows over the future of the group.

Almost 30 years ago, Dean Kelley wrote in his work on the sociology of religion, "Why Conservative Churches are Growing," that conservative churches provide firm answers to the questions of life. They demand commitment, exercise strong discipline, exemplify missionary zeal, and avoid relativism. With the exception of missionary zeal, these characteristics are scarcely discernable in the CBF.

In fact, the CBF exhibits some of the characteristics of Mainline American denominations, such as the Presbyterian (USA) and Episcopalian churches. These mainline denominations have adopted "open door" policies to any and every teaching in the name of "freedom" in the hope of swelling the pews. They increasingly have focused on developing "interfaith" relationships. More and more these groups have become social service agencies that do good things, such as feeding the poor, ministering to the sick and "offering a cup of cold water in Jesus' name," but place less or little

emphasis on evangelism and life-changing discipleship. And the denominations' seminaries have fallen to more diverse views on God because radical individualism is the fountainhead of theology.

Are these characteristics universally true of the CBF? Not yet. The CBF is an interesting study in demographics. If you attended a meeting, you would notice that the majority of its participants are elderly individuals who for one reason or another are disenchanted with the SBC, but who still hold many generational values that keep the CBF leadership in check. If I were to make a prediction about the CBF based solely on the similar tracks of this demographic in the life of Mainline denominations, I would predict that the CBF will tarry near moderate Baptist life until this generation passes. When the reins are handed to its younger crowd, fewer in number, a seismic shift will take place further left.

The CBF has shown slow growth in the past fifteen years. When the movement began, roughly 150 churches and 3,000 people (many from the same churches) lent their support to the movement. Today, it is virtually impossible to evaluate the size of the CBF. Literature distributed in a media kit prior cites roughly 765 churches that participated in the most recent meeting in Atlanta. However, according to the group's own statistics, there are today 1,854 "churches" who have declared a desire to participate with the Fellowship. Really? More than 1,800 CBF churches?

When I asked about membership, I was told that if I, as a member of a church in Texas, gave my regular tithe to my church and designated a portion of that tithe, even a single dollar, for the CBF, my church -- my entire church -- would from that day forward be known as a church associating with the Fellowship. So it is impossible to know which "church" listed as a participant is included as the result of a church making a decision to participate, or whether a moderate Baptist at First Baptist Church of Anywhere happens to have an affinity for the CBF.

This raises another question CBF leaders should address: How can a group which has claimed for 15 years the mantle of "champion" for the autonomy of the local church in Baptist life use this type of membership formula? Do not the remaining members of a congregation have a say in how they are counted? Does one person have the right to see his church called a "CBF church" by transferring a single dollar into the group's pocket while the remainder of the congregation knows nothing about the group?

Our Baptist forefathers would answer in the negative.

Having written this, I anticipate the usual objections that I have maligned the good name of the CBF. That has not been my intention. Instead, I admit that there are many fine people in the CBF who have been hurt by denominational wrangling in the past.

At the same time, I believe CBF leaders have serious issues that should be addressed, such as how the "denomination"—they reject this label—will relate to other bodies who hold divergent or even erroneous positions on key doctrines. They will have to address their misconception of the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" in Scripture, often referred to by CBF participants as "the priesthood of the believer," and judge between individualism and true, biblical discipleship in the community of the faithful. And they will have to decide whether the Gospel should accompany social action, or social action the Gospel.

I suspect that I am already aware of the answers they would propose to such questions, but time will tell. I also believe the leaders of the group will say that they should ignore these inquiries and simply stay "on message." They have been doing so for 15 years, and few people have been willing to listen. Could it be because the CBF has been unwilling, as Kelley wrote, to provide so few definitive answers to life's important questions?◆

Note: Tomlin is a media professional in Fort Worth, Texas. He holds a Ph.D. in church history and historical theology. This article first appeared in Baptist Press on June 26, 2006.

If There is Sin, What Then?

Matthew 18:15-20

A sermon preached by Brian Hamrick,
Spring Meeting of the Rappahannock Baptist Association,
Nomini Baptist Church, April 27, 2006

All of our churches have the same main problem. It isn't the number of baptisms we had last year. It isn't how much we gave to missions. It's simple. Your church has this problem, my church has this problem, every church on earth has this problem because every human being on earth has this problem. Sin.

Sin is the most basic and most fundamental problem of every church. That rebelliousness that tells God, "I've got another way of doing it."

How do we move away from sin's influence in the church to grow in holiness? Many churches preach against sin, yet do virtually nothing about it.

Jesus gave us very clear commands of how to deal with sin.

Matthew 18:15-20 (ESV):

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

You know, when I was in school, we got taught how to deal with one of the most destructive forces on earth: fire. If we were ever in a fire and our clothes caught flame, the instructions for our own safety and survival were very simple: STOP, DROP, and ROLL. For anyone who would do this, they would be assured the flames would hurt them no more. But for anyone who would not follow these simple commands, the fire would continue its damage until it consumed its victim entirely.

There is something more destructive than fire. It's sin.

Yes, brothers and sisters, the church is made up of redeemed sinners, but it is not meant to

be a place for sin to breed and grow. It is not meant to be a place where sin is given a wink here, a chuckle there, a blind eye, or an embrace of tolerance within the church.

I mentioned to one of our brothers here that I was considering preaching a Scripture passage that dealt with church discipline, and he jokingly said for a title, “My way, or the highway.” Some people think that’s what this is all about.

I mentioned to a brother who was heading off to seminary last fall about the church’s desperate need for practicing church discipline as Jesus taught it, and he told me he had never heard of it before.

