

By His Grace And for His Glory

A Historical, Theological and Practical Study
Of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life

Revised and Expanded
20th Anniversary Edition

Thomas J. Nettles



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Preface

Initially this book arose, published in 1986, as a response to church reactions to the January Bible Study of 1980. Ephesians was the text. Paul's doctrines of election, depravity and regeneration took many by surprise and led to many perplexed and pressing questions. What started as a small pamphlet on election grew as other valid questions continued to emerge: "Why evangelize? Why strive for holiness? How can anyone have assurance?" One of the most persistent questions was, "Is this Baptist?" Though "Is it biblical?" should be sufficient, for the millions who have meshed their lives in good conscience with Baptists congregations across the world, the question is not irrelevant. One purpose of this book at that time was to shed light on the historical denominational question.

In the years since then, the issues engaged have become more visible, more widely embraced by church members, pastors, denominational servants, more controversial and ardently opposed by some, and the subject of many discussion groups in churches and a variety of denominational settings. The attention focused on the doctrines of grace is good; it is healthy to give intense thought to issues of God's holiness, His sovereignty, and His efficacious and infinitely wise design in the justification of sinners under the curse of His Law. Though I am accustomed to it, I am still mystified that the same truths that engender a frame of love, joy, humility, gratitude and transformation of life in some, among others that profess a belief in the gospel they infuse fear, anger, resentment and fervent opposition. Some dissenters even propose strategies for exclusion of those who cordially confess these doctrines. This is sad, but perhaps normal. The most persevering advocates of the doctrines of grace once stood strongly in opposition to them.

Isaiah had words of warning that could well apply to historians, doctrinal polemicists and political strategists. “For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right (Isaiah 29:20, 21 ESV).” In reviewing the massive amount of literature presently being produced on the subject of this book, I believe I have seen many take offense at a word in order to create prejudice, many a snare laid to entrap reprovers, and many empty arguments designed to repress those who are right. In fact (not surprisingly to any who have sought to wade in these waters), I detect the same tendency in my own attempts to argue a case in this discussion. When I have detected it, I have sought to correct it, as well as repent of it; but I am sure that in some places the kind of self-serving sinfulness described by Isaiah has wound itself so tightly into a personal perception that I have been unable to extricate my arguments from it. I will gladly consider seriously alternative interpretations of the historical narrative, theological arguments, and biblical support concerning any passage in this book.

With that acknowledgment, I hold responsible for errors of any kind no person that has had the graciousness to encourage and counsel in completing this second edition. I could not have completed it in a timely fashion apart from quick and competent help.

When I suggested the idea of a second edition to Founders Press, Dr. Tom Ascol, the editor, responded immediately with an enthusiastic affirmative. He has provided helpful suggestions throughout the process. Ken Puls, who does more than I think it is possible for one person to do, worked on the layout and all else related to the technical aspects of producing the book. Barb Reisinger and other administrative helpers at Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, have given immediate response to numbers of requests.

Robert Nettles painted the cover. He executed my suggestion about its content with greater loveliness of composition than I could have anticipated. He also did all the sketches included.

My lovely and devoted wife, Margaret, as on so many occasions, has sacrificed personal time with me and encouraged me to persevere at the labor of writing. She, more than any other person, knows the time and emotional investment involved in going over and over sentences and paragraphs so that they might come close to saying what one is trying to say. She delights my heart.

Media Services at Southern Seminary gave professional help as well as real personal interest to the completion of this project. Special thanks go to

Michael Pate, a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and member of my shepherd group in the school of theology, for his hours given to scanning the text of the first edition of this book. In addition, Andy Rawls, Director of Media Services, put Michael on the project as part of the regular operations of that department. Andy also photographed the oil portrait that is the book cover and put that, plus the sketches, on disc to be sent to the publisher. Donald Corbin and Christopher Smith oversaw the process of scanning the sketches. Others in that department did bits and pieces of busy work, and for their help I am truly grateful. What a devoted team of skilled workers with a true servant spirit!

Jason Fowler supervises the archival holdings of the Boyce Library at Southern Seminary. He and his competent staff responded quickly and successfully to each request I made of them in the final stages of writing. Thank you, friends. In the first edition I acknowledged indebtedness to libraries and staff at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, the British Museum Library, and Dr. Williams' Dissenters Library at the University of London. That is a debt that obviously remains. Camille Couch invested superior workmanship, endless hours of labor, and a sense of personal stewardship in typing the entire manuscript of the first edition published by Baker Book House. My gratitude both to her and to Baker has not faded.

My faculty colleagues at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary maintain a spirit of theological energy and encouragement that approves of writing as a kingdom investment. This atmosphere has been fostered by its administration: President, R. Albert Mohler, Dean and Vice-President, Russell Moore. What a lively and pleasant experience of theological education we enjoy together.

Finally, to the thousands of Baptist witnesses that were faithful unto death and found their greatest consolation and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bible presents him to us through the blood of the eternal covenant. They put no confidence in the flesh for they understood that they had no goodness nor moral aptitude to commend themselves or turn themselves to God; they knew that nothing could separate them from the love of God for God placed it upon them unconditionally before the foundation of the world; they worshipped by the Spirit of God for they knew that He had opened their hearts to believe; they feared no condemnation because they trusted to the efficacy of Christ's sacrificial death; they struggled valiantly against the formidable foes of the world, the flesh and the devil because they were strengthened with all might according to His glorious power in whose hands they were secure. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His

glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24, 25 NASB).

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Introduction

It is with difficulty that men strive to define “Baptists.” Some obviously find that the blast of the Baptist trumpet and the boom of the denominational drum clash incongruously with what they view as twentieth-century faith. But those who prize the name do so as one of several in their history, not all of which were fondly given or received.

The vernacular description “commonly called Anabaptists” appears at the front of the *1644 London Baptist Confession*. This colloquial error reappears in history under a variety of terms. “Churches of Christ,” “Christians (Baptised Upon Profession of their Faith),” “Congregations, Gathered According to the Primitive Pattern,” and the more simple “Baptised Believers” have been featured as descriptions of Baptists over the past three hundred years. The gradual adoption of “Baptists” as a shortened denominational handle evidences itself by its formal use as early as 1672 in some of the English royal documents.

What particular phrase or belief can best capture the genius of the Baptist movement? Can we define a movement so dynamic and complex as the Baptist denomination in one sentence? Shall we center on liberty of conscience, uncoerced response, religious experience, a specific view of Scripture, a particular doctrine of the church, a distinctive view of missions, or some perspective of sociological or political involvement?

The particular focus of this book draws attention to soteriology in Baptist life. The writer’s thesis is that Calvinism, popularly called the doctrines of grace, prevailed in the most influential and enduring arenas of Baptist denominational life until the end of the second decade of the twentieth century.

For the past seventy years, both negligence and rejection have taken their toll upon the Baptist understanding of and—even more—commitment to those truths that Baptists once held dear. Thus, the focus upon the doctrines of grace is intentional and unashamed. This, however, in no way implies a reductionistic approach to Baptist life.

Defining the Baptist Movement

Selecting any ideological or practical category for singular treatment may well flatten into a bland and unimpressive portrait of what is best seen as a three-dimensional figure. Baptists exist as a complex mixture of many elements, practical and ideological, essential and optional. Each factor interpenetrates the other and must be seen in relation to the whole. None by itself defines the entire Baptist movement.

In these essential categories, we recognize many points of agreement between Baptists and all other Christians, between Baptists and all other Protestants, as well as the significant divergences from both. These broad categories must receive some, if minimal, attention. The terms *orthodox*, *evangelical* and *separate* give both the necessary parameters and the necessary freedom to a definition of what it means to be Baptist. The preface to *The Baptist Faith and Message* of 1963, a Southern Baptist Confession of Faith, states this very well:

Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.¹

Orthodoxy

First, Baptists are orthodox, although this term has several meanings, e.g., medieval Catholic orthodoxy, Lutheran orthodoxy, and Reformed orthodoxy. The broadest and most widely accepted meaning of the term itself refers to the trinitarian and christological affirmations of the early church. Schaff's *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (s. v. "Orthodoxy") defines orthodoxy as "a conscientious adherence to the Christian faith as taught in the Bible or rather in the ecumenical creeds." All Christians must ask, "Who is this Christ whom we worship, and what is his relationship to

¹ *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1963), 6.

deity?" The first four ecumenical councils of the church sought to express an answer to this twofold question. The Creed of Nicea affirmed that Jesus was of the same essence as God the Father and in his incarnation had taken upon himself the complete human nature. This creed also affirmed his separate personality from the Father. Councils at Constantinople and Ephesus protected these affirmations against various heretical divergences until a christological definition was given final form at the council at Chalcedon. While stated in negative terms, the formula was designed to exclude certain errors related to the person of Christ. The statement said:

We ... teach men to confess one in the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly man of a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood ... to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person.²

While Baptists have not assented to this statement simply because it is a creed, but have preferred to emphasize its faithfulness to all scriptural data presented about Christ, Baptists have nevertheless used the very language of this statement in confessions and catechisms and theologies.

Christology constituted perhaps the first controversy in Baptist life. John Smyth made room for the Mennonite views of celestial flesh in his Christology; Thomas Helwys felt it was a definite compromise to make such a concession. Smyth's willingness to compromise at that point partly caused the cleavage between the two men in 1610. Thus, Helwys stated in his Confession of Faith written in 1610 and published in 1611:

That IESVS CHRIST, the Sonne off GOD the second Person, or subsistence in the Trinity, in the Fulness off time was manifested in the Flesh, being the seed off David, and off the Isralits, according to the Flesh. Roman. 1.3 and 8.5 the Sonne off Marie the Virgine, made of hir substance, Gal. 4.4 By the power off the HOLIE GHOST overshadowing hir, Luk. 1.35. and being thus true Man was like vnto us in all things, sin onely excepted. Heb. 4.15. being one person in two distinct natures, TRVE GOD, and TRVE MAN.³

² Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983 reprint), 2:62.

³ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 119.

The last phrase is obviously influenced by christological orthodoxy, and the phrase “made of hir substance” shows a strong aversion to docetic Christology.

The *First London Confession*, written by Baptists in London in 1644, also partakes of the flavor of patristic orthodoxy. Article II makes an affirmation of the Trinity in language reminiscent of the Chalcedonian and Athanasian Creeds and even includes the *filioque* clause:

In this God-head, there is the Father, the Sonne, and the Spirit; being every one of them one and the same God; and therefore not divided, but distinguished one from another by their several properties; the Father being from himselfe, the Sonne of the Father from everlasting, the holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Sonne.⁴

The *Second London Confession*, adopted by Particular Baptists in England in 1677, followed very closely the *Westminster Confession of Faith* but differed significantly in ecclesiology, ordinances, and the relationship of the church to the state. Various other changes in phrases and words demonstrate that this confession is not simply an uncritical reproduction of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* but represents the studied and accurate opinion of the Particular Baptist churches at that time. Chapter VIII, entitled “Of Christ the Mediator,” clearly aligns with an orthodox Christology:

The Son of God, second Person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance and equal with him ... did when the fullness of time was come take upon him man’s nature with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin. ... So that two whole perfect and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one Person: without conversion, composition or confusion; which person is very God, and very Man: yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and Man.⁵

Orthodox trinitarianism is also affirmed in this confession:

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistencies, the Father, the Word (or Son) and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and Eternity, each having the whole Divine Essence, yet the Essence undivided, the Father is of none neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son is Eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who

⁴ Ibid., 156–157.

⁵ Ibid., 260–261.

is not to be divided in nature and Being; but distinguished by several peculiar, relative properties, and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.⁶

Such christological and trinitarian orthodoxy was not limited merely to the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. The Arminian Baptists also joined with their Calvinistic brothers in affirming this acceptance of the decisions of the early councils of the church. In the mid-seventeenth century, confusion had arisen in General Baptist life relative to the person of Christ. In order to set straight those who were denying the accepted christological formulas of the church, the General Baptists of the Midlands produced a document entitled *The Orthodox Creed*. In the preface a rather astounding statement is made by these Baptists: “We are sure that the denying of baptism is a less evil than to deny the divinity or humanity of Christ.”⁷

The Orthodox Creed has a heavy emphasis upon trinitarian and christological theology. Concerning the divine nature of Christ, the confession states that the Son of God is “very and true God, of one nature and substance with the Father and God by nature—co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost.”⁸

In addition, it affirms that the second person of the Holy Trinity took to himself a “true, real and fleshly body, and reasonable soul” and “became very and true man like unto us in all things sin only excepted.”⁹

Orthodox language again makes its way into the confession when the writers say that Christ unified the nature of God and the nature of man in his own person: “The properties of each nature being preserved without change of either nature, or mixture of both.” And the person thus composed is “one Christ, God-Man, or Emmanuel, God with us.”¹⁰

Further, as if such specific language and such extended articles in these areas were not enough, Article 38 of *The Orthodox Creed* commends the Nicene Creed, the Creed of Athanasius, and the Apostles’ Creed to the Baptist constituency. The writers believed those creeds could be proved “by most undoubted authority of holy scripture” and were necessary to be understood by all Christians. Baptist ministers were encouraged to teach these creeds, according to the analogy of faith as recorded in the sacred

⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 300–301.

Scriptures, for the edification of young and old as a means “to prevent heresy in doctrine, and practice.”¹¹

In the eighteenth century, General Baptists again developed internal problems related to Christology. Ministers who accepted Socinian views of the person of Christ, a view that compromised his deity, were tolerated within the general assembly. Dan Taylor determined to begin a new connection of General Baptists and formed such a group in June of 1770. Among the six articles that they wrote to show the distinguishing tenets of their organization was an article on the person and work of Christ. The first part of it states:

We believe, that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and man, united in one person: or possessed of divine perfection united to human nature, in a way which we pretend not to explain, but think ourselves bound by the word of God firmly to believe.¹²

The 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message*, while less detailed than some of the former, nevertheless makes the same affirmation. Article II states that God “reveals himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit with distinct personal attributes but without division of nature, essence, or being.” God’s Son has taken upon himself “the demands and necessities of human nature,” and after accomplishing his work he now resides at the right hand of God, where he partakes “of the nature of God and of man.”¹³

Baptist catechisms express the same orthodoxy. Keach’s Catechism says that Christ the Son of God “became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul.”¹⁴ This catechism also affirms three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and “these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power, and glory.”¹⁵ The catechisms of John Broadus, J. P. Boyce, Henry Fish, W. W. Everts, and others follow suit in their affirmation of orthodoxy on the trinity and the person of Christ.

Southern Baptist systematic theologies have also sought to maintain this adherence to orthodoxy. John L. Dagg discusses Christology under the headings of three propositions: “Jesus Christ was a man... Jesus Christ was

¹¹ Ibid., 326.

¹² Ibid., 326.

¹³ *Baptist Faith and Message*, 8.

¹⁴ Benjamin Keach, “Keach’s Catechism” in *Baptist Catechisms*, ed. Tom J. Nettles (Memphis, TN: Tom J. Nettles, 1983), 81.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

God. ... The two natures of Jesus Christ, the Divine and the human, are united in one person.”¹⁶

J. P. Boyce, in his chapter on the Trinity, sets forth the article from the “Abstract of Principles,” which he intends to expound, and states: “The peculiarity of this definition is that it is a mere statement of the Scriptural facts revealed, while, at the same time, it includes every point involved in the doctrine of the Trinity as held by orthodox Christians of all ages.”¹⁷ He also clearly expresses an orthodox Christology.¹⁸

Mullins affirms that the Chalcedonian definition “most fully gathers up the statements of the New Testament.”¹⁹

W. T. Conner continues this affirmation of orthodoxy in his book *Revelation and God*. Although reticent about the philosophical basis of the ecumenical creeds and some supposed unbiblical abstractions concomitant with them, he endorses their basic purpose:

The orthodox position, as set forth in the ecumenical creeds of the early centuries of Christian history, was to the effect that Christ possessed two whole natures, human and divine, that these natures were not to be confused, and that he was one person and the person was not to be divided. As stated above, so far as these creeds meant to affirm the religious ideas and values of the humanity of Jesus, of his deity and of his undivided personality, we cannot disagree, but rather heartily assent.²⁰

Dale Moody at times appears to continue this same strong tradition, but he eventually falls short. After discussing the Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, he states, “Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Baptists, and most other Protestant denominations embraced all of these three Creeds.” He then commends *The Orthodox Creed* of the General Baptists and notes that it quotes all three. Moody also affirms Chalcedon in its basic teaching about the full humanity, full deity, and indivisible personhood of Jesus. “A critical Chalcedonian Christology, based

¹⁶ John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 3rd ed. (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; reprint ed., Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 179, 181, 201.

¹⁷ James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887; reprint ed., Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 272–291.

¹⁹ E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1917), 178.

²⁰ W. T. Conner, *Revelation and God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1936), 187–189.

on the Johannine Logos, is still the most adequate way to state the unity between God and Jesus Christ.²¹ For Moody, however, this means an interpretation of Chalcedon according to Nestorian categories, a commitment that can hardly be distinguished from adoptionism.

In spite of Moody's departure from the historic understanding of Chalcedon, one may conclude that Baptists are defined, at least in part, by their adherence to orthodoxy. Obviously such a conclusion is not exhaustive, for it fails to distinguish Baptists from Roman Catholics, historic Presbyterians, Lutherans, and the Greek Orthodox tradition; but it nonetheless serves as an essential parameter within which Baptists have fit historically.

Evangelicalism

Second, Baptists are evangelical. From this area comes the material for the major content of this book. Although the author contends that the purest and most consistent expression of evangelicalism resides within the halls of Calvinism, he acknowledges great breadth within historic and modern evangelicalism. One need attend only one meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (composed of Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Anglicans, and others) to see that disagreements in certain theological constructions are pursued with vigor, openness to truth, and love. Therefore, the careful analyst does not simplistically identify evangelicalism with hyper-fundamentalism, neo-fundamentalism, aggressive decisionistic soul-winning or strict Calvinism.

While great openness characterizes evangelicalism, definite parameters must exist. Sometimes the nomenclature has been used to hide regrettable slides into heterodoxy and even heresy. Although this has made the word virtually useless in some contexts, historic evangelicals must make the effort to restore credibility to a word with noble heritage. Orthodoxy, as discussed earlier, is certainly a part of evangelical theology. Both this openness and exclusiveness were manifest in the 1867 formation of the Evangelical Alliance for the United States. In addition to the nine-point doctrinal statement adopted by the English branch of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846, the American group adopted the following statement:

Resolved, That in the same spirit we propose no new creed, but taking broad, historical, and Evangelical catholic ground, we solemnly reaffirm and profess our faith in all the doctrines of the inspired word of God, and

²¹ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 8, 413–426.

in the *consensus* of doctrines as held by all true Christians from the beginning. And we do more especially affirm our belief in the *divine-human person and atoning work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* as the only and sufficient source of salvation, as the heart and soul of Christianity, and as the center of all true Christian union and fellowship.²²

Orthodoxy, in the spirit of Athanasius, is discerned as a safeguard of evangelical soteriology. Bruce Shelley concurs in his description of evangelicalism as a “spirit, a concern for sinners, a way of life. Its master motif is the salvation of souls, its guiding image the redemptive Gospel of Jesus Christ. All other considerations are subordinate to this standard.”²³

The evangelical message asserts the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the personal revelation of God, the completeness of his work in humiliation and exaltation for the redemption of sinners, the effectual working of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, and the necessity of an uncoerced response of repentance and faith. The heart of evangelicalism throbs with the redeeming gospel of grace, expressed in a missionary passion that outreaches in evangelism. This forms the basic divide determining who is “Christian” and who is not. Those who are perishing refuse this gospel, and those being saved embrace it.

