

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: CALVINIST, ARMINIAN, AND BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOTERIOLOGY



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To oversimplify a bit, Southern Baptists have two theological tributaries flowing into our mainstream – the Arminian-leaning General Baptists and the Calvinist-leaning Particular Baptists. Unto themselves, these tributaries were essentially free-standing streams, independent of each other. The General Baptists were first chronologically, with leaders such as John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Thomas Grantham. The name *General* Baptist came from their belief in a *general* atonement – that is, that Christ died for all the people who would respond in faith to Him. These Baptists may not have had access to most or all of Arminius’ works, but they were in agreement with many points of his theology. This theological stream was expressed in doctrinal confessions such as Smyth’s *Short Confession* of 1610, Helwys’ *Declaration of Faith* in 1611, the *Faith and Practices of 30 Congregations* of 1651, and the *Standard Confession* of 1660. The Free Will Baptists and General Baptists are the purest contemporary denominational expressions of this stream of thought.

In contrast, the name of the *Particular* Baptists was derived from the fact that they believed in a *particular* (or *limited*) atonement – that is, Christ died only for particular people, i.e., the elect. Their best known doctrinal confessions were the *1644 London Baptist Confession* (expanded in 1646), the *Second London Confession* of 1689, and the *Philadelphia Confession* (of the Philadelphia Association) in 1742. The *Second London Confession* follows the language of the Reformed *Westminster Confession* verbatim (except at points that even Calvinistic Baptists differ from Presbyterians), and the *Philadelphia Confession* likewise copies the *Second London Confession* almost entirely word for word.

However, when these rather pure General Baptist and Particular Baptist streams flowed together into what would become the Southern Baptist mainstream, the water became a bit muddied. After the Great Awakenings, these older streams were mixed with other tributaries, particularly the revivalistic Separate Baptists (sometimes called the “Sandy Creek tradition”). The result was a conglomeration that was not identical to any of these tributaries. After the Second Great Awakening but long before the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, key

Baptist leader John Leland in 1791 described the theology represented in the best of Baptist pulpits in this way in *A Letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia*: “I conclude that the eternal purposes of God and the freedom of the human will are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men is the doctrine of sovereign grace mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism.”¹

This mixture of Calvinism and Arminianism was expressed doctrinally in the *New Hampshire Confession of 1833*, which moved away from the more Calvinistic language of the *Philadelphia Confession*. The *New Hampshire Confession* became pivotal for Southern Baptist theology in that (a) it was included in even more formative and popular works such as the *Baptist Church Manual* published by J. Newton Brown and the American Baptist Publication Society in 1853, and the best-selling *What Baptists Believe* by O. C. S. Wallace in 1913; (b) it became the doctrinal confession of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at its founding and before the development of the first *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925; and (c) its language and format set the pattern for all three versions of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, and 2000), the official doctrinal confession of the Southern Baptist Convention. The more Calvinistic *Abstract of Principles* was adopted by the founding faculty of Southern Seminary (and later adopted by Southeastern Seminary), but its impact was much less on overall Baptist theology in that (a) the *Abstract* has never been approved as a denominational confession by any national meeting of Southern Baptists³; (b) the *Abstract* is fully satisfying to neither Calvinists nor non-Calvinists, since it embraces no more than four points of traditional Calvinist soteriology³; and (c) it was

¹John Leland, “A Letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia, 1791,” in *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland*, ed. Louise F. Green (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 172

²All three SBC seminaries that were founded before the first version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925 (SBTS, SWBTS, and NOBTS) developed or utilized a confession to guide their faculties -- SBTS had the *Abstract of Principles*, and NOBTS had the *Articles of Religious Belief* (each of these developed by the institution's founding faculty), while SWBTS utilized the previously developed *New Hampshire Confession*. After the *Baptist Faith and Message* was approved by the SBC in 1925, SBTS and NOBTS have continued to utilize these confessions that were unique to their institutional history as a secondary confession, and the most recent SBC-adopted version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* as their primary confession. Since the *New Hampshire Confession* was so close in format and wording to the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message*, SWBTS simply used that denominationally approved confession as its own confession. The *Baptist Faith and Message* (the 2000 version for most, the 1963 version for a few) is the primary confession for all six SBC seminaries; for most state conventions, associations, and related entities; and for many SBC-related colleges and universities.

³In the official sesquicentennial history of Southern Seminary, Greg Wills describes the *Abstract* as a four-point Calvinist document, omitting the affirmation of belief in limited or particular atonement. See Greg Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1859-2009)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

evidently a minority doctrinal confession among Southern Baptists both then and now.⁴ The *Baptist Faith and Message* is the standard confession of the Southern Baptist Convention and of all its seminaries, a consensus document which merges these streams together.

