

Evangelical Forum Newsletter



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Two Paths

In this issue of the *EFN* you can read about two recent defining moments in contemporary Baptist life. One is the removal of Myers Park Baptist Church from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina for its unapologetic support for homosexual behavior. The second is the recent “Building Bridges” Conference on the rise of Calvinism in the SBC. How in the world are these two events related? They represent two distinct trajectories emerging from the post-SBC conservative resurgence (1979-1990).

The first trajectory is that represented by Myers Park Baptist Church. It is the trajectory of post-SBC liberalism. Read carefully Myers Park Pastor Stephen Shoemaker’s letter to the annual meeting of NC Baptists. He appeals to those who “treasure soul freedom, soul competency, and the autonomy of the local church” not to remove his church from fellowship, because they have “come to the place where we said we were ‘open to all and closed to none,’ and fully welcomed gay and lesbian persons who wish to follow Jesus with us.” Shoemaker further appeals to “the competence and freedom of the individual to open scripture and interpret it for his or her life guided by the Spirit of God.” This is where “freedom” without confessional boundaries leads.

When I was a seminary student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1980s P.M. (that is to say, Pre-Mohler), Shoemaker was the Pastor of Crescent Hill Baptist Church, which lies very near the seminary campus. It was

then a popular church among seminarians. Shoemaker taught preaching as an adjunct, and his ministry was put forward as a model for others to follow. I do not know if he held the radical views he holds now at that time. He continued to climb the moderate ladder and served the Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, where, if the current directory flap is any indicator (see “News and Analysis of Interest” in this issue), he also had a perverse influence.

At Myers Park, the heir to the progressive pulpit of Carlyle Marney and a church long separated from the “backwards” Southern Baptists by its dual alignment with American Baptists, Shoemaker has apparently felt safe to let his theological convictions and that of his congregation come clearly into the open. No, it is admittedly not a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Church, though it is part of the now ultra-liberal Alliance of Baptists. One should also not forget that the CBF is also proudly forging ties with American Baptists and even held their annual meeting in 2007 in conjunction with the ABC-USA. We can at least be glad that things are out in the open. Now we know clearly where Shoemaker and Myers Park stand. North Carolina Baptists were also able to exercise their autonomous freedom to exclude Myers Park for their departure from Biblical standards.

The first trajectory is clear. Freedom without Biblical and confessional boundaries leads to licentiousness and lawlessness.

The second trajectory is represented by the presentations and discussions held at the “Building Bridges” Conference. It is the trajectory of post-SBC conservatism. I did not attend the meeting but spoke with two Evangelical Forum friends who did, and I have listened to the messages online. The key thing to read or listen to, in my mind, is Jeff Noblit’s message on “Calvinism:

Cause for Rejoicing.” Noblit is Pastor of First Baptist Church in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and he was once the poster child for “church growth success” in his state convention until the Lord convicted him of his unbiblical methods and the lack of lasting fruit in his ministry. From there his Calvinistic convictions came out in the open, and he led his church on a path of reform in its doctrine and methods.

In that message, Noblit takes on the mantle of a prophet. He offers the thesis that the battle over inerrancy in the SBC was only the beginning of a much larger, longer, and perhaps even more controversial movement of revival and reformation in the SBC. Noblit warns that inerrancy must not become an idol for Southern Baptists. We agree on the inerrancy of Scripture. Now the question is, “Do we believe in its sufficiency?” Will we believe what the inerrant Scriptures teach about the sovereignty of God in salvation?

Noblit also warns of the dangers of evangelical pragmatism, which eventually takes us right back to where we started. Adopt pragmatic methods in one

generation and in the next you have another crop of “soul freedom” pastors emerging.

The second trajectory is that which takes doctrinal purity with the utmost seriousness. In my mind it is a no-brainer as to which path represents the most Biblically faithful route. I’ll take Noblit’s path over Shoemaker’s. ♦

JTR

Purpose: The Evangelical Forum is a fellowship of concerned evangelical Pastors and laymen who desire to see renewal and reformation within Baptist churches in Virginia. We affirm the *Second London Baptist Confession* (1689) and the *Baptist Faith and Message* (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.

Report: Evangelical Forum 2007

The sixth annual Evangelical Forum meeting was held on Friday-Saturday, October 5-6, 2007 at the Jefferson Park Baptist Church in Charlottesville. The 2007 theme was “Of the Holy Scriptures: Baptists and the Bible.” Guest speakers were Dr. Michael Haykin of Toronto Baptist Seminary and Greg Barkman of Beacon Baptist Church of Burlington, NC. The speakers looked at the doctrine of Scripture as it is presented in the first chapter of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

On Friday evening Pastor Barkman spoke on “The Inspiration and Infallibility of Scripture” and Dr. Haykin on “A Spirituality of the Word: Scripture in the 1689 Confession.” On Saturday morning, Dr. Haykin spoke on “The Gifts of the Spirit: Early Baptist Thinking in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” and Pastor Barkman on “The Canon of Scripture.” Links to audio files of all presentations is posted at jpb.org/ef.html.