In short, the doctrine of justification by faith is the *raison d'être* of evangelicalism. Forgiveness of sins and imputed righteousness completely undercut as well as contradict the sacerdotal sacramentalism of Catholicism. All evangelicals—Wesleyan, Arminian, Lutheran, Calvinist—affirm this reality. The conflict between evangelicals centers on the discussion of how faith comes and why it comes. That it comes, the object of its coming, and the basic result of its coming admit no debate among evangelicals.

It is well attested in the documents of Baptist history that Baptists have affirmed this understanding of the gospel in line with others who could be considered evangelical. The *Confession of 1644* clearly teaches that “the Gospel which is to be preached to all men as the ground of faith, is that Jesus is the Christ, the Sonne of the everblessed God, filled with the perfection of all heavenly and spiritual excellencies, and that salvation is onely and alone to be had through the beleiving in his Name.”²⁴

More explicitly concerning the elements of justification, Keach’s (or the Baptist) Catechism defines justification as “an act of God’s free grace,

²² *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*, s. v. Evangelical Alliance.

²³ Bruce Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 17.

²⁴ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 162.

wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." This definition is identical to that of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and demonstrates broad unanimity in evangelical truth between different Protestant denominations.

Likewise, the *Second London Confession* (1677) demonstrates Baptist unity with other orthodox, evangelical groups. Highlighting not only their points of uniqueness but their large areas of agreement, these Baptists expressed their indebtedness to Christians of other denominations in the preface of this confession:

And there we did conclude it necessary to express ourselves the more fully and distinctly, and also to fix on such a method as might be most comprehensive of those things which we designed to explain our sense and belief of; and finding no defect in this regard in that fixed on by the Assembly, and after them by those of the Congregational way, we did readily conclude it best to retain the same order in our present Confession. And also when we observed that those last mentioned did, in the Confession (for reasons which seemed of weight both to themselves and others), choose not only to express their mind in words concurrent with the former in sense, concerning all those articles where they were agreed, but also for the most part without any variation of the terms, we did in like manner conclude it best to follow their example, in making use of the very same words with them both, in those articles (*which are very many*) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs. And this we did, the more abundantly to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, as also with many others whose orthodox confessions have been published to the World, on the behalf of the protestants in diverse nations and cities [author's italics].²⁵

From the *Westminster Confession* and *Savoy Declaration*, a large segment of contemporary evangelicalism draws its theological nurture. Baptists in America were molded in that same tradition, largely through the incalculable influence of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, virtually identical to the *Second London Confession*.

C. H. Spurgeon, still acclaimed by many as the most influential Baptist preacher of history, helped found the British branch of the Evangelical Alliance. He withdrew from some Baptist associations when he felt evangelical views were compromised and sought other Baptist fellowship where these views would be supported. Although Spurgeon held tenaciously to Calvinistic theology, he clearly affirmed orthodox evangelicalism

²⁵ Ibid., 245.

as the most basic foundation for Christian fellowship. In April of 1887 he wrote:

In our fellowship with Methodists of all grades we have found them firmly adhering to those great evangelical doctrines for which we contend. ... We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system; but we believe that Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to the vital truth, and therefore we are sorry to see any quitting it who have once accepted it.²⁶

Spurgeon expresses exactly the sentiments of this present work. The gospel-mindedness of Southern Baptists cannot be divorced from evangelical roots. The 1845 formation of the Southern Baptist Convention arose partly from the Southerners' evangelical dissatisfaction with Northern-minded home-missions policies that refused the appointment of evangelists for the growing West and South. The Southern churches were so frustrated by gospel needs unmet that they organized to meet them. Exclusion in principle from the recently initiated foreign-mission enterprise was another major reason for the division.

Historians trace the basic dynamics for the evangelism and missions so characteristic of Southern Baptists to the 1775 settlement of Separate Baptists at Sandy Creek, North Carolina. These arose directly from the "great awakening" in New England Congregationalism, which was the American expression of the English evangelical revival. Before the awakening, only forty-seven Baptist churches existed in America only seven of these below the Mason-Dixon line. Daniel Marshall and Shubal Stearns led the Sandy Creek Baptists in establishing forty-two churches and ordaining a hundred and twenty-five preachers in only seventeen years. Both Marshall and Stearns, as well as other leaders of the awakening in America, had been influenced significantly by the preaching of George Whitefield, a leader of the English awakening. The evangelical revival in England, arising largely from the zeal of the Wesleys, influenced William Carey, a Baptist, and heralded the birth of worldwide modern missions. The Wesleys were Methodists; Whitefield an Independent. All were evangelicals.

A more recent phenomenon demonstrates the open evangelical consciousness of twentieth-century Baptists. The evangelical revival in England, arising from the new-birth preaching of the Arminian Wesleys and the Calvinist Whitefield, not only contributed to the simultaneous awakening in America through Whitefield but received prolonged life from the New World by way of the writings of Jonathan Edwards. These writings

²⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Sword and Trowel*, 1887, 195.

greatly affected the Baptists Sutcliff, Fuller, and Carey, thus aiding in the birth of worldwide modern missions. What they would not accept from Wesley and seemed suspicious of in Whitefield came crashing upon them from Edwards, largely through his treatise *Freedom of the Will*, and then because they considered it “fully consistent with the strictest Calvinism.”²⁷ The influence and benefits of this evangelical network are obvious.

“Evangelical” is a sound, biblically based word arising from the Greek term *eujaggelivzomai*, used most often in Scripture to describe the open publication of the gospel. Baptists received their name from unsympathetic observers, who saw in the immersion of believers a strange rite yet were unaware that their protest was designed to undergird the essential nature of the church as a gathered community of regenerate believers. Baptists have little difficulty in keeping their commitment evangelical when their distinctive ordinance fittingly focuses on the gospel as the heart of all they are and do.

Separate Elements

In addition to the essentials of orthodoxy and evangelicalism, Baptists have yet another stream of influence that flows into their final form. This ingredient distinguishes Baptists from other evangelicals, such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists and so on. It can be denominated by the term *separate*. This factor grows out of early associations with the Separatist movement of England and the Anabaptist movement on the Continent. Baptists fall heir to the separatistic tradition, first enunciated by Independents and Congregationalists but confused by them through their practice of infant baptism. Baptists persist in the question “How can the church be a gathered community of believers when the reality of a spiritual rebirth is confused by practicing baptism solely on the basis of a natural birth?”

The most revolutionary change occurring in the Separatist congregation, which moved to Amsterdam under the leadership of John Smyth in 1608 and returned to England under the leadership of Thomas Helwys in 1612, was the shift from infant baptism to believer’s baptism. This was part of a larger change, in which magisterial methods of reform were revoked and replaced by free-church principles. The statement of doctrines entitled *A True Confession* represents the Separatist theology of the church in its early days. On baptism it stated:

²⁷ John Ryland, *Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816), 9, 10.

... such as bee of the seed, or vnder the government of anie of the Church, bee euen jn their infancie receiued to Baptisme, ond made pertakers of the signe of Gods Couenant made with the faithfull and their seed throughout all Generations.²⁸

When they returned to England, their view of baptism had changed. The Confession of Thomas Helwys, printed in 1611 in Amsterdam, stated “that everie Church is to receive in all their members by Baptisme vpon the Confession off their faith and sinnes wrought by the preaching off the Gospel.” Helwys added, “that Baptisme or washing with Water is the outward manifestation off dieing unto sinn and walkeing in newness of life and therefore in no wise apperteyneth to infants.”²⁹

In 1644 the Baptists “commonly though falsely called Anabaptists” composed a Confession of Faith in which baptism by immersion was espoused for the first time in a “modern” confession. Having been charged with “doing acts unseemly in the dispensing the ordinance of baptism not to be named amongst Christians” (that is, baptizing women naked), the confession specifically repudiated this by affirming that baptism meant to dip under the water “so as with convenient garments both upon the administrator and subject with all modesty.” They also affirmed that this ordinance was to be “dispensed onely upon persons professing faith or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized.”³⁰

Baptist conviction has remained virtually the same even to the time of the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message*. Believer’s baptism by immersion has enjoyed rather vigorous defense by the best minds produced in Baptist life—such as John Gill, Adoniram Judson, John Dagg, B. H. Carroll and others too numerous to name.

The true Separatist position, endorsed by believer’s baptism, affirms that the local and visible church exists only as a community of gathered believers and opposes the idea that the church exists as those born into the state or is associated with true believers as part of their families without personal regeneration. Thus, the regenerate nature of the church foundations the Baptist commitment to believer’s baptism, the priesthood of every believer, the autonomy of the local congregation, and associated doctrines.

Others *claim* this distinctive, but Baptists apply it with their rigorous demand for a public profession of faith, in what they view as a scriptural manner, before local fellowship is confirmed.