So I don’t assume this is familiar to each of you. Discipline is not a well-accepted word in this day and time. We think it’s overly restrictive, and that we should ignore it for the sake of personal freedom.

I hope you won’t tune this out. Some of you will be wondering how this helps bring people to Christ, how this really is a part of our mission, and I will answer those things.

Now, I want you to relax for a moment. Church discipline is not about a witch-hunt. It’s not about practicing a judgmental attitude, or mean-spiritedness. It’s not about humiliating another person. It’s not a way to get even with someone who wronged you. There are a lot of ways it should never be done, because it can be done wrong—yet it is equally wrong to avoid doing it, as if Jesus never said anything about the subject.

Some of you may hear this message and grow fearful I am teaching some form of perfectionism in order to be accepted by God. Let me assure you I am not—the cross signifies that God graciously accepts repentant sinners who believe the Gospel, not those who have performed a perfect life. But on the other hand, we must not be neglectful of the call upon us to holiness, for God has said, “Be holy, as I am holy.” Church discipline is more about restoration than punishment. It’s about people being reclaimed, and keeping each other from sin. It is like surgery that corrects something wrong so that more serious injury does not result.

Baptist historian Gregory Wills discovered that after the Civil War, discipline in churches declined in part due to churches growing larger. He said, “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. 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.”

If sin happens, or perhaps, when sin happens, this is what we are taught to do.

The first step is,

I. Privately confront the offender.

What are you supposed to do when someone has wronged you? Gossip? Call all your friends to get your support? Start plotting your revenge? No. You are not told even to sweep it all under the rug and avoid the person. You are not told to leave the church to go out in search of the perfect one.

Look at verse 15:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

There's no mention here of the pastor, or deacons, or even a discipline committee. It's you. You might say, I can't do that. I'm not a confrontational person. I'm too loving. Friends with all due respect, you are not loving enough, if you would let your brother or sister persist in sin.

The best way to handle a problem you have with another Christian is to talk about it, face-to-face. Notice it says, "if your brother." Sisters, I think you are implied here also. This is not so much a plan for dealing with conflict with the world, but within the church. Jesus taught us to make this a priority in Matthew 5:

if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

We have no right to nurse grudges, whine about our wounds, and resist efforts at healing. We are to take the first step—to risk the engagement—that can lead to a restored relationship. We are to do this with gentleness and with love toward that person, the kind of love God showed you in forgiving you.

This passage stresses something very important to us: first of all, that our relationship with one another in the body of Christ is extremely important, and, secondly, that our faithfulness to God is something we are accountable for.

Did you know this is why we have church membership? It isn't so you can get cheap cemetery plots. It is to say, this is the family of God I am accountable to for my life.

Too many times we act like Cain... remember Cain? He killed his brother, and then he had the nerve to ask God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Uh, yeah! But here we are 5,000 years later, and if we are not careful, we neglect this sacred responsibility as well.

When a person sins against you, they are not only breaking fellowship with you, they are breaking fellowship with God also. Jesus doesn't say, "learn to live with it." He doesn't even say, "You know, nice people just go with the flow." No. He says, "Heal it. Here's how."

Why don't we do this more often? I suppose we are concerned about backlash if that person gets defensive.

Richard Belcher tells the fictional story of a pastor who came to a church that was in pretty rough shape, spiritually speaking. There was a dear older lady there named Miss Lilly who was always warm toward the pastor. She made him cookies and cakes and had a big smile on her face. One night, the pastor got a call that Miss Lilly had been in a car accident. As the pastor was getting ready to go see her in the hospital, the phone rang. Someone in the church told him, "Miss Lilly has been charged with a DUI." As he went to the hospital, he prayed as to how he could lovingly respond to this problem. He visited with Miss Lilly, caring for her, praying for her, and showing his love. Then he said, "Miss Lilly, I understand you may have a problem. I'd like to help you." Miss Lilly suddenly became a different person. She was furious! As the pastor was starting to receive this "new" Miss Lilly, other church members walked in, seeing Miss Lilly visibly angry. "What's wrong, Miss Lilly?" they asked, and she responded, "The preacher just told me I'm going to hell!" (Source: Richard Belcher, *A Journey in Purity: A Theological Novel* [Columbia, SC: Richbarry Press, 1996]. This is an EXCELLENT, enjoyable source as a pastor wrestles with church discipline. I have paraphrased the account here.)

Many are simply afraid of conflict and confrontation. We are aware that we might get involved in conflict with someone who doesn't play by the same set of rules.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes it is the lack of confrontation that causes as much conflict as anything else! Mold in the home or gangrene in the human body do the most damage when they are not confronted, and they are worth the cost of confrontation. In fact, we would count it foolish not to confront those things.

One pastor noticed, "Many church fellowships and small groups remain superficial, because they are afraid of conflict. Whenever an issue comes up that might cause tension or discomfort, it is immediately glossed over in order to preserve a false sense of peace. Mr. 'Don't Rock the Boat' jumps in and tries to smooth everyone's ruffled feathers, the issue is never resolved, and everyone lives with an underlying frustration. Everyone knows about the problem, but no one talks about it openly. This creates a sick environment of secrets where gossip thrives."

When we don't stand up to sin in the church, others in the church will become tired of their hurtful behavior, and the church will eventually self-destruct.

Peacemaking does not happen by avoiding conflict. It happens by addressing it in a way that honors God.

We should put nothing ahead of holiness. No matter who they are related to, how long they've been in the church, or how abundantly they may give in money or time to the church, sin needs to be dealt with.

But such private confrontation must always surround the Word of God, and not the rules of man. Don't confront someone because they didn't do things your way. Be sure it is something God calls sin.