The meeting was once again blessed by vibrant hymn singing. Pastor Rob Stovall of Providence Baptist Church served as Worship Leader. Book tables were presented by Lloyd Sprinkle of Harrisonburg and Sherman Isbell of Fairfax. Lunch on Saturday was served by the ladies of Providence Baptist Church. Saturday’s session ended with an open dialogue session with the speakers.

The 2008 Evangelical Forum will be held in the Fall of 2008. Details TBA.

Reports and Reflections on Two State Convention Meetings

Reports

This year I attended the annual meetings of the two SBC state conventions in Virginia, the SBCV and the BGAV.

First, on Monday, November 12, I attended the opening day of the two-day annual “Homecoming” meeting of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV) held at Liberty Baptist Church in Hampton, Virginia. A November 20, 2007 Baptist Press article reported that there were nearly 1,200 messengers present for the meeting. The theme was “Pushing Back the Darkness.” Speakers included O. S. Hawkins (Guidestone), Mac Brunson (FBC-Jacksonville), Ergun Caner (Liberty), and Tom Eliff (IMB). The SBCV total number of churches increased to 503 with the addition of 21 new churches. A 2008 budget of \$10 million was accepted, increasing the 2007 budget by 6.9%.

Second, on Tuesday, November 13, I attended the first day of the two-day annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) held at the Richmond Convention Center in Richmond, Virginia. An article written by Robert Dilday of the pro-BGAV *Religious Herald* and posted on Baptist Press on December 4, 2007, reported that about 1,100 messengers were present. At the lunch break of the first day, however, the Clerk reported only 675 registered messengers. The keynote speaker was Lance Watson of predominantly African-American St. Paul’s Baptist Church in Richmond. Guest music leader was Ken Medema. The meeting theme was H.O.W. (“Hope is in the Way”). The BGAV adopted a budget just over \$14.3 million for 2008, an increase of less than 1%.

Reflections

These are the bare facts of both meetings. Now for some personal reflections.

The SBCV was marked by exuberant and loud praise music and singing led by a worship team from Liberty University. One friend remarked that he felt he had stumbled into a Church of God meeting. The meeting was simply organized. One gets the sense that the SBCV spends little on costs for its meetings though all is done with technical excellence. The messengers reflected diversity in age, gender, and ethnicity. The SBCV continues to invite nationally known SBC figures and is clear in its identity with and support for the SBC. Ties are also clear with Liberty University, including the aforementioned Praise Team and the preaching of controversialist theologian Ergun Caner. A key transition looms in the future for the SBCV with the impending retirement of founding Executive Director Doyle Chauncey.

The BGAV meeting marked the 5th year anniversary of the “Kingdom Advance” reorganization initiated by BGAV Executive Director John Upton in 2002. He and Treasurer Eddie Stratton assured messengers that the BGAV’s financial slide has been arrested and that growth is in the future. The budget remained on the forefront of messengers’ minds, however, as for the second straight year efforts by the Budget Committee to reduce funds going to educational institutions like Leland Seminary and Bluefield College were rebuffed. A friend suggested that the theme next year might be “S.O.S” or even “D.N.R.”! Messengers also passed a resolution supporting the New Baptist Covenant Meeting slated for Atlanta in January 2008. The resolution appeared aimed to defend John Upton from criticism of his early public support of the event without official BGAV approval. The New Baptist Covenant has been criticized as a political effort to win “evangelical” Christian voters to Democratic causes and candidates. Two of its key supporters are former Democratic Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Moderate Baptists have often criticized the SBC for being in the back pocket of the Republican Party, but they see little conflict in their support for Democratic causes.

Personal Notes

One of the 21 churches joining the SBCV on November 12 was my congregation, Jefferson Park Baptist Church. We sought a unique affiliation and have severed our ties completely with the BGAV. We have been warmly welcomed to the SBCV. Contrary to BGAV propaganda (as in the deceptive and ironically misnamed "Truthfully Speaking" booklet) we were not courted or even contacted by the SBCV until we initiated interest in joining the convention. For the last several years we had made the effort to hold up a banner of warning in the BGAV. In the end, we found our stand yielding diminishing results.

If truth be known, we are not a perfect fit with the SBCV either. In fact, there are still some common threads between the BGAV and the SBCV despite their break. Chief among these are tendencies toward pragmatism in church growth and evangelism. Church planting in both the SBCV and BGAV seems to tilt toward Willow Creek, Saddleback, and even Emerging Church models. The annual evangelistic youth camps in both conventions look little different as both feature Christian rock bands, Christian entertainers (skit performers, etc), and post-modern speakers. The trend toward celebrity SBC speakers and even rabid anti-Calvinists, like Ergun Caner this year, is also disconcerting.