²⁸ *Baptist Confessions*, 93.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

John L. Dagg, in his monumental *Manual of Theology* (the second part, entitled *A Treatise on Church Order*), includes a forty-page section discussing the implications of infant membership in churches. One by one, he tackles the arguments for infant membership and dismantles them with a plethora of biblical and theological argumentation. His final argument against infant membership reduces all the arguments for it to one analogy, i.e., the Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree and so the “blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles; and the, covenant which secures the blessing, embraces their children with them.”³¹ After pages of very clear, concise, and convincing reasoning, Dagg closes with these words:

Infant membership is argued from the identity of the olive-tree; but, unfortunately for the argument, the changes which the apostle has described, infringe on the identity of the tree, exactly in the wrong place. All these changes respect the branches, and are made on one principle—the substitution of faith for natural descent; as the bond of connection between the branches and the root. Infant membership depends on natural descent; and the one principle on which all the changes are made, by taking away natural descent, leaves infant membership to hang on nothing.³²

Another baptistic element contributing to the formation of contemporary Baptists is a three-pronged building block, including the corollaries of liberty of conscience, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. Although these three are not to be identified simplistically with each other, they nevertheless imply one another. Liberty of conscience, for which Baptists have bled since the time of Thomas Helwys, means that no man or human doctrine is lord over the conscience. No other creature has the right to bind a man’s conscience by human doctrines. Thomas Helwys said:

...men’s religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the king shall not answer for it, neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.³³

³¹ John L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 165.

³² *Ibid.*, 183.

³³ Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, (n.p., 1612), 69.

Obviously Helwys would not claim “heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever” as Baptists. The espousal of liberty of conscience relates solely to the functioning of men in civil society and does not define what a Baptist is. It is a condition Baptists seek for all men so that they may be free to hear and openly submit to the evangelical message of Christ.

Both John Murton and Leonard Busher, who followed Helwys as pastor of a small General Baptist church, wrote major works on liberty of conscience. General Baptists and Particular Baptists alike joined in the struggle for liberty of conscience until it was finally attained under the reign of William and Mary by the issuing of the Act of Toleration. Although England did attain liberty of conscience and freedom of religion, its people were never able to gain disestablishment of the Anglican Church.

However, the Baptists in America, helped by the existence of a great plurality of denominations plus the impetus of Jeffersonian libertarianism, gained separation of church and state as well as the other two freedoms. The struggle was carried on in America mainly by such Baptists as Roger Williams, John Clarke, Isaac Backus, and John Leland until it was granted in writing by the Bill of Rights of the Constitution adopted in 1789.

While the affirmation of these three freedoms is a cardinal tenet of Baptist life, Baptists may very well exist where none of these freedoms has been achieved. In fact, Baptists in the past have thrived and continue to thrive in areas where they have neither liberty of conscience nor freedom of religion nor separation of church and state. However, a Baptist church cannot exist where there is no regenerate church membership and no affirmation of believer’s baptism. These are the ecclesiological *sine qua non’s*.

In summary, to be Baptist means to be *orthodox* in one’s view of the Trinity and the person of Christ. To be Baptist also means to be *evangelical* in one’s soteriology. Finally, to be Baptist means to be consistently *separate* in ecclesiology and to seek to encourage conditions in which all may hear the gospel.

This work details Baptist evangelicalism and claims, along with Spurgeon, that the purest biblical presentation of the gospel glides upon the waters of the doctrines of grace. Indeed, any rejection of these doctrines carries within it seeds that sprout into nonevangelical positions. In the words of Spurgeon, their full acceptance fits a man for battle against all the enemies of God:

You cannot vanquish a Calvinist. You may think you can, but you cannot. The stones of the great doctrines so fit into each other, that the more pressure there is applied to remove them the more strenuously do they adhere. And you may mark, that you cannot receive one of these doctrines without believing all. Hold for instance that man is utterly depraved, and you draw the inference then that certainly if God has such a

creature to deal with salvation must come from God alone, and if from him, the offended one, to an offending creature, then he has a right to give or withhold his mercy as he wills; you are thus forced upon election, and when you have gotten that you have all: the others must follow. Some by putting the strain upon their judgments may manage to hold two or three points and not the rest, but sound logic I take it requires a man to hold the whole or reject the whole; the doctrines stand like soldiers in a square, presenting on every side a line of defence which it is hazardous to attack, but easy to maintain. And mark you, in these times when error is so rife and neology strives to be so rampant, it is no little thing to put into the hands of a young man a weapon which can slay his foe, which he can easily learn to handle, which he may grasp tenaciously, wield readily, and carry without fatigue; a weapon, I may add, which no rust can corrode and no blows can break, trenchant, and well annealed, a true Jerusalem blade of a temper fit for deeds of renown.³⁴

A survey of how this formidable weapon was deftly wielded, then sadly forsaken continues and concludes this introduction.

Overview: A Map of the Baptist Journey

A survey is a sort of map. Before a trip begins in detail, travelers need to see a map of the entire territory, including some lands that lie outside the particular route taken. The overall fortunes of Calvinism among Baptists (that juxtaposition of words is not proper but will do for now) in England and America constitute the guide along the way. Slightly more space will be devoted to England in this overview, since subsequent text treatment of it ends in the early nineteenth century. Some readers may feel that massive apologies are due for not including a chapter on Spurgeon. His sermons and other works, however, are available in such abundant proportions, and he is quoted so often in other sections of this book, that his inclusion seemed unnecessary. Also, Ian Murray's book *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, in which a notable discussion of Spurgeon's Calvinism forms a major contribution, is readily available. On with the overview. ...

Baptists and Calvinism in England

Chapter one will outline the differences between the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. This work purposefully focuses on the Calvin-

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 63 vols. (Pilgrim Publications: Pasadena, TX, 1969), 7:304.

istic section of Baptist life. The Arminian section was plagued with lamentable apostasy in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Socinianism playing the role of destroyer in the first two lapses and liberalism in the last. Particular Baptists remained faithful through all those years until debilitated by various currents in the last half of the nineteenth century, when the Calvinistic banner was carried forth by the Strict Baptists in a severely truncated form. Human responsibility then suffered a smashing blow from the hammer of God's sovereignty by the hand of misguided logical extension.

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ORTHODOXY

Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691), William Kiffin (1616–1701), Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), John Spilsbery (1593–1668), Henry Jessey (1601–1663), and John Bunyan (1628–1688), among others, stand as representative of the firm conviction, fervent piety, powerful preaching, and theological orthodoxy of seventeenth-century Particular Baptists. Although some differences on communion and church membership existed in those days of emerging from Separatism, there was unity in soteriology. The two London Confessions actually represent the theological commitments of Particular Baptists nationwide during this period, the *1689 Confession* having been signed by representatives from more than 107 churches all over England and Wales.³⁵ Some churches in the West that followed the theological shifting of Thomas Collier gradually moved from this strong Calvinism into a reactionary position, Collier himself eventually becoming a Universalist. But if some in the West declined, others vigorously resisted this apostasy. Instead, they increased in zeal and, from Bristol, sought to promote fellowship and meaningful association between the churches in the area and even boxed the ears of the London churches for slackness in pursuing such interchurch encouragement.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DECLINE

The eighteenth century has been characterized as one of decline by most historians. Deism, Socinianism and Latitudinarian theology did severe damage to Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregational and General Baptist churches. Particular Baptists, on the other hand, did not fall into theological error. Instead, John C. Ryland could say in 1777, "There is no

³⁵ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for the author and sold by Burditt, Buxton, Hamilton, Baynes, etc., 1811–1830), 1:503–511.

apparent apostasy in our ministers and people from the glorious principles we profess." Although the middle of the century saw a decline in the number of Particular Baptist churches, by 1798 they numbered 361 in England, of which 320 had pastors. An additional 84 were in Wales. Much growth had come in the last fifteen years of the century.

What did cause consternation in the fellowship came in the form of the "modern question." Far-reaching consequences hung on the answer to the question: whether the unregenerate could be called upon to exercise saving repentance and faith. John Brine (1703–1765) was the leader of those writing negatively to the question. But John Gill (1697–1771), friend of Brine and acknowledged leader of Baptists for fifty years of the century, never wrote on the question. This in itself is a strange phenomenon, since Gill is characterized as the definitive hyper-Calvinist, but it is no less strange than the fact that Gill rejects Brine's main argument against the question. For this reason, one full chapter is given to Gill and a reinvestigation of the charges adhering to his reputation.

Although a major part of the century was blanketed by a sorrowful recession of growth for the Particular Baptists, too censorious a judgment upon the age would fail to recognize the outstanding contributions made by such men as Joseph Stennett (1692–1758), John Collett Ryland (1723–1792), Benjamin Beddome (1718–1795), Samuel Medley (1738–1799), and John Hirst (1736–1815). Some seem to feel that too-close adherence to Calvinism was the dominant factor of the decline, but they make the deadly error of failing to distinguish between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism. Thus they fail to appreciate the gospel zeal inherent in the former. A broad view of the entire religious scene might lead to a contrary opinion and see Calvinism as the factor that conserved the strength of the Particular Baptists and made possible the worldwide propagation of the gospel in the next century. This seems to be the view of Joseph Ivimey as he draws conclusions from an anecdote he related about the elder Joseph Stennett (d. 1713):

Had our ministers in general manifested this strict adherence to the *Calvinistic* doctrines which Mr. Stennett did, instead of that spurious candour and moderation expressed by some others; there is no doubt but many churches would have been preserved from the whirlpool of Socinianism, which has swallowed up some Particular Baptist Societies, and nearly all of those which at the end of the seventeenth century belonged to the General Baptists.³⁶

³⁶ Ibid., 2:503–511.

Help to Zion's Travelers, by Robert Hall (1728–1791), was published in 1781 by request of the Northamptonshire Association. It was the book form of what had been delivered orally as a sermon on Isaiah 57:14. The content vindicated Calvinism from the objections of many detractors, including Arminians, Socinians and Antinomians. In addition, it gave a strong affirmation to the necessity of calling all men to repentance before God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This book figured largely in the movements of William Carey toward the position he expresses in *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (1791). That influence was also present in Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785). A full chapter of the present work (chapter three) concentrates on Fuller's theology to demonstrate that a strong affirmative answer to the "modern question" did not involve any declension from historic Calvinism. Nor did the rise of modern missions come as a result of shaking off the fetters of Calvinism, but instead issued as the necessary expression of it. This cannot be too strongly affirmed or stressed in the contemporary scene, where it is commonly believed that the doctrines of grace are the enemy of evangelism. Indeed, they are the enemy of systems and methods that thrive on reductionistic perversions of the gospel—but true evangelism has no dearer friend than these doctrines.

NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRENDS

The story of English Baptist Calvinism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be given in survey form by a simple method, involving three steps. First, a survey of the theological tendency of the Baptist Union will give a fairly accurate picture of whether churches connected with that group regarded Calvinism as strategic or absolute in one's comprehension of the gospel. Second, the rise and history of the Strict Baptists show the fortunes of Calvinism from another perspective. Third, a statement on the contemporary status of the Reformation doctrines closes the overview of the English scene.

The Baptist Union: Under the picture of John Gill, in the vestry of John Rippon at the Baptist Church in Carter Lane in Southwark, near the southern end of the old London Bridge, close to sixty Baptist ministers met in 1812 to found the first Baptist Union. Among the attenders of the meeting were Andrew Fuller, John Sutcliff, John Ryland, Jr., John Rippon and Joseph Ivimey. The latter, the main force behind the meeting, had issued a call for it in 1811 in *The Baptist Magazine* in an article entitled "Union Essential to Prosperity." Ivimey conceived of it as an opportunity for the various societies and agencies having separate organizations—yet supported largely by the same churches, associations, and individuals—

to give reports of their respective progress so as to encourage and renew the zeal of the churches. Andrew Fuller was doubtful about the prospect, thinking that it would only “show the poverty of the denomination,” but he could not have been less than pleased when a collection taken for the Baptist Missionary Society totaled £ 320. Among the resolutions adopted at this consultative meeting was one that called for the objectives of union to be “the promotion of the cause of Christ in general; and the interests of the denomination in particular.” In addition, the first official meeting of the Union was set for June 25–26, 1813.

It is noteworthy that at this 1813 meeting a Confession of Faith headed the items that were discussed and approved. Paragraph one of this original constitution is worded in terms in which “the Calvinism of Particular Baptist churches was customarily defined.”

That this society of ministers and churches be designated “The General Union of Baptist ministers and churches” maintaining the important doctrines of “three equal persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal election; original sin; particular redemption; free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; efficacious grace in regeneration; the final perseverance of real believers; the resurrection of the dead; the future judgment; the eternal happiness of the righteous, and the eternal misery of such as die in impenitence, with the congregational order of churches inviolably.”³⁷

The doctrinal basis was strong and uncompromising. The years from 1817 to 1831, however, saw very little advance in the concept of union among the English Baptists. The burgeoning success of the Baptist Missionary Society and the origin and rapidly increasing popularity of the Baptist Irish Society absorbed the energies of the churches. Little time or creativity was left for engendering viability for the separate functioning of the Baptist Union. Baptists also saw the painful separation of the Serampore Mission from the Baptist Missionary Society. Controversy over strict communion arose during these years, pitting Joseph Ivimey on the side of strict communion against Robert Hall and F. A. Cox on the side of open communion. In addition, the high profile of Calvinism among the Particular Baptists began to take on more rounded and plainer contours, so that similarity rather than distinction began to characterize the comparison between General and Particular Baptists. Meetings of the union continued during these years, at the instigation of Joseph Ivimey, but they

³⁷ E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1959), 26.

were so small and ineffective that Ivimey was forced to write in 1830 that the design “was never fully realized.”³⁸

In 1832 a reorganization occurred, which opened the door for the eventual expansion of the Union, but only by means of chipping off the piercing doctrinal edges. Article one, containing the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism, gave way to an extraordinarily short doctrinal statement susceptible to the most extreme abuse: “1st. To extend brotherly love and union among the Baptist ministers and churches who agree in the sentiments usually denominated evangelical.”³⁹

This wording indicated a growing alienation from the Calvinism of former days. Although many pastors still held the distinguishing tenets of Calvinism, their contentment with the nebulousness of the mere affirmation of “evangelical sentiments” shows a diminishing attachment to their essentiality. History fails to reveal what positive advantage denominations actually gain by uniting around a crucifixion of truth. Any projects sponsored under such auspices are fragmented from the beginning, for in reality, foundations and goals are always identical. The true Christian character of any enterprise can neither be guaranteed at the beginning nor measured at the end, for the pursuers of the project will confess to nothing more than the most puerile understanding of the Christian faith. Only a heroic and defiant individualism can salvage good in such a case, and that in spite of—rather than because of—its character.

“Evangelical,” when precisely defined, can be a marvelously useful word. But when left without definition and combined with the amazingly insipid theological term *sentiments*, its tendency to dereliction is absolute. Ivimey saw this clearly and lamented it. Whereas two decades earlier he had criticized Gill, not for Calvinism but for what he considered as false practices built upon it, he now saw the danger from another direction. Almost the last sentence he wrote for the press was intended as a warning against flirting with Arminianism:

Nor can I disguise the fact, that, in my opinion, the dignified tone, and denominational zeal, manifested by Booth, Fuller and others are greatly lowered; and that a general spirit of laxity is introduced among us, as to the “DOCTRINES” of grace, as well as to the “DISCIPLINE” of the New Testament.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ivimey, *English Baptists*, 4:382.

³⁹ Payne, *Baptist Union*, 61.

⁴⁰ George Pritchard, ed., *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Reverend Joseph Ivimey*, (London: George Wightman, 1835), 311.

Thirty years later, John Howard Hinton (1791–1873)—who had been secretary of the Baptist Union for over twenty years and had sought to maintain commitment to the main pillars of Calvinistic orthodoxy, though modified at points—gave a surprisingly bitter evaluation of the doctrinal basis of the 1832 reconstitution of the Union. “What a poverty-stricken resolution it is that defines these objects, was as strongly felt then as it has often been felt since; but it was absolutely all that the assembled brethren would bear.”⁴¹

Other events show increased determination toward vaporization of doctrine. In 1842 John Gregory Pike, the leader of the New Connection General Baptists, was invited to preside at the Baptist Union meeting. In 1857 the meeting was held in Nottingham, so that it could be nearer the largest number of General Baptist churches and thereby encourage their attendance.

Further abolition of doctrinal distinctives was evident by 1864, when the chairman of the meeting urged those attending that one immediate aim of the churches should be “the supercession, on practicable, sound and safe principles of the distinction between General and Particular Baptists.”⁴² Although these sentiments were present, no official action was forthcoming. In 1872, therefore, Thomas Thomas reminded the churches that such action needed to be taken, since the doctrinal differences were by then almost imperceptible:

Our communion is becoming closer and more frequent. Not only are members of churches freely transferred from one section to the other, but brethren, if eligible for office in other respects, are irrespective of sentiment, elected to be deacons in the churches to which they are transferred. Further still, General Baptist Churches are quite accustomed to choose Particular Baptist pastors; and a proportionate, but not an equal, number of General Baptist pastors are settled over Particular Baptist Churches.⁴³

No one really needs to ask whose doctrine was changing so radically as to make this interchange possible. Not only was Calvinism dying confessionally in Particular Baptist life (the nomenclature even has a hollow ring by now), but fewer and fewer held the doctrines of grace personally, and even fewer than that dared to preach them as essential to an understanding of the gospel. When organic union was being discussed seriously in 1874, John Clifford, editor of the *General Baptist Magazine*, could say

⁴¹ Payne, *Baptist Union*, 61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, see footnote.

candidly, “We were never further from Calvinism than we are today.”⁴⁴ He had no fear that he would adversely affect the chance of eventual union by such forthrightness. Particular Baptists would never think of being aroused against contemplating union with Clifford and his kind, for in 1873 even the meager “sentiments ... evangelical” had been dropped and replaced with a lone doctrinal statement, “The immersion of believers is the only Christian Baptism.”

When, in 1877, Dr. Samuel Cox published *Salvatore Mundi*, denying the doctrine of eternal punishment, it became evident that the issue had degenerated from Calvinism/Arminianism to whether or not it matters that one is a Christian at all. It should come as no surprise, then, that by the time the official union between General and Particular Baptists occurred in 1891, the Baptist who actually had the greatest right to remain, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, had seceded from the Baptist Union.

Spurgeon blazed in Baptist life as a somewhat solitary figure during all his ministry. In the mid-1850s in London, his pronounced Calvinism caused such consternation that he was accused of preaching “doctrines of the most rampant exclusiveness.” Spurgeon’s stance for Calvinism and against Arminianism has been documented well in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Ian Murray.⁴⁵ He adhered to strict Calvinism throughout his ministry and was never without a ready word to defend that theology against what he felt were the destructive tendencies of Arminianism. The situation in the Baptist Union, however, had become so desperate that by 1887 evangelical Wesleyanism held more in common with Spurgeon than the doctrinal nothingness of the Baptist Union. Those years of controversy (ca. 1887–1892) have proved perplexing, painful, and sometimes embarrassing to Baptist Union historians. What does one say when the greatest Baptist preacher of the denomination’s history, a man of large and generous heart and no small penetration, finds it impossible to maintain the facade of fellowship? The situation has been handled largely by treating Spurgeon with paternalistic condescension as a good but sick man, unable to cope with the evolving and developing intellect of Baptist theology.⁴⁶ The truth appears to be undeniable, however, that his concerns about the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the reality of eternal punishment, and other fundamental tenets of the faith were well founded. The writings of John

⁴⁴ John Clifford, in A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1947), 215.

⁴⁵ Ian Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), see especially 45–114.

⁴⁶ Payne, *Baptist Union*, 127–143; Underwood, *English Baptists*, 229–233.

Clifford after the death of Spurgeon show clearly his heterodoxy—and the truth of Spurgeon’s claims—on each of these points.