The goal of this process is not kicking someone out of church if they sin against us. Sinning against each other does not call for immediate disqualification from the church. But if we say nothing, all we do is give legs to sin in the church. We enable it. We allow it to grow stronger. Sin needs darkness to grow. It needs isolation disguised as "privacy." Jesus does not say to run away from our brother or sister who sins against us. The goal is their repentance and restoration, that is, turning away from sin and toward obedience to God.

Now in a perfect world, all conflicts would get resolved at this level. At this level, you win your brother. You gain back that valuable treasure that had been lost. I had the occasion in the last year where a brother saw something in my character he confronted me about, and I said to him, "Thank you for loving me enough to offer this correction."

Confronting someone is not necessarily easy, but it is always godly. Don't be afraid to confront an offender even if you suspect you will only get pride and ugliness in return. Sadly, many people do not acknowledge any authority greater than themselves, and they'll resent it. Be more concerned about their restoration to the body than how you are treated.

So Jesus says sins against each other are to find private resolution, even without the knowledge of the pastor. But sometimes that doesn't happen. Sometimes, the two involved can't see the big picture. Or perhaps one of the persons is stubborn and refuses to repent. So Jesus says there is another step to take.

II. Establish the facts.

Jesus said in verse 16, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

One of the problems that can develop when a brother or sister sins against someone, is that the story gets changed and transformed. There's a tweaking and twisting of the facts, a shifting of the blame, and all you have left is a warped version of what really happened.

Notice the sin should still be a fairly private matter at this moment. Those that go along are witnesses, not cheerleaders. In such situations, facts matter most, not feelings, not previous relationships, not rumors.

Sometimes, we are all slow to repent. Sometimes we all make excuses for our behavior and try to justify it. Jesus calls the offended to take along one or two more with them, not only to establish the facts, but that it might further encourage repentance.

But if that is a fruitless experience, there is still one more step to go.

III. The congregation needs to act.

If sin lingers this long, what are we to do? Drop it? Let it linger in the shadows? Not according to Jesus.

Notice this is not the first step. A church business meeting must never be the first place a sin is to be confronted, unless that sin is of a particularly severe and public nature. Notice also the final responsibility does not belong to the pastor, but the whole congregation!

Now, if a church has to get to this step, it is a sorrowful and serious moment. It is not enjoyable, any more than serving as a juror is enjoyable. I would compare it to paying taxes—none of us enjoy writing checks to Uncle Sam, but we know the consequences of not paying it is far worse, and that this is part of being a responsible citizen.

The members of the church should hear the matter responsibly and without partiality.

No one should look forward to it, but to neglect it is equally dangerous.

Fairfields has some rich history on this. In 1845, the church was in its second year, and Dr. Kirk was the pastor. A member was excluded for adultery. I want you to imagine what would have happened if Dr. Kirk had taught the church, “Oh, just let it go. We need their giving and we don’t want to hurt their feelings. Besides, we want a bigger building. We don’t want them to stop coming to church.”

Sometimes, churches are afraid to follow through with this, because they fear it will cause their self-destruction. In our own church’s history that year, 3 people were baptized, 5 were disciplined, and 6 died. But less than 5 years later, the church membership had grown considerably, and they had difficulty seating everyone who wanted to come to church! They even had to build more space so that people could hear the Gospel!

Being called a member of the church of Jesus Christ is not anyone’s right. It is a privilege given by God’s grace working in one’s heart when he is saved. It is also a privilege the congregation may remove when necessary.

Some of you may say that sounds so unloving. Friends, since Jesus said to do it, it is the most loving thing you can do, if it needs to be done, and if it is done in a humble manner.

Correcting sin for the purpose of bringing repentance is far more loving toward that person, even if they resent it, than tolerating sinfulness.

What if the congregational meeting to hear this matter does not result in reconciliation and repentance?

Jesus said to treat them as a tax-collector or Gentile—in other words, as a non-believer.

Why would we do this? The same reason we send children to their rooms when they disobey their parents. It encourages repentance. It is not so we may feel superior to them. It is so they might be truly sorrowful for their sin and turn from it.

Now maybe you've been thinking all along, doesn't Jesus say, "Do not judge." Yes, he does in Matthew 7. What does he mean? Let me ask you something—when your church called a pastor, did they make judgments about him? When you got married, did you make any judgments about that person you married? Of course you did. Were you wrong to do that, were you disobeying what Jesus said when He said, "Do not judge?" No. The key to that passage is context. Jesus is saying do not make hypocritical judgments. Do not judge another as if you have no sin yourself, as if there is one standard for you and another for someone else.

In 1 Corinthians 5, the church was tolerating a man who was sleeping with his father's wife. The apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit reproves the church, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil from among you."

Church discipline is not deciding where the offender will spend eternity. Brothers and sisters, judging such matters is not playing God. It is obeying God.

Does church discipline contradict God's commandment to love? No. In fact, 2 John tells us, "this is love that we walk according to His commandments." It is an expression of love. It is a training tool to lead believers toward faithfulness to God.

This idea that "I take care of me, you take care of you, and never the twain shall meet" is very American, but it's not Christian. We're to be each other's accountability partners.

This is how God's love is described in Scripture. Hebrews says, "For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines and scourges every son whom he receives, for what son is there whom the father does not discipline."

I have a 2-year old son at home. Do you know what I do when he tries to climb the couch? I say, "Nathan, get down." If he doesn't listen, I pick him up and put him on the floor. Why? Because he will do more harm to himself, if he doesn't listen. I do this, because I love him.