This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* will trace how the Arminian and Calvinistic doctrines of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) helped shape Baptist beliefs today. The first section addresses the (Arminian) General Baptist theology of Thomas Grantham. The paper entitled “Thomas Grantham’s Theology of Atonement and Justification,” was presented by Dr. Matt Pinson, President of Free Will Baptist Bible College, at a Spring 2011 special event sponsored by the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry. Pinson contrasts the General Baptist Grantham’s affirmation of the substitutionary atonement with the view of John Goodwin, who might be described as a Wesleyan Arminian (since Wesley often cited him) and affirmed the governmental view of the atonement. Grantham and Goodwin represent two poles within Arminian theology – Grantham is a Classical or Reformed Arminian, while Goodwin is a Wesleyan Arminian.

The first section also includes the responses of three discussion panel members who interacted with Pinson’s paper at the conference. Clint Bass is an Associate Professor of Church History at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. Bass earned the Th.M. degree from Duke University, and his D.Phil. from Oxford University. He is an expert in the thought of Thomas Grantham, having recently published his doctoral dissertation, *Thomas Grantham and General Baptist Theology*. Jim Leonard is a Visiting Scholar at the H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and is a Ph.D. Candidate at St. Edmund’s College of the University of Cambridge. He also serves as Vice President of the Society of Evangelical Arminians. Rhyne Putman has earned the M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he is currently completing his Ph.D. dissertation. He serves as an Instructor of Theology at NOBTS. After these responses, Dr. Pinson provides a brief rejoinder to each of these interlocutors.

The second section focuses on Calvinist (or Reformed) and Baptist views of soteriology. The first article in this section is a survey of the doctrine of regeneration in evangelical theology from the Reformation until 1800, authored by Kenneth Stewart. Dr. Stewart is Professor of Historical Studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and is author of the recent well-received book *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*. Heather Kendall applies the Bible’s story line to the doctrine of soteriology, especially Reformed doctrines of soteriology. Ms.

⁴O. C. S. Wallace, whose *What Baptists Believe* sold nearly 200,000 copies before the creation of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925, an enormous number at that point in Baptist life, was aware of the *Abstract* but chose to use the *New Hampshire Confession* in his article by article doctrinal study because “it is the formula of Christian truth most commonly used as a standard in Baptist churches throughout the country, to express what they believe according to the Scriptures.” See O. C. S. Wallace, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1913), 4). Wallace included the *Abstract* in an appendix at the end of the book “for helpful comparison and study.” Wallace, 4, 204-208. So, long before the *Baptist Faith and Message* was written, the *Abstract* was not the preferred doctrinal confession of the majority of Baptists, and evidence from LifeWay Research suggests that the same is true today.

Kendall earned an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree from York University, and is a member of New Life Fellowship Baptist Church in Innisfil, Ontario. Glen Shellrude, Professor of New Testament at Alliance Theological Seminary, analyzes New Testament texts that are problematic for Calvinistic theology. In the concluding article, Eric Hankins, Pastor of First Baptist Church in Oxford, Mississippi, proposes a Baptist soteriology that is something of a *via media* between Calvinist and Arminian doctrines, based on the belief that the biblical notion of election is more nearly corporate election than the election of individual believers. We express our appreciation for each of these who have contributed articles to this issue of the *Journal*.

We would point your attention to three additional items. First of all, we hope you'll read the poem memorializing Dr. Alan Day, a fellow of the Baptist Center and for 25 years Pastor of First Baptist Church in Edmund, Oklahoma, who suffered an untimely death in an accident. You can get a touch of Dr. Day's heart in his [2001 Founder's Day Address](#) at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, posted on the Baptist Center website. A poem remembering Dr. Day, in our "Reflections" section, is contributed by Clay Corvin. Second, we commend to you some excellent book reviews by our reviewers. Thirdly, as always, we appreciate Joe McKeever's cartoons.

You'll note that this issue 8.1 of the *Journal* is labeled "Spring 2011." We apologize again for being behind our normal publishing schedule, but we are making a concerted effort to catch up within a few months. The Fall 2010 issue (7.2) came out just a few weeks ago, and we anticipate that the Fall 2011 issue (8.2) will be published in about a month. This Fall 2011 issue will be a *festschrift* in honor of Dr. Dan Holcomb, Senior Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Holcomb announced his retirement this year, and our next issue will feature a series of articles about three areas of his great expertise – church history, culture, and the church. We believe you will enjoy this issue. We then hope to release the Spring 2012 issue at the normally scheduled time. The focus of the Spring issue will be how Christians interact with the government in the public square through activities such as chaplaincy and faith-based benevolent ministries.

Thank you for your readership of the *Journal*. Let us remind you that the Baptist Center web site (<http://www.baptistcenter.com/>) has many other resources that might be useful to you, including historic Baptist confessions, rare early writings of Baptists and other post-Reformation Christians, back issues of the *Journal*, and white papers on subjects of interest -- all indexed for your convenience. If you are interested in interaction on subjects of interest to Baptists, we would also recommend that you check out the daily articles and comments in the *SBC Today* blog (<http://sbctoday.com>). We hope that you find these resources to be helpful for your ministry.

Thank you again for your support of the Baptist Center and for the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*!

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