

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: FOUNDATIONS FOR BAPTIST DOCTRINES & DISTINCTIVES

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Baptists are evangelicals, but not all evangelicals are Baptists. Baptists have different views from other evangelical groups on some doctrinal issues, and sometimes we as Baptists don't even agree among ourselves. As the old saying goes, listen to four Baptists and you'll find at least five or six different opinions!

Attention to doctrine and doctrinal distinctives have been a focal part of the mission of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry since its inception. This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* deals with three clusters of foundational doctrinal issues of interest to Baptists. Some of these issues define Baptists in differentiation from other evangelical groups, while on some other issues there is a range of disagreement among Baptists.

The first section of this edition of the Journal focuses on the church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both of these ordinances are confessional, since they are designed for believers to identify publicly with Jesus Christ. Both ordinances remind the participant of core truths of the Christian life -- the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and the new life that comes through Him. The proper meaning and mode of these ordinances are described in Article VII of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Participation in the ordinances is inextricably tied to church membership. The *BF&M 2000* describes baptism as "prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper. Therefore, participation in these ordinances presupposes confession and covenant."

Dr. Rex Butler, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes the first article on "*Sacramentum*: Baptismal Practice and the Theology of Tertullian & Cyprian." Obviously, the practice and teaching of the early church and patristic fathers on baptism is important to the practice and teaching of baptism today. Moving forward a few centuries, Dr. Lloyd Harsch contributes the article entitled, "Were the First Baptists Sacramentalists?" Harsch, who also serves as Associate Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, compares the beliefs of the early Baptists with those of the Catholic and Reformed churches of that time. One of our doctoral fellows in the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, Christopher Black, contributes "Infant Baptism and the Half-Way Covenant." Black's article utilizes the compromise within New England Puritanism in the Half-Way Covenant to discuss the role of baptism in church membership. The last article in this section is written by another NOBTS doctoral student, Jason Sampler. It concerns "Baptists and the Lord's Supper: How Confessions Can Inform Our Theology." Sampler discusses the options of "closed," "close," and "open" views of participation in the Lord's Supper, about which there is significant disagreement within Baptist life.

The second section of this issue concerns "Doctrines and Distinctives," which includes two articles addressing Soteriology and Pneumatology, an article on Christology, and an article on Religious Freedom. The articles on the work of the Spirit in salvation are

submitted by two young theologians, Gary L. Schultz, Jr. of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and W. Madison Grace II of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Although differing somewhat in perspective, these two articles reflect two well-established Baptist viewpoints on the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Dr. R. Larry Overstreet, a fellow of the Baptist Center and Professor Emeritus in Pastoral Theology at the Northwest Baptist Seminary, contributes an article on a Christological theme: “The Superiority of Christ: The Identity of Melchizedek in Hebrews.” Dr. Overstreet surveys the exegetical options regarding the identity of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, and argues that the most likely reference is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Dr. Malcolm Yarnell contributes an article on “The Development of Religious Liberty: A Survey of Its Progress and Challenges in Christian History.” Yarnell, who serves as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Theological Research, and Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is one of the most outstanding theologians in the Southern Baptist Convention. Yarnell’s recent book on theological method is given an extensive review by Matthew Ward later in this issue. Yarnell’s article on religious liberty reminds us that this doctrine has always been a distinctive hallmark of Baptist beliefs, and it is as important to defend it in our own day as it was for our predecessors in earlier generations.

There are three articles in the section addressing “Theologians and Theological Method.” Dr. Matt Pinson reexamines the thought of one of the first English Baptists – Thomas Helwys. In “The First Baptist Treatise on Predestination: Thomas Helwys’s *Short and Plaine Prooffe*,” Pinson, who serves as President of Free Will Baptist Bible College, affords us a closer look at one of the first significant Baptist theologians. Craig Kyle Hemphill contributes “The Tension of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Prison Theology Regarding Social Reflections concerning Race and Poverty.” The relation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy is important for any theology, and Hemphill’s article challenges the reader to ponder the social implications of one’s theology. Finally, Matthew Ward contributes “Will We Be Free Churches or Not? A Wake-Up Call to the Southern Baptist Convention.” Ward’s article ponders the implications of Malcolm Yarnell’s recent book *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* for the theological method of churches in the free church tradition. There are also several excellent book reviews in this issue of the *Journal*.