With our children, we give boundaries and we enforce them. Should it be any different with members of the church? Should we not tell them “no” out of love for them when they do harm to their own soul or the witness of the church, and enforce consequences when they persist in rebellion and defiance?

Friends, I grieve the number of negligent people our churches still call members. How can we do this with integrity? How can we include these in our testimony when they have abandoned us years ago? Non-attendance is often the sin that covers up many others.

To my brothers who are fellow pastors here, teach your people obedience to Jesus in this area very carefully and very patiently. This is nothing to rush into. This is not something to do without the formative disciplines of preaching, teaching, having spiritual conversations, and building a sense of accountability in our churches. Sometimes, it takes a while for a congregation to grasp what is taught here. Brothers, be patient and prayerful, even when people misunderstand you.

To my brothers and sisters who are church members here, will you support your pastors in teaching obedience to Jesus in this area? Yes, you’ll have some people in your church resistant to this. Will you go with them to the Scriptures and show them how we are to be obedient to Jesus? Stand with your pastor when he stands on the Word of God—even if it causes disagreement. Yes, you’ll find people who will receive no correction well, much like a small child throwing a fit. But our faithfulness needs to be to Jesus, and not to the whims of man.

I told you I would answer some of the questions I thought might be bothering you.

How does this help bring people to Christ?

Your church gives a testimony, whether you are aware of it or not, whether it is good or bad. When non-believing people come in contact with your church, many of them are inspecting it carefully. In many cases, they’ve got a better nose for what is good and what is bad in your church than you do. You say, well, I’ve been going there for years. Yeah, but if you’re not careful, you can get in the trap of just getting used to everything and accepting it.

Your pastor can tell you how heartbreaking it is when a non-believer points out behaviors in the church that don’t belong there.

Obedying Jesus in this area communicates not only to our own congregation that we take His authority and His person seriously, but it also communicates that to the lost. It communicates we believe in the reality of changed lives as a result of God’s grace.

When they see Jesus in us, God often uses that to warm their hearts to the Gospel, and to hunger for the Word. When they see sin, apathy, negligence, and carelessness among us, it

doesn't matter how good the preaching is, they see the hypocrisy. And many will conclude there is nothing special about our Gospel or our Savior. Could there be a worse myth we could spread? May it not be!

How is this a part of our mission?

Our mission is more than performing good deeds, evangelism, or even baptizing new believers. It is walking by the obedience of faith, trusting and obeying God in all that He has revealed to us, because our chief aim is to enjoy and glorify Him.

Our mission is not to make our churches bigger, as if we are a business. Our mission is to glorify God, because He has been gracious to us to save us through Jesus and we are now both His children and His servants.

We must be concerned with bringing sinners back to God. We are Christ's ambassadors. May God find us faithful. ♦

Brian Hamrick is a native of Richmond, Virginia and served as Pastor of Fairfields Baptist Church in Burgess, Virginia when he preached this associational message. He has recently been called to serve as Pastor of First Baptist Church of Clewiston, Florida.



Evangelical Forum Fifth Annual Meeting

Wednesday, November 8, 2006
Afternoon session: 3:30-5:00 pm
Evening session: 7:00-9:00 pm

Host Church: Green Run Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, VA
(www.greenrunbaptist.com).

Host Pastor: Shane Martin

Guest Speakers:

- Dr. Tom Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.
- Dr. Andrew Davis, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Durham, NC.

Reflections on the Death of Rev. William Sloane Coffin and Moderate Seminary Days

By Jeffrey T. Riddle

Rev. William Sloane Coffin, an icon of Protestant liberalism, died on April 12, 2006 at the age of 81 years at his home in Strafford, Vermont. The *New York Times* obituary article that appeared the next day traced the flamboyant and controversial career of Coffin. It noted that the Presbyterian minister “embraced a philosophy of social activism at the heart of his clerical duties.” He came from a family of great wealth and privilege. His forebears had been on the Mayflower. His father, also named William Sloane Coffin, was a vice-president of W. & J. Sloane, the furniture manufacturer, and the president of the board of trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His uncle, the Rev. Henry Sloane Coffin, was president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

As a young man Coffin studied music in Paris in hopes of becoming a concert pianist. His undergraduate studies at Yale were interrupted by his service in Europe in World War II as an infantry officer. He returned to complete his college studies at Yale and then move on to the Yale Divinity School where he was influenced by the ideas of Reinhold Niebuhr. He took the post as Chaplain at his alma mater in 1958 and served there until the late 1970s.

While Chaplain at Yale his radical social gospel ideas developed as he engaged first in the civil rights movement and then in the ant-Vietnam war movement. In 1965 he formed a group called Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, and by 1967 he was arrested for encouraging students to burn their draft cards. In 1978 he became the pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, a bastion of liberal Christianity. After leaving Riverside in the late 1980s he became the leader of Sane/Freeze, a group that lobbied for nuclear disarmament and a freeze on nuclear testing. In 1999 he suffered a debilitating stroke, and this year the Rev. Sloane Coffin went the way of all flesh.

Why did I take note of the passing of this very liberal, northern minister of privilege who so eagerly embraced a naïve social gospel? I took note because I recalled my days as a seminary student in the late 1980s at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, when Dr. Sloane Coffin had been a guest on campus. I had attended one of his presentations at which he had given one of his diatribes against nuclear armament and preached whole-heartedly the social gospel. At the time I was an impressionable seminarian at the then moderate school, but even then I recall being bothered by Rev. Coffin’s presentation. “Where is the gospel in this?” I kept thinking.