Although the distinguishing doctrines of Calvinism were not the issue in the “downgrade controversy,” Spurgeon’s adherence to them so shaped his views of God and truth and so committed him to the importance of principles in theology that he saw more clearly than anyone the nature of the issues at stake. Those who had no capability of understanding Spurgeon’s position railed at him with very little reserve, a melancholy fact that prompted Spurgeon to remark: “Those who are so exceedingly liberal, large-hearted, and broad might be so good as to allow us to forego the charms of their society without coming under the full violence of their wrath.”⁴⁷ One contemporary historian who understands in detail the theological movements of the last part of the nineteenth century regarded Spurgeon’s move as “the grandest gesture yet against the debilitating forces at work within English Nonconformity.”⁴⁸

As recently as 1971 this theological malformity expressed itself vividly from the platform of the annual assembly of the Baptist Union, when Michael Taylor used the occasion to express his denial of the deity of Christ:

I believe God was active in Jesus, but it will not do to say quite categorically: Jesus is God. Jesus is unique, but his uniqueness does not make him different in kind from us. ... The difference is in what God did in and through this man and the degree to which this man responded and co-operated with God.⁴⁹

Several churches and ministers seceded from the Union when no official reprimand of Taylor came from its council, but many just as surely defended Taylor’s right to declare such heresy in the ranks of accredited ministers.

This should surprise no one familiar with the development of theological thought in Baptist Union circles. H. Wheeler Robinson (1872–1945), principal of Regents Park College from 1920–1942 and leading English Baptist theologian in the twentieth century, had advanced a theological method quite incapable of correcting Taylor. Robinson himself rejected the historicity of Adam and his connection with man’s sinfulness.⁵⁰ In fact,

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, *Sword and Trowel* (1888), 620.

⁴⁸ Ian Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (n.p., Edward Arnold, 1977), 28.

⁴⁹ Speech by Michael Taylor, Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union, in *Reformation Today*, No. 10 (Summer 1972), 36.

⁵⁰ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation in the Actuality of History* (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1942), 65.

he called the Old Testament narration of the fall “a minor and negligible element in the literature and religion of Israel”⁵¹ and finally concluded that “modern views of the Bible and of the origin of the race remove Adam’s transgressions from the data of the problem” of human sin.⁵²

Robinson dismissed out of hand the doctrine of eternal punishment in favor of annihilationism or “a revised form of conditional immortality.”⁵³ Postmortem opportunities for salvation will probably be presented to men, for “we have no sufficient ground for asserting that the final decision is always made at the present stage of our development; indeed, we all realize that many men on earth have never had a fair opportunity of making it.”⁵⁴ The whole idea of hell was rather disgusting to Robinson, and he insisted “there is something unhealthy in being over-much concerned with hell.”⁵⁵ Baptists in the centuries before him would have concluded the reverse.

More devastating than these (because foundational to them) are Robinson’s views of revelation and the method of discerning error. Revelation comes in the interplay between Christian experience and the providential movement of history. Scripture cannot be taken in any verbal or propositional sense but must be seen as a record of divine encounters upon individual consciousness. The Bible is the “sufficiently accurate record of a religious experience which is normative and authoritative.”⁵⁶ We have no right, therefore, Robinson claims, “to assume that the ethics of Amos or even of Jesus are directly applicable, as they stand, to every generation.”⁵⁷

In like manner, it would seem, one could conclude that we have no right to make the propositional beliefs of the apostles as normative for today. In his approach to the “ministry of error,” Robinson makes room for that position by saying, “Obviously any dogmatic assertion of what is truth and what is error in contemporary religion would be especially out of place in such a subject.”⁵⁸ When such little platform is given for establishing truth and resisting error, it is no wonder that a denial of the deity of Christ should meet with a defense of the rights of the speaker.

The years from Clifford to Robinson and beyond appear to have acclimatized the members of the Baptist Union so thoroughly that no shock at all is produced by the cold winds of infidelity. But such continued expo-

⁵¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926; reprint ed., 1934), 163.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵³ Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation*, 310.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

sure to disease and death can also have the effect of lowering immunities to the point that the slightest infection can kill. Christians over the world must pray that the denomination that produced Keach, Gill, Booth, Fuller, Carey and Spurgeon may once again uncover the foundation on which they stood. It would be tragic if Calvinism is joined by other truths viewed merely as theological archaisms in the Baptist Union; for then, not only will evangelical purity be compromised, but the Christian faith itself will be lost.

The Strict Baptists: Calvinistic theology had not completely vanished from Baptist life in England, however. Theological discussion in the 1820s centered not only upon the issue of communion but upon the subtle encroachment of Arminianism into Particular Baptist life.⁵⁹ The arguments of Robert Hall (1764–1831) for open communion contemplated the possibility that eventually no “Baptist” churches as such would exist, but only “Baptist” individuals. Atheological romantic fervor for the promotion of missions alarmed and alerted some to the dangers of some styles of evangelism. These two issues characterized the concerns of Strict Baptists at their inception as a separate, recognizable entity.

By the 1830s, statements against “Fullerism” and open communion began to become common in certain areas. Not only were the terms of communion characteristic in definitions made by Strict Baptist groups, but “the doctrine which asserts that saving faith is the duty of all men” was repeatedly rejected. Definite form was given to the movement by the appearance of several publications, the most influential of which was called *The Gospel Standard*, begun in 1835 and continuing to this day. Its adherents are known as “Standard Men,” and the churches endorsing its Confession of Faith are properly denominated “Gospel Standard Baptists.” *The Gospel Herald*, begun in 1833, held the same basic doctrine. It merged in 1887 with *The Earthen Vessel*, a magazine started in 1845 in Southwark, the area of London eventually to be invaded by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The *Vessel* criticized Spurgeon severely because of his obvious adherence to “duty-faith”—he constantly insisted that all men everywhere turn from sin and rebellion and bow at the feet of Jesus. The magazine did manage a word of commendation and support for him in his struggle with the “downgrade.”

In 1896 another publication appeared, entitled *The Christian's Pathway*. The rejection of duty-faith and open communion characterized its content also, in addition to a positive stance on the “eternal sonship of Christ,” prompted by a controversy within the pages of *The Earthen Vessel*,

⁵⁹ *Annual Report and Bulletin of the Strict Baptist Historical Society*, No. 13 (1976), 5–7.

1859–1860. Its position was clearly summarized in a letter to a deacon of a church wishing to be included in its list of acceptable churches:

1. Does your Church and Pastor endorse the doctrine stated at the head of the Directory, viz.: The Eternal Sonship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?
2. Does your Church and Pastor endorse all the points of Doctrine under the head “Particular,” and reject Duty-Faith, or as some term it “Spurgeonism?”
3. Does your Church and Pastor endorse all that is implied in the word “Strict,” i.e., that none but baptized believers of Churches of the same Faith and Order can commune together at the Lord’s Supper?

The most pronounced affirmation of this theological tenet came in 1878 in *The Gospel Standard*, when a confession appeared, expanding the Strict Baptist antipathy to universal calls to repentance and faith. (This issue is discussed briefly in chapter sixteen.)

Developments since World War II have seen all the Strict Baptists except those holding the *Gospel Standard* confession drop their rejection of duty-faith. *Grace* magazine has replaced the *Gospel Herald-Earthen Vessel* publication, and *Reformation Today* has replaced *The Christian’s Pathway*.⁶⁰ True Calvinism has been recaptured in these magazines and the doctrines of the *1689 Confession* heartily espoused. The positions of Fuller, Carey, and Spurgeon are celebrated and hyper-Calvinism in every form rejected. While a period of some years in the twentieth century found the Metropolitan Tabernacle lose its distinctive evangelical Calvinistic witness, in recent years it has been rediscovered under the ministry of Peter Masters. Although maintaining and arguing for a strictly separatistic posture, the ministry there has been instrumental in leading many back to the doctrines of grace.

Contemporary Status of Reformation Doctrine: With the commencement of *Reformation Today* (1970), the Carey Conference for Ministers began. Meeting annually, it draws Baptist ministers from independent Baptist churches as well as Baptist Union churches. As its name indicates, experimental and practical application of great doctrinal truths forms the core of the conference’s purpose. The 1985 conference was devoted to the theme of missions, while the 1986 conference is dedicated to the reexploration of the parameters of the *1689 Confession* and what, in a comprehensive sense, is the Reformed faith.

⁶⁰ *Reformation Today*, No. 1 (Spring 1970).

Happily, the historic Calvinism of the old English Baptists has been snatched from the jaws of death, has all the marks of health, and shows promise of multiplication. Whether it can withstand the onslaughts of theological and ecclesiastical trendiness and maintain—like Fuller, Carey, Ivimey, Booth, and Spurgeon—a tender heart and a steel backbone does not depend upon the strength and comprehensiveness of the system itself. Certainly no other view of God, man, the world, and all things visible and invisible can approach the strength of Calvinism. Rather, under God, the tenacity of the present Reformation will depend upon the degree to which the hearts of those involved have been captured for truth and whether their affection radiates toward the temporal or the eternal.