The *Journal* is particularly pleased to publish several articles in this issue by outstanding Southern Baptist young scholars whose studies have focused on Theology. Christopher Black and Jason Sampler are Theology majors who have completed their course work in the Ph.D. program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Black provides invaluable assistance to the Baptist Center, including work editing the *Journal*. He also serves as president of the Student Theological Fellowship on the NOBTS campus. He is currently researching and writing a dissertation in the field of theological anthropology. We are very pleased to include his contribution in this issue. Jason Sampler is also a Ph.D. student at NOBTS majoring in Theology. He is working in Lawrence, Kansas while completing his dissertation on Baptist views on the Lord’s Supper. Gary Schultz graduated in December 2008 from Southern Seminary, having written his dissertation on *A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement*. He has been serving as student associate in the Ministry Resources office at Southern Seminary. W. Madison Grace is a Theology major in the Ph.D. program at Southwestern Seminary. He serves as Assistant to the Director and Webmaster for the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Seminary, the analog at

SWBTS to the Baptist Center at NOBTS. Grace also serves as an editorial assistant for the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Matthew Ward is also a student at Southwestern Seminary, and was recently selected by the Baptist Theology editorial board to present a paper at the Baptist Theology Research Award Student Symposium. Craig Kyle Hemphill is currently a student at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He holds the Juris Doctorate degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, where he served as editor in chief of the *Thurgood Marshall Law Review* for several years. He has served as a federal law clerk, as in-house counsel for the City of Houston, and as an associate at legal firms. He is not only licensed as a lawyer, but also as a minister by both the National Baptist and Southern Baptist conventions, and has served as a youth minister in two congregations. The *Journal* is pleased to publish these excellent articles from our next generation of leaders from four different theological institutions, which reflect a variety of perspectives. Their contributions give us greater confidence for the future of Baptist Theology!

December of 1776 was a time of crisis—one of the darkest hours in the American Revolution. The Revolution appeared to be all but lost. The British had won a series of battles on land and sea, and were firmly in control of New York City, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. The Continental Congress had fled Philadelphia, and only 3,000 troops remained from the earlier Continental Army of over 20,000 troops. Even George Washington wrote a cousin that “the game is pretty near up.” In the midst of this crisis, Thomas Paine penned these famous words in *The Crisis* on December 23, 1776: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” Paine’s words were read to the Washington’s army before they crossed the Delaware to win the key victory at Trenton that sustained the Revolution.

As I pen these words, not only is America (and indeed the entire world) facing perhaps the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, but Southern Baptists are also facing crises as well. We face the crises of the soul—deciding our identity (who we are) and our mission (what we do). Our crisis of identity is our struggle to determine what it means to be Southern Baptist in faith and doctrine. Our crisis of mission is our inability to reach our nation and world for Christ effectively. We have been plateaued in baptisms for over half a century, and statistics indicate that the Convention is tipping into decline. What must be done to address these crises in Southern Baptist life? Obviously, we must find ways to reach out in missions and evangelism to fulfill the Great Commission. We applaud and affirm those efforts from the depths of our being. But some will attempt to accomplish outreach at the cost of Baptist identity and doctrine. That is too high a price. These crises of mission and identity are indeed tests of the soul, tests that the summer Christian and the sunshine Baptist will flunk. But true Baptists will rise to the occasion, and by the grace of God we will prevail for His glory. This issue of the *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* is dedicated to that end – of clarifying foundational doctrinal issues so that we may achieve effective evangelistic outreach without doctrinal compromise. May it be so!

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