As I recall, Dr. Coffin was the guest of one of the ethics professors at Southern at that time. When I talk with someone today still wanting to argue that our SBC seminaries really were not all that liberal before the conservative resurgence, I always try to point out to them the fact that when I was in seminary there were no professors in the ethics department who were clearly and vocally pro-life. Imagine that! No pro-life ethics professors in an SBC seminary! If they do not believe me, I pull off my shelf the text that was used in the Christian ethics class I took at the old SBTS under Dr. Paul Simmons and read them a few selected passages from his book, *Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision-Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983): pp. 105-06,

The Bible gives a great deal of guidance on the abortion issue. This is not in the form of a rule or commandment prohibiting abortion, nor even casuistic details regarding circumstances under which it may be permitted or prohibited....

In terms of the current debate, the claim that the Bible teaches that the fetus is a person from the moment of conception has been tested and found wanting. The notion comes from natural law theory, not from the Bible....

Further, the Bible gives no support for those efforts to prohibit abortion at law. It is clearly not “antiabortion” in the sense that contemporary groups would have us believe....

The silence of the Bible on the subject of elective abortion is an eloquent testimony to the sacredness of this choice for women and their families and the privacy in which it is to be considered....

One is free to abort or not to abort, as God leads. This is the freedom of grace.

Yes, that's right. This was the worldview being advocated while I was at Southern. By the way, after leaving Southern Dr. Paul Simmons went on to be a founding leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-supported Baptist Seminary of Kentucky. On one hand, moderate seminary professors were encouraging the students of my day to be anti-war social activists like Coffin. On the other hand, they were saying that it is OK to abort babies. Inconsistency.

As I read the rest of William Sloane Coffin's obituary, I was struck by the inconsistencies of his personal life. A man born into wealth and privilege made his mark by becoming an activist for the poor, but he did so on one of the most elite campuses in America. He preached about social justice to a tony Riverside Church congregation. As the *Times* noted: "So if Dr. Coffin preached on behalf of the poor and downtrodden, he did so to the most prominent and talented parishioners." I am reminded of the wag who observed, "the Liberals opted for the poor, but the poor opted for the evangelicals."

More striking than the inconsistencies of Coffin's professional life were those of his personal life. The obituary noted that he had been married three times and divorced twice. His marriage to Eva Anna Rubinstein, which had produced three children, ended in divorce in 1969. That same year he married Harriet Gibney, whom he divorced in 1976. His third wife, Virginia Randolph Wilson, survived him. It seems that the peace for which Coffin was such a vocal advocate among nations was not a state that he could maintain in his own household. Yale alumnus and cartoonist Gary Trudeau of "Doonesbury" lampooned Coffin with a character known as "Rev. Scott Sloan," a "thoroughly modern minister/enabler."

So when I read of the passing of Rev. William Sloane Coffin, I thought of those days at Southern when I heard him speak, and I remembered how thankful I am that ministers in the coming generation being trained in Southern Baptist seminaries will have a much different set of ministry icons put before them to emulate. ♦

Jeffrey T. Riddle, Jefferson Park Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Virginia

Evangelical Forum Newsletter



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2005 Evangelical Forum plenary sessions.

Quick Quotes

- **On “Avoiding Entertainment” in Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Crossway, 2005):**

Many American churches have used entertainment-based methods of evangelism—theotainment, as it has been called by some—in sharing the Gospel with both adults and children. With adults, it often takes the form of surveying target audiences and creating an evangelistic service in which everything from the music to the sermon is geared toward making them feel comfortable—a “sit back and enjoy the show” approach. With children, it takes the form of youth groups or Sunday schools that spend most of their time thinking up fun activities that will sneak the Gospel in through the back door.

Now there is no reason to argue against communicating the Gospel in an understandable, creative, or even provocative way. But evangelism that takes the form of entertainment has some harmful side effects. Remember—what you win them with is likely what you’ll win them to. If you win them with entertainment, they’re likely to be won to the show rather than the message, which increases the likelihood of false conversions. But even if they’re not won to the show, entertainment based methods make repentance virtually impossible. We are not encouraged to forsake our sin by having our senses amused or our preferences coddled. The Gospel is inherently and irreducibly confrontational. It cuts against our perceived righteousness and self-sufficiency, demanding that we forsake cherished sin and trust in someone else to justify us. Entertainment is therefore a problematic medium for communicating the Gospel, because it nearly always obscures the most difficult aspects of it—the cost of repentance, the cross of discipleship, the narrowness of the Way (pp. 54-55).

- **“The Cutting Edge Has No Edge.” An edited Al Mohler post to the “Together for the Gospel” Blog posted on June 30, 2006:**

Looking back farther than I would like to remember, I recall as a seminary student reading an article by Richard John Neuhaus (back when he was still a Lutheran) on the issue of relevance in ministry. In essence, Neuhaus argued that the churches most determined to be relevant at all costs were destined to be the churches which were actually least relevant of all. Making an idol of relevance is a form of self delusion. Authentic relevance is represented by the transforming Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the faithful witness of the church throughout time....

(T)he big division among evangelical pastors today is between those who pursue faithfulness, assuming that faithfulness will produce relevance; and those who pursue relevance, hoping that faithfulness will emerge out of that quest.

So many of the issues we deal with today seem to be focused on those who, in their own way, argue that we should pursue relevance by putting ourselves and our churches out on the “cutting edge” of ministry. If this means taking every opportunity to extend faithful witness and ministry in the name of Christ, then count me in.

Regrettably, it often becomes a rationale for something very different in the end. Repeating that slogan, many pastors and churches, along with an array of parachurch ministries, push themselves into modes of ministry that are based more on cultural analysis and pragmatism than in a clear biblical and theological understanding of the nature and purpose of the church—and the integrity of the Gospel.