"So," a Pastor friend of mine asked me, "Why then are you joining the SBCV?" Here are five of the reasons I offered:

1. Though we may not currently agree with many of our brethren in the SBCV on methods, we at least agree on the inerrancy of Scripture and on the basic doctrinal and ethical fundamentals as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message (2000).
2. Participation in the larger SBC only works well if one is associated with a state convention.
3. The SBCV gives half of its offerings directly to SBC causes, which means a significant amount of our money goes to causes we desire to support, like the International Mission Board and SBC seminaries, where incredible things are being done in building the kingdom.
4. Being part of the SBCV gives us the opportunity to have fellowship with local Baptist churches in our area which are also doctrinally conservative, as opposed to isolation.
5. The number of like-minded SBC churches in Virginia that will move in the direction of Biblical reformation in membership, government, and doctrine will only increase as the years go by. Ed Stetzer of LifeWay has recently reported that one third of recent SBC seminary graduates identify themselves as five-point Calvinists. This number will only grow over time, and the impact will be felt as these men enter the pulpits of our churches. ♦

JTR

Quick Quote

The Unitarian teachers by no means claim to absolve their followers from the unbending strictness of Christian morality. They prescribe love for God that dominates all life and a habitual spirit of devotion. However, people who seek a refuge in this form of faith seem to go there because they want a watered-down sort of faith; they want the joys of Christianity without the difficult doctrines. In particular, most of them seem to want to escape the Bible's command to be separate from the world, a unique and special people. They prefer to remain at one with the world's philosophies.... In short, we can find no watered-down alternative to Christianity that can be rationally supported. If we have abandoned Christianity, then we must logically abandon all its forms. We must abandon any hope of finding the comfort of faith without its demands.

--William Wilberforce (1759-1833) in *Real Christianity* contrasting Unitarianism with Biblical faith.

“Calvinism: A Cause for Rejoicing”

Notes from a Message by Jeff Noblit

Presented at the “Building Bridges” Conference, November 26-28, 2007

First, I am encouraged by the rise of Calvinism, because it will help us in the overcoming of inerrancy idolatry and the reclaiming of the sufficiency of Scripture in our churches. Some have said we won the battle for inerrancy but lost the battle for sufficiency. Holding to the inerrancy of Scripture without at least an equal commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture for all faith and practice is sheer idolatry.

We changed the convention’s mind, but we did not change its heart.

The mind has been changed, the seminaries, but the heart, the local churches, have not been changed.

It seems that not one in a thousand can tell the difference between pragmatic messages that use the Scriptures and Spirit-filled preachers who faithfully preach the Word. The true difference between the two is life and death. It is the difference between Rick Warren and John MacArthur.

Second, the rise of Calvinism will produce better church splits. Church splits are not all necessarily bad.

Most church splits today are not good splits; they are usually over power and worldly desire.

When essential doctrine is at stake, however, the pastor must stand. Peace at all costs is the banner of the coward.

Splitting over essential doctrine is not only inevitable, it is commanded and it is commendable.

It is healthy for humble, compassionate men to stand for truth even if it divides the church.

Third, the rise of Calvinism will help expose and remove the covert liberalism that has crept in among us. Our churches are more liberal than ever before.

One thing is for certain, any denomination that holds to the inerrancy of Scripture without equal passion for the sufficiency of Scripture will soon find itself right back in the cesspool of liberalism, but it will be worse. It will have the label of conservative, evangelical on the outside, but the substance will be the same old liberalism we fought so long against.... Here I include much of what I understand about the purpose-driven or seeker-friendly model, the emerging church, and the “psycho-church” (like Joel Osteen)... It is an old liberalism in new clothing.

How can it be that 20 years after the conservative resurgence our churches are more liberal than ever before?

Fourth, the rise of Calvinism will restore true evangelism.

Many have declared that the rise of Calvinism will kill evangelism and missions. Usually they are talking about “hyper-Calvinism.” I do not know one hyper-Calvinist Southern Baptist. I haven’t met one!

You can’t pin the deadness and lack of evangelism in roughly ten thousand SBC churches [that had no annual baptisms] on the fact that Calvinism killed evangelism. It was dead already!

We have drama evangelism and music evangelism, but whatever happened to the foolishness of preaching the gospel?

God did not call us to get results; he told us to make disciples.

Fifth, the rise of Calvinism is encouraging because it is so young.

I believe this is nothing less than a spiritual awakening, and it is a natural outgrowth of the conservative resurgence in the SBC.

Sixth, I am encouraged by the rise of Calvinism, because it grasps the new wine, which is actually the old wine of Biblical church ministry.

In the past few years people have called me to ask about the new wine of Biblical evangelism, church discipline, meaningful membership and truth-driven missions. Missions isn't about sending missionaries; it's about sending truth. Planting churches isn't about planting churches, it's about sending preachers. They ask about parent-driven children's ministry and youth ministry. And they ask about the doctrines of grace, and they tell of frustration in lack of fruit in those they are baptizing. This is not really new wine; it is the old wine of Benjamin Keach, John Bunyan, John Gill, Andrew Fuller, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, John Dagg, P. H. Mell, Basil Manley, Sr. and Jr, James Petigru Boyce, John A. Broadus, and B. H. Carroll. This isn't new wine. It's old stuff. Sadly most of our churches are like old wineskins and they cannot take the new wine.