Baptists and Calvinism in the United States

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ROOTS

When Roger Williams came to the New World in 1631, he brought with him not only an irrepressible conscience, which eventually brought banishment from Massachusetts Bay upon him, but the unvarnished Calvinism of his separatistic Puritanism. The Baptist Church founded under his influence in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1639 embraced this same theology. John Clarke, another Englishman who found the church-state relation of Massachusetts Bay unpalatable, also made his way to Rhode Island and, with the help of Williams, purchased land from the Indians. Under the probable influence of Williams, Clarke became a Baptist sometime between 1640 and 1644. The church he founded at Newport, the second Baptist church in America, “maintained the doctrine of efficacious grace,” and at least until the time of Thomas Armitage remained Calvinistic.⁶¹ The Confessions of Faith of both Clarke and Obadiah Holmes, who succeeded Clarke as pastor, demonstrate this truth beyond doubt. Clarke left his confession in writing, and a portion was inserted in the records of the church. Isaac Backus, in his notable *A History of New England*, published the main portion of it:

The special decree of God concerning angels and men is called predestination Romans viii. 30 ... of the latter more is revealed not unprofitable to be known. It may be defined the wise, free, just, eternal and unchangeable sentence or decree of God, determining to create and govern man for his special glory. ... Election is the decree of God, of his free love,

⁶¹ Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor & Co., 1887), 671, 673.

grace and mercy, choosing some men to faith, holiness and eternal life, for the praise of his glorious mercy: ... The cause which moved the Lord to elect them who are chosen, was none other but his mere good will and pleasure. ... A man in this life may be sure of his election ... but not of his eternal reprobation; for he that is now prophane may be called hereafter.⁶²

Obadiah Holmes's *Confession and Testimony* are preserved in the same volume.⁶³ The spirit of evangelical Calvinism penetrates the entirety: God "knows who are his; and the elect shall obtain it," for in the covenant of grace "God hath laid the iniquity of all his elect and called ones upon him [the Son]" so that they "shall never fall away nor perish." God bestows his salvation by effecting faith through a preaching ministry sent into the world "to publish repentance to the sinner, and salvation, and that by Jesus Christ." Yes, these ministers are to declare "the grace of God through Jesus Christ, even to those that are yet in the power of satan: yea to bring glad tidings by and from the Lord Jesus Christ."⁶⁴

The First Baptist Church of Boston arose under the downpour of ecclesiastical intimidation as Thomas Gould sought answers about the baptism of children, especially his own child, born in 1655. After ten years of confusing browbeating from the established church in Boston, Gould—along with several others who had recently come from England, including a Mr. Goodall from William Kiffin's church—entered into a church relationship. This church was also Calvinistic.⁶⁵

One cannot take seriously the contention that these men simply adopted their soteriology from their theological milieu without critical examination. At least two factors should dissuade any from accepting such an argument. First, their radical departure from the ecclesiology of their contemporaries and neighbors, plus their willingness to suffer for this separation, shows that they were not void of personal initiative in doctrinal construction. Their openness to argue their case before men of intimidating educational credentials marks them not as arrogant (for they were meek men), but as confident of conclusions drawn from honest and independent inquiry. Second, their insistence that all belief and practice must have a plain and clear scriptural warrant speaks highly of their retention of Calvinism while altering their view of baptism. Other soteriological op-

⁶² John Clarke, "Confession of Faith," in Isaac Backus, *A History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2 vols. (Boston, MA: Edward Draper, 1777), 1:255, 256.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 208–212, 256–260.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 256, 258, 259.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 355–415.

tions were available and known to them. We must conclude, therefore, that they conscientiously and knowledgeably adhered to Calvinism as biblical in its soteriological connections.

INTO THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The Middle Colonies, especially Pennsylvania, benefited from the influence of the Keach family almost as much as had the English Baptists of the seventeenth century. Benjamin Keach's son, Elias, came to the New World an unconverted man. For a brief period he found great fun duping the dissenting Christians of Pennsylvania by preaching to them some of his father's sermons. Great crowds came to hear the young London divine, and his jocular experiment appeared to be faring well. In the midst of his preaching on one occasion, he was seized with terror and for a while could not continue speaking. In the mercy of God, the young Keach was converted under his own preaching and was instrumental in founding the first Baptist church in Pennsylvania—at Pennepack, now within the city of Philadelphia.

Keach, along with Thomas Killingsworth, founded other churches. Another moved intact from Wales. In 1707 these churches, now five in number, organized to form the first Baptist association in America, the Philadelphia Baptist Association. This association regularly used the *Second London Confession* in its doctrinal discussions and in 1742 officially adopted it with two additions as its own Confession of Faith. By far the most influential association in Baptist life in America, its power was felt greatly in the First Great Awakening, and its Calvinistic theology was formative and dominant in Baptist life in both the North and South. So strong was the Calvinism of this association that in 1752 it passed a resolution affirming that such as rejected the doctrine of unconditional election could not be members of the churches:

Upon which fundamental doctrines of Christianity, next to the belief of an eternal God, our faith must rest; and we adopt, and would that all the churches belonging to the Baptist Association be well grounded in accordance to our Confession of faith and catechism, and cannot allow that any are true members of our churches who deny the said principles, be their conversation outward what it will.⁶⁶

In 1774 the association adopted the practice of giving “observations and improvements of some particular article of faith, contained in our

⁶⁶ *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1707 to 1807* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 69.

Confession.”⁶⁷ These yearly “circular letters” form quite delightful expositions of evangelical Calvinism. Correspondence carried on with William Carey and enthusiastic reports on the progress of missions abroad and among the Indians and in unchurched areas of America show that the members of this group maintained a healthy alliance between doctrine and practice.

In the South, the first Baptist church was also Calvinistic. The First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina (actually founded in 1682 in Kittery, Maine), adopted the *Second London Confession* as a valid summary of its biblical faith. William Screven, upon his retirement as first pastor in 1708, urged the church to secure as pastor a man who held to the doctrines set forth in that confession. In 1751, when the Charleston Association came into being, its doctrinal understanding found accurate expression in that same document. One of the most notable pastors of the state (and indeed in the South) during the decades straddling the turn of the nineteenth century was Richard Furman. From 1787 to 1825 he served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina. In addition, he served as first president of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the United States for Foreign Missions, known also as the Triennial Convention, established in 1814. He was a staunch Calvinist.

As Baptists moved into other parts of the South, some General Baptists appeared among them. These, however, were largely swallowed up by an aggressive and warm Calvinism in the First Great Awakening during the middle of the eighteenth century. Additionally, Baptist membership grew by leaps and bounds due to the invasion of Separate Baptists. This group, whose early leaders were Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall, held a strong conversion theology, manifested admirable responsibility for evangelistic organization, and fervently expected powerful movements of the Holy Spirit when they preached. They had arisen initially out of New England Congregationalism. The New Lights were opposed by the Old Lights, who insisted on identifying adherence to the confession of faith and external morality with true Christian faith. Jonathan Edwards defended the New Light insistence on conversion. When many of the New Lights began to adopt Baptist ecclesiology because of its harmony with the ideal of a regenerate church, they were naturally hesitant about the use of any confession of faith. Their theology, however, was Calvinistic and when, often haltingly, they did produce confessions, their Calvinism was obvious. *The Confession of Faith of the Kebukee Association*, a Regular Baptist Association, paved the way for the union with several Separate Baptist

⁶⁷ Ibid., 136.

churches. Two of the seventeen articles deal with the sovereignty of God in salvation:

7. We believe that in God's appointed time and way (by means which He has ordained) the elect shall be called, justified, pardoned and sanctified, and that it is impossible they can utterly refuse the call, but shall be made willing by divine grace to receive the offers of mercy. . . .
9. We believe, in like manner, that God's elect shall not only be called, and justified, but that they shall be converted, born again, and changed by the effectual workings of God's holy Spirit.⁶⁸

Likewise, the Sandy Creek Association, the most influential Separate Baptist grouping of the eighteenth century, adopted a confession in 1816. Articles III and IV (out of ten articles) indicate the soteriological commitments of Sandy Creek and the multiplicity of Separate Baptist churches and associations that arose from its influence:

- III. That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed.
- IV. We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost.⁶⁹

When Separate Baptists and Regular Baptists united in Virginia, the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* formed the doctrinal basis. Therefore, by the time that union was complete, Baptist life in the South was characterized by strong doctrinal commitments to evangelical Calvinism, a sense of dependence upon the working of the Holy Spirit to bring about conversion (often in a dramatic fashion), and a conviction of stewardship about evangelistic organization.

The rising of Free Will Baptists, under the leadership of Benjamin Randall in the 1780s in New Hampshire, prompted New England Baptists to work through a restatement of their faith, with some special attention given to areas highlighted by the Free Will movement. In 1833

⁶⁸ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia, PA: The Judson Press, 1959), 355, 356.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 358.

the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* was completed and recommended for adoption to the churches of New Hampshire. Its influence was greatly widened in 1853, when J. Newton Brown, editorial secretary to the American Baptist Publication Society, published it in *The Baptist Church Manual*. Other church manuals, including that of J. M. Pendleton, also published it, making it the most widely disseminated creedal declaration of American Baptists.

Many have interpreted the contents of the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* as an attempt to modify the strong Calvinism of earlier days into something more palatable to the tastes of eighteenth-century churches. It is true that it is not as detailed or as lengthy as the *Philadelphia Confession*, but it is also true that the substance of its doctrine remains unchanged. One of its concerns is succinctness. But its framers additionally desired to show that the issues raised by the presence of the Free Will Baptists were certainly not foreign to the knowledge or concerns of historic Calvinism. One emphasis recurring in the Free Will framework of theology was the culpability of man. Culpability extends only as far as the freeness of man's will and/or the provisions of God's grace. The "power of free choice is the exact measure of man's responsibility," said Benjamin Randall.⁷⁰ And if the fall has affected the will negatively, redemption by the Triune God has placed all men on equal footing: none are excluded, but neither is salvation actually procured for anyone:

They are all dependent for salvation upon the redemption effected through the blood of Christ, and upon being created anew unto obedience through the operation of the Spirit; both of which are freely provided for every descendant of Adam.⁷¹

The same teaching constituted the essence of their concept of the gospel call. The call of the gospel "is co-extensive with the atonement to all men," as are the "strivings of the Spirit." Salvation, therefore, is "rendered possible to all." If anyone fails to be saved, "the fault is wholly his own."⁷²

The framers of the *New Hampshire Confession* were justifiably eager for people to understand and see it fully and unequivocally stated that Calvinism was not a mechanically fatalistic system but rather took full cognizance of the moral nature of man, the duties incumbent upon him as a result of that moral nature, and the relationship of the gospel to these duties. The article on the fall of man sets the theological stage for this progression:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 370.