The other problem with the “cutting edge” is that it really has no edge. The culture is moving at warp speed in so many different directions that absolute relevance is a mirage. Faithfulness to the Gospel produces the only relevance that matters. Of course, we use forms of language and mechanisms of communication that others can understand, but the basic structure of our ministry and the substance of our beliefs are unchanged and unchanging—and still ever relevant.

Those who push themselves ever onward toward the cutting edge will find themselves falling off the edge.

- **A young Christian woman, “Jennie,” offers a critique of her experience on a short-term youth mission trip in Anna Sophia Botkin and Elizabeth Botkin’s *So Much More* (Vision Forum, 2005):**

In my 15-year old mind, going on a mission trip was supposed to be a way to serve the Body of Christ in another country. All of us cheerful, hardworking Americans flew in and got an entire church painted and looking beautiful. We sang songs and played games. We hugged the elderly and kissed children. But with a sickening feeling in my stomach, I suddenly came face to face with the fact that everything we had done was, at best cosmetic. We had not brought any scriptural teaching to people who really needed to know how to live the gospel in their country....

I realized that what we had done could not be termed “missions” work at all. What these people needed was a faithful, biblical pastor who could lead their church into the “meat” of the gospel, teaching them how to manage their limited finances and to serve Christ out of their lack. This was a church starving for solid Biblical teaching, and all we had done was to paint their chairs and walls....

I wanted my home church to feel that they had done well in sending me to minister in another country. But deep down, I knew that we had made very little difference....

I saw that the problem of short-term missions was that it tended to give a short-term view of the work of the Church. We cannot just blow in from out of town and “fix” things in ten days....

Focusing on the superficial, cosmetic needs only discourages those who think they are helping. The real crying needs of the third world are complex and controversial—nothing that can be fixed by a group of teenagers on a “missionary” tourist excursion. And the biblical solutions are consequently being neglected because this superficial activity is hyped as “God’s will”....

The circus atmosphere of many short-term mission trips has not led Christianity toward more fruitfulness, but it has reinforced the pragmatic trends of Evangelicalism, which are redefining Christianity as experience-oriented or entertainment oriented (pp. 257-60).

- **On Integrity in Ministry. From Charles Spurgeon’s sermon “Baptismal Regeneration,” preached Sunday morning June 5, 1864 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.** In this controversial message, Spurgeon challenged the integrity of evangelical Anglican ministers who chose to stay within that denomination despite its prayer book’s teaching on baptismal regeneration.

Sirs, when I accepted the office of minister of this congregation, I looked to see what were your articles of faith; if I had not believed them I should not have accepted your call, and when I change my opinions, rest assured that as an honest man I shall resign the office, for how could I profess one thing in your declaration of faith, and quite another thing in my own preaching? Would I accept your pay, and then stand up every Sabbath-day and talk against the doctrines of your standards? For clergymen to swear or say that they give their solemn assent and consent to what they do not believe is one of the grossest pieces of immorality perpetrated in England, and is most pestilential in its influence, since it directly teaches men to lie whenever it seems necessary to do so in order to get a living or increase their supposed usefulness: it is in fact an open testimony from priestly lips that at least in ecclesiastical matters falsehood may express truth, and truth itself is a mere unimportant nonentity. I know of nothing more calculated to debauch the public mind than a want of straightforwardness in ministers; and when worldly men hear ministers denouncing the very things which their own Prayer Book teaches, they imagine that words have no meaning among ecclesiastics, and that vital differences in religion are merely a matter of tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum, and that it does not much matter what a man does believe so long as he is charitable towards other people. ♦

News and Notes

- **CBF Lacks Funds to Appoint New Career Missionaries**

The 2006 annual meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship did not include the commissioning of any new fully-funded career missionaries. According to a June 26, 2006 Associated Baptist Press article by Rob Marus ("Fellowship breaks tradition with commissioning ceremony"), CBF "broke tradition" this year by only commissioning "short-term and self-funded mission workers."

The Marus article observes: "CBF, whose missions giving has lagged in recent years, will not appoint any career missionaries this year. Appointments during the last two years benefited from a multimillion gift from a single donor."

The article also included the "candid assessment" of Jack Snell, interim CBF global missions coordinator, quoted as saying: "Our offerings are flat; we have not reached our goal in the Offering for Global missions in several years. In many cases, our passion is dull and our compassion is diluted by fatigue."

CBF now funds a mere 107 active career missionaries in the United States and internationally. As CBF funds dwindle and attention is shifted toward "social justice" issues, one wonders how long CBF will be in the missions business.

- **Problems At Virginia "Baptist" Military Schools**

Three military high schools in Virginia funded by the state missions budget of the Baptist General Association of Virginia have all faced recent public relations problems.

According to a July 8, 2006 article in the Charlottesville *Daily Progress*, Fork Union Military Academy in Fluvanna County, Virginia and Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Virginia were recently placed on a list of 22 schools from across the nation that will have their academic standards reviewed by NCAA investigators. The listing came about as part of an NCAA crackdown on so-called "diploma mill" schools. Both schools have gained national prominence for placing athletes in elite NCAA colleges and universities.

The *Danville Register & Bee* reported on July 11, 2006 that Hargrave Military Academy in Chatham, Virginia had reached an out of court settlement in a suit against the Guyles family of Mt. Holly, NC. The Guyles' son had been dismissed as a student at the school in March 2006. The Guyles family had then sent a letter critical of the school to other Hargrave parents and also set up a website (www.hargravehasproblems.com) containing a copy of their letter, additional criticisms, and postings from other disgruntled parents. Hargrave then filed suit against the Guyles family.