Can a bridge be built to connect all these different groups and keep us as one? I think building bridges is a noble task. But we ought to have concerns. As R. C. Sproul points out, a bridge has two-way traffic. I am not brining in and embracing some of the things I see under the big tent. If that makes me not a Southern Baptist, then I am not a Southern Baptist. I think it makes me a good Southern Baptist. We must consider the soil on which the bridge rests and there are some bodies of water no men have ever considered building a bridge over. The divide is just too great. If we think this convention is going to go forward another 10, 20, 25 years, there will be some radical changes and possibly some significant splits. I hope that does not happen, but there is a great divide. The bridge must be of God. Unless the Lord builds the bridge, they who labor do so in vain.

Seventh, I am encouraged by the rise of Calvinism because of its glory of God focus. We must be possessed by the glory of God in the church.

In God's theater there is only one act, and it is the glory of God. The church is his theater. The church needs revival and reformation. This will call for suffering by his shepherds, but the glory of God is worth it.

Jeff Noblit is Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He also leads the Anchored in the Truth Ministry (anchoredintruth.org). Audio files of this message and others from the conference can be found at edstetzer.com/2007/11/calvinism_conference_presentat_1.html. ♦

In the blogosphere

Blogs from EFN Steering Committee members:

Baptist Reform (Travis Hilton):

www.baptistreform.blogspot.com

Stylos (Jeff Riddle): www.jpbestylos.blogspot.com

The Old Baptist (Rob Stovall):

www.oldbaptist.blogspot.com

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Newsletter**



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Book Review

Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006): 254 pp.

Perhaps you have heard the word *justification* defined this way: justification is God's treating me just-as-if I had never sinned. But is this true? Does justification merely equal forgiveness of sins—as amazing as that is—or is there something more? Do we need an external righteousness that is not our own?

These are questions of eternal significance. In *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation*, Brian Vickers argues that the question of whether Scripture teaches the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer is not a mere academic debate but a matter that concerns the heart of the gospel and salvation (p. 15). Vickers states his argument on page 18: "The contention of this book is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is a legitimate and necessary synthesis of Paul's teaching." He has produced a persuasive and rewarding book defending this Scriptural doctrine.

Vickers desires to avoid the twin extremes of seeing too much in a particular text by importing ideas into it (eisegesis) and seeing too little in the text by failing to see the big picture (ignoring the interpretation of Scripture by Scripture). As a corollary goal, he hopes to show that "Protestant theology, particularly the Reformed tradition, has not been dominated only by systematicians who cared little for exegesis" (p. 18, footnote 4).

Vickers states that the book does not thoroughly examine all of the concepts related to imputation. Topics such as righteousness and union with Christ are not given an exhaustive treatment but are dealt with in light of their implications for imputation. He also informs readers that the book overlooks much important historical material to focus on the matters of exegesis related to imputation. Finally, this book does not contain a section devoted to a study of the New Perspective on Paul, although Vickers gives extensive bibliographical listings and interacts with proponents of New Perspective views in various sections as these ideas relate to imputation.

To give context and frame to the discussion, chapter one sketches the history of the doctrine of imputation, beginning with the Reformation and continuing to the present. The chapters that follow are an examination of key texts relevant to imputation and contain rigorous exegesis, technical language, and copious footnotes. Vickers concludes with a synthesis of Paul's teaching and a final chapter on the importance of the doctrine of imputation. Each chapter closes with a helpful summary.

Vickers demonstrates that the doctrine of imputation was not fully developed by the Reformers but was refined by their followers in writings and church creeds. He argues that imputation, though often associated with covenant theology, is not restricted to a covenantal framework (p. 34, footnote 36). He shows that modern theologians can be found across the spectrum, including those who embrace traditional views and those who deny imputation but finds that the traditional view is a neglected doctrine in modern times (p. 44). Vickers notes that "the inductive and descriptive nature of biblical theology" can provide "a guard against unfounded deductions" from particular texts, but it can also pose a danger by preventing any kind of synthesis of various texts (p. 69). He argues for the legitimacy of systematic theology, particularly in regard to imputation.

Chapter two focuses on Paul's quotation of Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3, English Standard Version). Vickers shows that Paul's understanding of Abraham is at odds with Jewish tradition that sees Abraham's works as the ground of his justification. By studying the context of Romans, Vickers concludes that Abraham is ungodly, and he receives imputed righteousness through faith apart from works. Vickers sums up his conclusion on imputation in Romans 4:

Romans 4:1-8 is about the appropriation of righteousness, and that righteousness, as a status declared by God, is most clearly linked in this text with the non-imputation of sin, i.e., forgiveness. This status is brought about by the reckoning of faith as righteousness. Faith is not itself the righteousness, but as is made clear in the context, faith is the instrument that unites the believer to the object of faith. The object is thus the source of the righteousness that is reckoned to the believer (p. 111).