⁷¹ Ibid., 371.

⁷² Ibid., 373.

We believe that man was created in a state of holiness under the law of his Maker; but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint but choice, being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, wholly given to the gratification of the world, of Satan, and of their own sinful passions, therefore, under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse.⁷³

Sin is willful, condemnation is just, and all men (with or without the provision of salvation) are without defense or excuse. Man's full duty to God is in no sense abrogated by the appearance of grace.

Article VI, "Of the Freeness of Salvation," outlines the way in which man's depravity relates to the free and open preaching of the gospel:

We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial, penitent, and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own inherent depravity and voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which refusal will subject him to an aggravated condemnation.⁷⁴

Calvinism in no way eliminates man's responsibility for believing all that God says; its affirmation of depravity and the necessity for divine initiative are not made at the cost of man's full duty to God. The harmony between the law and the gospel demonstrates this truth, for the law "is holy, just, and good; and ... the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts, arises entirely from their love of sin."⁷⁵ In regeneration, the Holy Spirit works in such a way as to "secure our voluntary obedience to the Gospel."⁷⁶ In addition, "repentance and faith are sacred duties," but the fact that they are duties in no way diminishes the reality that they are "also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God."⁷⁷ The fact that inability flows from sin doesn't eliminate the reality of the inability. Sovereign grace must reign if any of these desperate sinners are to be saved. This balance is clearly expressed in the article "Of God's Purpose of Grace."

We believe that Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which he graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that be-

⁷³ Ibid., 362.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 363.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 365.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 364.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

ing perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end; that it is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy, and unchangeable; that it utterly excludes boasting, and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of his free mercy; that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree; that it is ascertained by its effects in all who truly believe the gospel; that it is the foundation of Christian assurance; and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves, demands and deserves our utmost diligence.⁷⁸

This same concern for the proper relation between the divine and the human aspects of salvation informs the article "Of the Perseverance of Saints." The Free Will Baptists warned believers to "watch and pray lest they make shipwreck of their faith and be lost."⁷⁹ Although grace will help them, the believers' infirmities and temptations may be so strong that "their future obedience and final salvation are neither determined nor certain."⁸⁰ The Calvinistic Baptists were no less solicitous of watchfulness, but they were determined to attribute the watchfulness and perseverance to the faithfulness of God to his people. If indeed one has experienced God's sovereign goodness in regeneration, it will certainly be evidenced in a new affection directed toward the things of God. Its source and continuance are not dependent on the strength of the human will but rather on the power of God:

We believe that such only are real believers as endure to the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from mere professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.⁸¹

Rather than interpreting the *New Hampshire Confession* as a gradual retreat from the Calvinism of former days, it is better to see it as an affirmation of the Calvinist position on the particular issues raised by the presence and growth of Free Will Baptists in New England. The Calvinists did not jettison their distinguishing tenets but rather were saying, "We have a defensible and biblical understanding of the relation of man's will and duty to the doctrines of God's sovereignty." The activities and leaders of American Baptists of the North harmonize well with the leading

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 374.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 365.

features of this confession. Chapter four enfleshes these concepts in the ministries of Isaac Backus, John Leland, Luther Rice, Adoniram Judson, Francis Wayland, and David Benedict. Baptists in the South still preferred the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* but felt no theological division from their Northern brethren.

The last half of the nineteenth century saw an almost imperceptible and very gradual alienation from thoroughgoing Calvinism on the part of Baptists in the North who separated in 1845 from their Southern counterparts. David Benedict (chapter four) feared that such would happen if trends he noticed in 1860 continued. By the time of A. H. Strong (chapter eight), the forces of biblical criticism and evolution (both biological and ideological) were so pervasive and compelling that schools and theologians in the North found no way to combat them. Strong's attempt to incorporate them into a defense of orthodoxy, though brilliant at times and valiant always, failed to convince his contemporaries and surrendered too much ground in the process. Both of these changes—the loss of Calvinism and the intrusion of liberalism—expressed themselves in the unions and divisions that were to characterize Northern Baptist life in the twentieth century.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRENDS

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Free Will Baptists—from whom Northern Baptists had remained distinct confessionally and organizationally during the nineteenth century—saw very little difference between themselves and their Northern contemporaries. Northern Baptists had adopted a convention structure for their various societies in 1907 and became officially denominated the Northern Baptist Convention. In 1911 the Free Will Baptists merged with the larger body of Baptists in the North, giving visual and organizational demonstration of the demise of the once-strong Calvinism of that denomination. No such merger was possible with the Free Will Baptists in the South, since the Calvinism of Southern Baptists was still vigorous.

The intrusion of liberalism caused several schisms from the Northern body. The temporary appearance of the Fundamental Fellowship in 1921 eventually produced the Conservative Baptist Association in 1947. The General Association of Regular Baptists was formed from conservative churches that withdrew from the Northern Baptist Convention in 1933. They adopted the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, with a premillennial interpretation of the last article. In 1923 the Baptist Bible Union of America, led by T. T. Shields, was formed. It reached its height in 1928

and eventually disintegrated. This group's confession was very similar to the *New Hampshire Confession*, with phrases added to speak directly to the doctrines affected by the liberalism of the day. Other groups registered protests against the liberalism of the Northern Baptist Convention.

It is significant that none of these groups was formed to protect doctrines strictly Calvinistic, although the *New Hampshire Confession* had a large influence upon all of them. The main sources of division concerned the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the eternity of the punishment of the unbeliever, and to some extent, the nature of the second coming of Christ. Individual Calvinists and Calvinistic churches have arisen in these groups. Some churches influenced by T. T. Shields hold these tenets. Liberty Baptist Seminary, the present hub of Baptist fundamentalism, has been criticized by the *Sword of the Lord* for allowing Calvinists a place of influence on the faculty. None were self-consciously Calvinistic in their origins, however, but were more concerned for separatistic purity and fundamental conservatism. Nevertheless, their forebears were strictly and joyfully Calvinistic, since their origin rested in Northern Baptist life, and at certain points along the way they have received some numbers and support from fundamentalists separating from Southern Baptists.

When the complex sectional factors of the mid-nineteenth century prompted the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, the desire for unfettered involvement in worldwide missions was at the heart of the separation. Calvinistic theology formed the basis for the mission program. Books and sermons defending the doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election, certain and effectual atonement, effectual calling, and perseverance of the saints abound from these early leaders. Chapters five and six demonstrate this by discussing the contributions of W. B. Johnson, R. B. C. Howell, Richard Fuller, Jesse Mercer, John L. Dagg, P. H. Mell, Basil Manly, Sr., Basil Manly, Jr., J. P. Boyce, and John A. Broadus. Within that list of names we find the presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention for the first approximately fifty years of its existence, the first educators in both college and seminary circles, and the first theological writers of Southern Baptist life. These doctrinal formulations not only represented the commitment of the elite but were strongly felt in churches and associations. For example, the founding documents of the Mississippi Baptist Association, consisting of the greatest portions of the present states of Mississippi and Louisiana, included a Confession of Faith in which the doctrines of grace are quite prominent and painfully clear:

3. We believe in the fall of Adam and impartation of his head (sin) to all his posterity; in the total depravity of the human nature and man's inability to restore himself to the favor of God.

4. We believe in the everlasting love of God to His people and the eternal unconditional election of a definite number of the human family to grace and glory.
5. We believe that sinners are only justified in the sight of God by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is unto all and upon all them that believe.
6. We believe all those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world are in time effectually called, regenerated, converted, and sanctified and are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.
7. We believe there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who by the satisfaction which he made to the law and justice “in becoming an offering for sin” hath, by His most precious blood, redeemed the elect from under the curse of the law: that they might be holy and without blame before Him in love.⁸²

This consensus in the doctrines of grace was perpetuated in Southern Baptist life through the second decade of the present century. Chapters eight and nine seek to establish this by examining the thought of F. H. Kerfoot, E. C. Dargan, J. B. Gambrell, J. B. Tidwell, and B. H. Carroll. These men were leaders as heads of agencies in the Southern Baptist community, editors of denominational papers, educators, and writers. In 1905 F. H. Kerfoot could still say, “Nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the ‘doctrines of grace.’”

This virtually unanimous belief disintegrated along the way. Among several contributing factors, most prominent from a content standpoint, were the theological methodology of E. Y. Mullins and the evangelistic methodology of L. R. Scarborough, presidents of Southern Seminary and Southwestern Seminary respectively. (This phenomenon is discussed in chapter nine.) Vestiges of the old doctrines still remained in places, as in the teaching and writing of W. T. Conner, of Southwestern Seminary (especially on the doctrine of election) and in the faithful ministry of J. B. Tidwell at Baylor University (chapter seven). With ever-increasing rapidity, however, concerns focused more and more on denominational programs that minimized and streamlined doctrinal materials. The doctrines were first ignored till they passed from the scene—and finally were either opposed openly as destructive of true piety and mission zeal or discussed as some idiosyncrasy of the past, to be recoiled from with great horror.

⁸² Albert E. Casey, comp., *Arnite County, Mississippi, 1699–1865*, 2 vols. (n.p., 1950), 128, 129.

Crises related to biblical authority, the necessity of the atonement, and the uniqueness of Christianity as the way to God have come to Southern Baptists only because the doctrines of God's sovereignty were first jettisoned from their proper place as the fountainhead from which all other doctrines receive their coherence. Some of these issues are touched upon in the theological chapters (ten through thirteen). Southern Baptists can only expect further theological fragmentation unless God in his mercy grants a Reformation comparable to that which occurred in sixteenth-century Europe.

It is the prayer of this author that this denomination, which has all the trappings of greatness, may escape the solemn reality graphically pictured in our Lord's description of some in His day: whitewashed sepulchers, clean and bright on the outside—but inside full of dead men's bones.