In May a Federal Court Judge in Roanoke issued an order that the website be taken down. The Virginia ACLU and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Free Expression filed an amicus brief protesting the decision. That brief can be read at: http://www.acluva.org/docket/pleadings/hargrave_amicus.pdf

Terms of the July settlement were not disclosed.

Fork Union, Hargrave, and Oak Hill all receive substantial funding each year from the Virginia portion of the "cooperative program" missions budget. According to the *2005 Virginia Baptist Annual*, Fork Union received \$112,125 in cooperative program and designated giving in 2005, while Hargrave received \$121,529 and Oak Hill \$120,746.

- **BGAV Churches Continue Faithful Giving to SBC Mission Special Offerings**

Despite years of moderate criticism of the SBC, grassroots giving to SBC mission causes from BGAV churches remains strong.

According to the *2005 Virginia Baptist Annual*, for the year ending 11/30/05, BGAV churches gave over \$2.9 million to the Lottie Moon Offering for the International Mission Board of the SBC and \$1.4 million to the Annie Armstrong Offering of the North American Mission Board of the SBC for a total of over \$4.3 million. In contrast, only \$491,497.68 was given to the CBF Global Missions Offering (encompassing both international and domestic missions) in that same period. This means that BGAV churches gave nearly ten times as much in direct special missions offerings to SBC causes over CBF causes in 2005.

Paradosis

Paradosis in the Greek word for “tradition.” It is also the title for this recurring section featuring the voices from the Virginia Baptist past.

Isaac Backus (1724-1806) was the pastor of the Middleborough Baptist Church in Middleborough, Massachusetts and an influential Baptist leader of the 18th century. He was a frequent correspondent and advisor to Baptists in Virginia and in 1789 engaged in a preaching tour of the state as part of “The Great Revival” that swept Virginia from 1785-91 (see Garnett Ryland, *The Baptists of Virginia 1699-1926*, p. 141-45). Backus was also a fierce advocate for religious liberty, which he sought for the unfettered preaching of the gospel. Below is the “Confession of Faith and Covenant” adopted by his Middleborough congregation in 1756. Modern Baptists should take note of Backus’ clear confessional Calvinism, including his belief that God “of his mere good pleasure from all eternity, hath chosen a number of poor lost men, in Christ Jesus, to eternal salvation.” We should also heed his call that “the door of the Church should be carefully kept at all times against all such as cannot give scriptural evidences of their union to Christ by faith.” Backus’ call for freedom from interference from civil authority in religious matters did not mean that he opposed spiritual accountability and discipline within the church.

Source: Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus, A. M.* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859): 334-39. With slight editing of Scripture references.

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH AND COVENANT

PREPARED BY THE REV. ISAAC BACKUS, AND ADOPTED BY THE FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH IN MIDDLEBOROUGH, AT ITS
ORGANIZATION, JANUARY 16, 1756.

ARTICLES OF FAITH.

PART I.

1. WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS BUT ONE only, the living and true God, who is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his Being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Deut 6; John 4:24; Ps 147:5, and 90:2; Jam 1:17; Isa 40:28; Jer 10:10; Isa 6:3; Exod 34:6,7.
2. That there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who are but one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory, 1 John 5:7; Phil 2:6; Acts 5:3,4.
3. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God, which he hath given, as our only perfect rule of faith and practice. Acts 20:32; 2 Tim 3:15, 16, 17.
4. That God who is infinite in knowledge, and perfectly views all things from the beginning to the end of time, hath fore-ordained that whatsoever comes to pass, either by his order or permission, shall work for the eternal glory of his great Name. Acts 15:18; Rom 9:17-23; Acts 2:23; Ps 76:10.
5. In the beginning, God created heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, — and he upholds and governs all things by the word of his power. Exod 20:11; Heb 1:3; Dan 4:35.
6. That God made man in his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness; and made with him a covenant of life, the condition whereof was perfect obedience. Gen 1:26, 27, and 2:16, 17; Gal 3:10.

7. Man, being left to himself, soon fell from that happy and glorious estate in which he was made, by eating the forbidden fruit, whereby he brought himself and all his posterity into a state of death. Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12, 19.

8. Man being thus dead, his help and recovery is wholly in and from God. Hos 13:9; Eph 2:8; John 6:44.

9. God the Father, of his mere good pleasure from all eternity, hath chosen a number of poor lost men, in Christ Jesus, to eternal salvation. Rom 8:29, 30; Eph 1:4, 5.

10. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, hath come and taken on him human nature; and in that nature hath yielded a perfect obedience to the laws that we have broken, and suffered death for our sins, and hath brought in a complete and everlasting righteousness; and hath risen and ascended to the right hand of God, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. Heb 10:6-10; Dan 9:24; Heb 7:25.

11. The Holy Ghost, and he only, can and doth make a particular application of the redemption purchased by Christ, to every elect soul. John 3:5 and 16:7-15.

12. The Spirit of God applies this redemption by convincing us of our sinful, lost and miserable condition, and then discovering the glorious Saviour, as he is offered to us in the Gospel, in his suitableness and sufficiency, and enabling us to embrace him with our whole souls, whereby he is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. John 16:8 and 1:12; 1 Cor 1:30.

13. The life of religion consists in the knowledge of God, and conformity to him in the inward man; which necessarily produceth an external conformity to his law; and brings us to live in obedience to his holy will, in all our ways, and in our several places and relations. John 17:3; Matt 23:26; Eph 2:10; Tit 2.

14. True believers being united to Jesus Christ by faith, have communion with God; and by his Spirit they are united to each other, and have communion one with another, whereby they are made partakers of each others' gifts and graces. 1 John, 1:3; Rom 1:11; Phil 1:7.