Chapter three discusses Romans 5:19 (“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous,” ESV), as well as its immediate context of 5:12-21 and other sections of Romans. Adam and Christ, as representatives of the human race, determine by their actions the status of those they represent. Vickers concludes that this passage presents the basis for the counting of the believer as righteous in Romans 4. He writes:

The righteous status, made possible by Christ’s obedience, is applied to the believer when he puts his faith in God. Christ’s obedience “counts” for the status that is secured at the cross, and appropriated by faith, through which comes the declaration of the actual status, “righteous” (p. 157).

Second Corinthians 5:21 (“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” ESV) is the focus of chapter four. Vickers argues that Paul draws heavily on the “Servant Songs” in Isaiah (such as chapter 53), which prophesy of Christ’s sufferings while placing them in a sacrificial context. This shapes the meaning of the phrase “made sin.” Furthermore, he says:

From first to last this is an act of God, who made Christ a sacrifice for sin by causing the sins of others to be counted to him. The twin statements, “a new creation” and “become the righteousness of God,” both centered in the phrase “in Christ” and dependent on his representative death, indicate that just as sin was reckoned to Christ, so too is Christ’s sacrificial death counted for righteousness to those “in him.” God counts them as righteous because they have Christ’s righteousness, they have Christ himself, and he has them (p. 190).

In chapter five, Vickers offers a synthesis of imputation taken from the texts examined in chapters two, three, and four. His position is strengthened by looking at the relation of other texts to imputation: 1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:9, and Romans 9:30-10:4. He finds that Paul teaches that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers, His obedience having counted for those united to Him by faith. God has acted “through Christ on behalf of sinners, who though undeserving are forgiven and declared righteous as a free gift from God on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary death” (p. 232).

Vickers concludes that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is a doctrine derived from a biblical-theological study of Paul’s writings and, therefore, is the teaching of the Scriptures.

Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness will challenge many readers, particularly those not acquainted with Hebrew and Greek words and grammar. The book is highly technical in some places, and the footnotes may become wearisome. However, Vickers has done his homework. He has produced an in-depth biblical-theological study that is well worth the effort to mine its gold. Educated readers, particularly pastors and seminarians, should obtain this book and study it.

Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness effectively bridges the unnecessary gap many try to create between biblical and systematic theology, revealing the need for both and the legitimacy of a synthesis of the various pieces of the puzzle, based on proper exegesis. Vickers admits that there is no single text that explicitly states that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer, but, with thorough exegesis, consideration of objections, and interaction with other scholars, he convincingly demonstrates that the doctrine of imputation is nonetheless a scriptural teaching that Christians cannot afford to discard.

In the end, Vickers accomplishes his goal to show the legitimacy of imputation as a synthesis of Paul’s teaching, demonstrating that good systematic theology is based on proper exegesis. The book has reinforced for me the need to study the Bible carefully and to interpret Scripture with Scripture, so I neither read too much into a text nor miss the forest for the trees. It has also spurred renewed gratitude to God for the gift of Christ’s righteousness imputed to us through faith that unites us to Him. What grace that God counts Christ’s obedience as ours! What good news we have to share! Truly, as Edward Mote penned, our “hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Doug Smith is a member of Cornerstone Chapel Reformed Baptist Church in Bristol, Tennessee. He does supply preaching and is a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. ♦

News and Analysis of Interest

• **“Building Bridges” Conference on SBC Calvinism Held at Ridgecrest**

The historic “Building Bridges” conference on Calvinism in the SBC was held at Ridgecrest Conference Center on November 26-28, 2007. The conference was sponsored by Founders Ministry, LifeWay, and Southeastern Baptist Seminary. There were over 550 conference attendees who listened to presentations from pastors, theologians, and scholars.

LifeWay’s Ed Stetzer began the conference by noting the rising number of Calvinist SBC seminary graduates. The conference featured alternating speakers representing Calvinistic and non-Calvinistic perspectives on various topics. Most of the non-Calvinistic speakers stressed that they did not feel that evangelical Calvinism was a threat to SBC, but all decried “hyper-Calvinism.” The most pointed expression of opposition to Calvinism came from Malcolm Yarnell of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

• **One third of recent SBC seminary graduates are five-point Calvinists**

In his presentation at the “Building Bridges” Conference on November 26, LifeWay researcher Ed Stetzer noted that nearly 30 percent of recent SBC seminary graduates now serving as pastors consider themselves to be five-point Calvinists.

Stetzer noted, “It would be difficult to say that Calvinism is not a growing influence in SBC life.” His research indicates that churches with Calvinistic pastors tended to be smaller in attendance, but that Calvinistic recent seminary graduates tend to conduct personal evangelism at a slightly higher rate than their non-Calvinistic peers.

Stetzer’s conclusion was that though churches with Calvinistic pastors are in the distinct minority in the SBC, their numbers will grow in the coming years. He also warned that not enough SBC churches, whether Calvinistic or non-Calvinistic, are very effective in evangelizing and discipling our culture.