15. We believe that the first day of the week, commonly called the Lord's day, is the Christian Sabbath. Matt 28:1-6; John 20:19, 26; Rev 1:10; Heb 4:8, 9, 10.

16. That God hath appointed the ordinance of Civil Government for the defending of the poor as well as of the rich, in their civil rights and privileges; and the work of the civil magistrate is, to punish moral evils, and to encourage moral virtue, without touching upon anything that infringes upon the conscience, or pretending to dictate and govern in the worship of the Eternal God; which belongs only to Jesus Christ, the great law-giver and head of his Church. Rom 13:1-4; 1 Pet 2:13, 14, 15; 1 Tim 1:8, 9, 10; Matt 23: 8, 9, 10; Luke 22:25, 26; Isa 33:20, 21, 22; Eph 1:22.

17. We believe there will be a general resurrection both of the just and unjust; and that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ; and will reward every man according to his works; when the wicked shall be sent into everlasting punishment, and the righteous be received into life eternal. John 5:28, 29; Rom 2:16; Matt 16:27 and 25:46.

PART II.

CONCERNING CHURCH AFFAIRS.

1. WE BELIEVE THAT A VISIBLE CHURCH OF CHRIST is a number of his saints and people, by mutual acquaintance and communion, voluntarily and understandingly, covenanting and embodying together for the carrying on the worship and service of God. 1 Pet 2:5; 1 Cor 1:2; Acts 2:42-47.

2. That Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of Christ, to be continued until his second coming; and that the former is requisite to the latter, *that is to say*, that those are to be admitted into the communion of the Church, and to partake of all its ordinance, —who, upon profession of their faith, have been baptized by immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Matt 28:19, 20; 1 Cor 11:23, 26, Acts 2:41 and 9:18, 26 and 8:12, 36-39; Matt 3:6, 16; Rom 6:4; John 3: 23.

3. Since none but saints can rightly partake of these ordinances, therefore the door of the Church should be carefully kept at all times against all such as cannot give scriptural evidences of their union to Christ by faith. 1 Cor 11:27, 29; Matt 7:6, 15-20; Ezek 44:7, 9; Isa 26:2.

4. A church thus gathered, hath power to choose and ordain those officers that Christ hath appointed in his Church, namely: Bishops or Elders, and Deacons; and also to depose such officers as evidently appear to walk contrary to the gospel, and to discipline their members; though in some such cases it is convenient and profitable to request the advice of neighboring churches of Christ. Acts 1:21-26 and 6:3; Num 8:10; Matt 18:15-18; Acts 15.

5. A Bishop or Elder hath no more power to decide any case or controversy in the Church, than any private brother; yet they having superior gifts for teaching and ruling ought to exercise and improve the same for the benefit of the church, and the church ought to be subject to the gifts bestowed on the minister from the Lord, while he is rightly acting in his place; —whose work is to lead in the actings of the church, and to administer the sacraments, and devote himself to the work of teaching, warning, rebuking and exhorting the people publicly, and from house to house. Matt 20:25-28; 1 Pet 5:3; Matt 28:19; Acts 20:20, 28, 31.

6. The Deacon's office-work is, to take care of the poor, and to have the oversight of the temporal affairs of the Church, and to minister at the Lord's table. Acts 6:1-4; 1 Tim 3:8-13.

7. Every saint is commanded to be faithful, to improve every gift and talent that is bestowed on them; in order to which, there ought to be such a gospel freedom that the church may know where every particular gift is, that it may be improved in its proper place, and to its right end; even the glory of God, and the good of his people. And the Church ought to be subject to such improvements. Rom 13:5-8; 1 Pet 4:10, 11, and 5:5.

COVENANT.

We do now in the presence of the great all-seeing and most glorious God, and before angels and men, give ourselves up to the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; and avouch Him this day, to be our God, our Father, our Saviour, and our Leader; and receive him as our portion forever. We give up ourselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and adhere to him as the Head of his people in the covenant of grace; and rely on him as our prophet, priest and king, to bring us to eternal blessedness. We acknowledge our everlasting and indispensable obligation to glorify our God, by living a holy, righteous and godly life, in this present world, in all our several places and relations. And we do engage, by the assistance of the Divine Spirit, to improve all our time and strength, talents and advantages, for his glory, and the good of our fellow men; promising by Divine help to walk in our house with a perfect heart; and to train up those under our care in the ways of God. And we also give up ourselves to one another in covenant, promising to act towards each other as brethren in Christ; watching over one another in the love of God; and to watch not only against those that are considered more gross evils, but also against all foolish talking and jesting which is not convenient; vain disputing about words and things which gender strife; disregarding promises, and not fulfilling engagements; tattling and backbiting; spending time idly at taverns or elsewhere; and vain and unnecessary worldly conversation on the Lord's days; and whatsoever else that is contrary to sound doctrine according to the glorious gospel of Christ; promising to hold communion together in the worship of God, and in the

ordinances and discipline of his church, according as we are, or shall be, guided by the Spirit of God in his word; expecting that he will yet further and more gloriously open his word and the mysteries of his kingdom; flying to the blood of the everlasting covenant for the pardon of our many errors, and praying that the Lord would prepare and strengthen us for every good work, to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In the blogosphere

You can read the *Stylos* weblog (blog) of *EFN* Editor Jeffrey T. Riddle at www.jpbcstylos.blogspot.com.

You can also read the *Baptist Reform* weblog (blog) of Evangelical Forum steering committee member Travis Hilton, pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in Bluefield, Virginia at www.baptistreform.blogspot.com.



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Evangelical Forum



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