• **Baptist Association in Oklahoma approves motion against Calvinism**

The Arbuckle Baptist Association in Oklahoma approved without question the following motion on October 16, 2007:

That the Executive Board of the Arbuckle Baptist Association recommend that the messengers to the Arbuckle Baptist Association Annual Meeting in October 2007, vote to request the Executive Director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, and the Executive Committee of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, and the Board of Directors of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, take a stand against presentation of reformed theology—often called “Calvinism”—as a legitimate topic that we need to debate, and instead of recommending that we debate reformed theology, take a public stand against reformed theology.”

A companion motion was also passed without question, stating,

That the Arbuckle Baptist Association send this motion to the President of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and to all members of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, as well.”

- **Baptist State papers decline rapidly**

An article in Baptist Press on December 6, 2007 reported that total circulation of state Baptist papers has dropped below one million (to 956,000) for the first time since 1953. In 1997 total circulation was 1.2 million and in 1987 1.7 million. David Moore, a writer for MediaLife, notes that, “Newspapers have struggled to attract young readers, with only 26 percent of respondents under 30 having read a paper the previous day. Young news consumers tend to get their news online and from cable news.”

At one time Baptist state papers were the “gate-keepers” of information for SBC churches and church members. This was especially true during the days of the doctrinal controversy in the SBC from 1979-1990 when moderate state editors, like Julian Pentecost at the *Religious Herald* in Virginia, slanted their management of the news to depict conservatives as narrow minded and petty and moderates as defenders of Baptist tradition and freedom. With the rise of the internet in particular, the days of managed news are over.

- **CBF Church in Texas in Flap over Homosexuals in Picture Directory**

Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas is currently undergoing a flap over the inclusion of homosexual members with their partners as family units in its church directory. The flap was first reported in *Baptist Press* on November 6, 2007 (“Gay couples in church directory kindles flap”) and also in the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* on November 16, 2007 (“Gay couples trigger debate at church”).

The *Star-Telegram* reported that Betty Price, a 44-year member of the church and layman working on the church directory was “blindsided” when a gay couple asked to be pictured together. When she refused their request, the church staff intervened, and Price either resigned (according to the church staff) or was removed (according to Price) from the directory committee.

Broadway Pastor Brett Younger issued a statement after a church meeting in mid-October in which he noted that Broadway has long had an “amazing policy on including gay people.” He noted, “It’s not a policy that a committee came up with, or the staff or the deacons.” Rather, “It’s an unwritten policy that came out of the shared life of this congregation, a policy I believe was inspired by the Spirit. This has allowed us to be a congregation where the conversation can take place about being gay and being Christians.”

The November 6, 2007 Baptist Press article noted that though several members were reticent to speak on the record they confirmed that “several people serving on and leading committees within the church are living openly homosexual lifestyles.”

According to the *Star-Telegram*, after vigorous discussion of the issue by the deacons, the church was set to vote on December 2 on a proposal “to print a directory with gay couples photographed individually but listed together in the telephone directory.”

On December 3, 2007 the *Star-Telegram* offered a follow-up article (“Church delays decision on gays’ photos”), reporting that the church sent the proposal back to the deacons to study until February 24, 2008. Baptist Press also offered a follow up article on December 3 (“Flap over gays in church directory festers”) noting the Broadway members “voted Dec. 2 to delay a decision on whether to include homosexual members as couples in a church pictorial directory.”

Pastor Brett Younger addressed the issue in his Sunday morning sermon on December 2. He is quoted in Baptist Press as having said in that message that those who disagree on this issue “are seeking the best way they know to be faithful to Scripture and follow Jesus. They know the Bible has been used to defend polygamy, slavery, and the oppression of women. We look at the compassion of Jesus and the way that He included everybody and it

seems clear that we should do the same. How can anyone who knows Jesus believe God condemns people for the way they were born? It's hard for these gracious Christians to understand how anyone could disagree."

Broadway was a leading church in opposing the SBC resurgence from 1979-1990. It was a founding supporter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Among its former Pastors is Cecil Sherman, the first national coordinator of CBF, and a Professor at Baptist Seminary of Richmond. Another former Pastor is Stephen Shoemaker, now Pastor of Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte North Carolina, a church that was removed from membership in the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in November for its open approval of homosexual practice. Questions are now being raised as to whether or not Broadway Baptist Church will be expelled from membership in the moderate-leaning Baptist General Convention of Texas.

• **North Carolina Baptists exclude Myers Park Baptist Church**

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSCNC) made several major decisions in its 2007 annual meeting November 12-14 in Greensboro, NC, including removing the Women's Missionary Union from its budget and accepting proposals to sever ties with the NC Baptist Retirement Homes and to weaken ties with its five historic Baptist colleges. NC Baptists also took a clear stand against endorsement of homosexual practice by overwhelmingly voting to disfellowship Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte (see Norman Jameson, "Convention disfellowships Myers Park," *Biblical Recorder*, November 24, 2007, p. 3).

A dispute had been growing with the liberal Charlotte church, a "Welcoming and Affirming" American Baptist congregation that had long ago left the SBC and had only minimal ties with the state convention, after the BSCNC revised their bylaws to explicitly state that churches supporting homosexual practice were "not in friendly cooperation." Myers Park chose to make the matter a political point by challenging their ouster.

Messengers from Myers Park were allowed to speak to the BSCNC meeting. Pastor Stephen Shoemaker read the following statement to messengers:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I appeal to you by the mercies of God to refrain from removing churches like ours from your fellowship. Christian fellowship is too divided as it is and is a scandal to Christ who prayed that we might be one.

I appeal to you as Baptists who treasure soul freedom, soul competency and the autonomy of the local church. These great Baptist principles argue on behalf of including those of minority witness and minority interpretation of scripture in its fellowship.

Our church studied the Bible, sought the Spirit of God and talked earnestly with each other for over 20 years to get to the place where we said we were "open to all and closed to none," and fully welcomed gay and lesbian persons who wished to follow Jesus with us. We do not claim to have the whole mind of God, and we respect those whose interpretations of scripture differ. It is the spiritual freedom we offer one another.

I appeal to you as Biblical people led by the Living Spirit of God whose life is centered in Christ.

Jesus welcomed those considered outcasts and sinners by His culture and religion into the Kingdom of God drawing near. We seek — we hope — to live in His Spirit.

And we, like Peter in the Book of Acts, have overcome our original resistance to the inclusion of gay and lesbian persons as Peter overcame his resistance to accepting Gentiles into the people of God. He saw the Holy Spirit fall upon the Gentiles, he saw God working in their lives and said:

“If then God gave them the same gift that He gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”

We could base the unity of our fellowship on any number of issues of Biblical interpretation: speaking in tongues, war, abortion, death penalty, divorce, homosexuality, and on and on. Let us base our unity on Jesus Christ as Lord and his call to discipleship and on the competence and freedom of the individual to open scripture and interpret it for his or her life guided by the Spirit of God.

A deacon from Myers Park, Nancy Walker, also addressed messengers, beginning,

I THANK GOD that I was born and raised at Myers Park Baptist Church. I was able to grow in my faith and my relationship with Christ in a church that was kind, loving and inclusive. I thank God that I am able to continue my spiritual journey at Myers Park Baptist, the church whose membership elected me to serve them as a Deacon without regard to my sexual orientation.

She closed her statement by saying,

I am a lesbian. I am a Baptist. I am a devoted follower of Christ. And no matter what your vote today, I will continue to be God's witness in the world for love, compassion and reconciliation among all people... and I will continue to be loved by God. I know this because it's in the scripture... and it's in my heart.

Myers Park has remained undaunted in the face of its dismissal and rebuke by NC Baptists. The church sees itself as having taken a public and prophetic stand in the name of “*soul freedom, soul competency, and the autonomy of the local church.*”

Ed Williams, editorial page editor of the *Charlotte Observer* and a member of Myers Park, chided the BSCNC in a November 18, 2007 editorial in which he wrote:

Our policy on homosexuals is simple. We welcome them to full fellowship of the church -- membership, eligibility for leadership positions, everything. It's easy to get into an argument about what the Bible says about homosexuals, if you want to. I don't. If they come to our church to worship and to serve, our door is open to them.

The N.C. Baptist State Convention, however, sees homosexuality not only as a sin but as a special sort of sin.

He continued:

Maybe the convention believes greedy people and divorced people need the support of a loving church community. I do. We welcome them, too.

I have no idea how many homosexuals are in our 1,900-member congregation -- maybe a few dozen. Of the members I know are homosexuals, most are couples in loving, committed relationships. Some have children. I certainly affirm, support and welcome them.

The fact is, we all have sinned -- homosexuals and heterosexuals, members of Myers Park Baptist Church and members of the N.C. Baptist State Convention. And we're all going to sin again.

The conflict, as I see it, boils down to this: Should a church open its doors to sinners and, if they earn the congregation's respect, even put them in positions of responsibility? At Myers Park Baptist, our answer is yes. If sinners are barred, who's left?

Williams' comments were ably answered by Alan Blume, Pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Boone, NC and President of the Board of Directors of the BSCNC in a letter to the editor in the *Observer* on November 23, 2007:

We are welcoming of sinners of every stripe, but we do not believe there is an ounce of support for the idea that one remains unchanged when he or she comes to faith in Christ. The Bible is clear that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is loving. That is the very reason God sent Jesus, His only Son, to die on the cross for us. Simply stated, God loves us enough to bring change to our life. If we do not need change, then Christ's death was cruel and unnecessary. God can change the homosexual just as He can change the alcoholic or the pedophile. God loves us too much to leave us on our old condition.

Myers Park Baptist Church has various letters, statements, and audio files of church meetings on this topic at mpbconline.org. ♦

Quick Quotes

- *“The Controversy or Conservative Resurgence of the late 20th Century is a mere precursor to the battles for theological integrity which face us, some of which will make that episode look like child’s play. Will you seek to propagate and preserve the Baptist heart?”*

--Malcolm Yarnell, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in a sermon titled “The Heart of a Baptist” preached on Founder’s Day at the seminary on March 9, 2006. Yarnell has been an outspoken critic of the resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC. The entire text of his message may be found at BaptistTheology.org.

- *I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. Suffer me to use the opportunity which the end of Lot’s wife affords. I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us that God is too merciful to punish souls forever, that there is a love of God lower even than hell, and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved. We are invited to leave the old paths of apostolic Christianity. We are told that the views of our fathers about hell, and the devil, and punishment, are obsolete and old-fashioned. We are to embrace what is called a “kinder theology” and treat hell as a pagan fable or a bugbear to frighten children and fools. Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink it or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.*

--Anglican evangelical Bishop J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) on the necessity of preaching the reality of hell. From the essay “A Woman to be Remembered” in his book *Holiness*.

Paradosis

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

Perhaps no theologian was more influential among early Baptists in Virginia than English Baptist Pastor Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). In his biography of Virginia Baptist pioneer Jeremiah Bell Jeter, for example, Hatcher said, “Above all theological writings he valued those of Andrew Fuller.” Fuller was deeply influenced by the writings of Jonathan Edwards and his account of the First Great Awakening in New England. Fuller was the first secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society. He and others in that Society were “holding the rope” at home when his friend William Carey set out for India as the father of the modern missions movement.

The passages below are from the essay titled “Creeds and Subscriptions” in which Fuller challenges the idea that Baptist Christians are non-creedal. For Fuller, “The man who has no creed has no belief.” The essay is found in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, Volume III (Sprinkle Publications, 1988): pp. 449-51.

CREEDS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

It has been very common, among a certain class of writers, to exclaim against creeds and systems in religion as inconsistent with Christian liberty and the rights of conscience; but surely they must be understood as objecting to those creeds only which they dislike, and not to creeds in general; for no doubt, unless they be worse than the worst of beings, they have a creed of their own. The man who has no creed has no belief; which is the same thing as being an unbeliever; and he whose belief is not formed into a system has only a few loose, unconnected thoughts, without entering into the harmony and glory of the gospel. Every well-informed and consistent believer, therefore, must have a creed—a system which he supposes to contain the leading principles of Divine revelation.

It may be pleaded that the objection does not lie so much against our having creeds or systems as against our imposing them on others as the condition of Christian fellowship. If, indeed, a subscription to articles of faith were required without examination, or enforced by civil penalties, it would be an unwarrantable imposition on the rights of conscience; but if an explicit agreement in what may be deemed fundamental principles be judged essential to fellowship, this is only requiring that a man appear to be a Christian before he can have a right to be treated as such. Suppose it were required of a Jew or an infidel, before he is admitted to the Lord’s supper, (which either might be disposed to solicit for some worldly purpose), that he must previously become a believer; should we thereby impose Christianity upon him? He might claim the right of private judgment, and deem such a requisition incompatible with its admission; but it is evident that he could not be entitled to Christian regard, and that, while he exclaimed against the imposition of creeds and systems, he himself would be guilty of an imposition of the grossest kind, utterly inconsistent with the rights of voluntary and social compact, as well as of Christian liberty....

If a Christian society have no right to judge what is *truth*, and to render an agreement with them in certain points a term of communion, then neither have they a right to judge what is *righteousness*, nor to render an agreement in matters of practical right and wrong a term of communion.

There is a great diversity of sentiment in the world concerning morality, as well as doctrine; and if it be an unscriptural imposition to agree to any articles whatever, it must be to exclude any one for immorality, or even to admonish him on that account; for it might be alleged that he only thinks for himself, and acts accordingly. Nor would it stop here: almost every species of immorality has been defended and may be disguised, and thus, under the pretence of a right of private judgment, the church of God would become like the mother of harlots – “*The habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*”

It is a trite and frivolous objection which some have made against subscriptions and articles of faith – that it is setting bounds to the freedom of inquire, and requiring a conformity of sentiment that is incompatible with the various opportunities and capacities of different persons. The same objection might be urged against the covenanting of the Israelites (Neh. x. 29) and all laws in society. If a religious community agree to specify some leading principles which they consider as derived from the word of God, and judge the belief of them to be necessary in order to any person’s becoming or continuing a member with them, it does not follow that those principles should be equally understood, or that all their brethren must have the same degree of knowledge, nor yet that they should understand and believe nothing else. The powers and capacities of different persons are various; one may comprehend more of the same truth than another, and have his views more enlarged by an exceedingly great variety of kindred ideas; and yet the substance of their belief may still be the same. The object of articles is to keep a distance, not those who are weak in the faith, but such as are its avowed enemies. Supposing a church covenant to be so general as not to specify one principle or duty, but barely an engagement to adhere to the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice, the objection would still apply; and it might be said, One man is capable of understanding much more of the Scriptures than another, and persons of more enlarged minds may discover a great deal of truth relating to science which the Scriptures do not pretend to teach; why, therefore, do we frame articles to limit the freedom of inquiry, or which require a conformity of sentiment incompatible with the opportunities and capacities of persons so differently circumstanced: The objection, therefore, if admitted, would prove too much. The powers of the mind will probably vary in the future world; one will be capable of comprehending much more of truth than another; yet the redeemed will all be of one mind, and of one heart. ◆

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Evangelical Forum



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