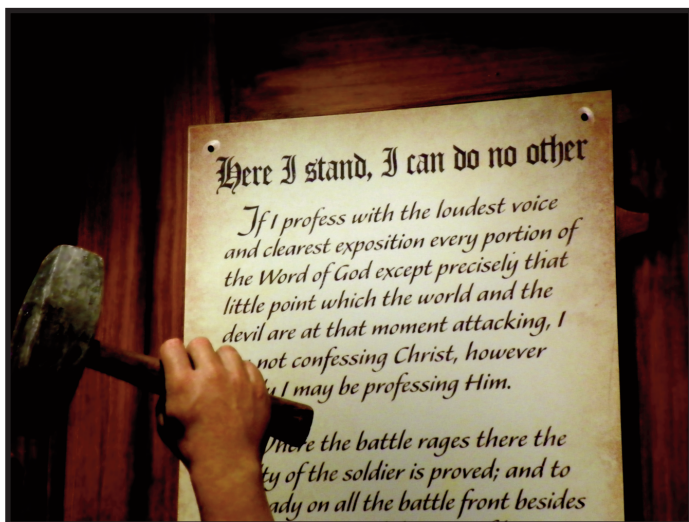


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# The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage

Florida Baptist Historical Society



*The Protestant Reformation –  
500 Years Later*

*The Journal of  
Florida Baptist Heritage  
Volume 19, 2017*

**Published by the  
FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**Cover Illustration: Martin Luther nailing his  
95 Theses to the door of the Catholic Church  
at the Saxon capital of Wittenberg Castle  
October 31, 1517**

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# Contents

## PREFACE

### *The Protestant Reformation 500 Years Later*

October 31, 2017, marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the reformation of the Christian church. The Protestant Reformation was symbolically started by Martin Luther posting on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church a declaration of *Ninety-five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*. The Roman Catholic Church condemned these propositions as being “heretical.”

Yet the theses that Luther proposed had evolved from his own spiritual struggles which led to his careful and intense study of the Scriptures. It was through this intense immersion into the Scriptures that brought a discovery of God’s grace and a revolution in Luther’s thinking. The Scriptures provided a rediscovery of certain biblical truths that for centuries had been forgotten or ignored by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy.

These biblical principles included the propositions of: *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone); *sola fide* (faith alone); *sola gratia* (grace alone); and *solī Deo gloria* (glory to God alone). And although Baptists were not a part of the Reformation movement, those rediscovered Biblical truths of 500 years ago, serve as the basis for the faith and practice of Florida Southern Baptists which are explored in this issue of the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*.



**This granite wall, with the foundation question quoted from Joshua 4:6, “what mean these stones?”, features the five “sola” principles that serve as the basis of the ministry for the First Baptist Church of Sweetwater, Longwood, Florida.**



## THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION — 500 YEARS LATER: AN OVERVIEW

***Donald S. Hepburn***

*Acting Secretary-Treasurer*

*Florida Baptist Historical Society*

### **Introduction to the Overview**

On October 31, 2017, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation will occur.

The central figure who most often is credited with setting the stage for this historic event was an Augustinian monk and university Biblical theology professor in Wittenburg, capital of Saxony, (an eastern territory of Germany), named Martin Luther (1483 – 1546). At the time that Luther posted his *95 Theses* on the church door at Wittenburg, Luther was merely announcing points of consideration for a planned academic dialog/debate to be held later within the confines of a university lecture hall. The main focuses of Luther's concerns were abuses of papal authority and the corrupt indulgence practices occurring within the Roman Catholic Church (hereinafter referred to as the Church). These so-called "heretical" ideas Luther proposed had evolved from his own spiritual struggles which led to his careful study of the Scriptures. Subsequently Luther translated and published the first Bible in the German vernacular language. It was through this intense immersion into the Scriptures that brought a discovery of God's grace and a revolution in Luther's thinking. The Scriptures provided a rediscovery of certain biblical truths that for centuries had been forgotten or ignored by the Church hierarchy. These biblical principles included the propositions of: *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone); *sola fide* (faith alone); *sola gratia* (grace alone); and *solī Deo gloria* (glory to

God alone). Those five propositions are further addressed by separate articles included in this issue of the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*.

**“For therein is the  
righteousness of  
God revealed from  
faith to faith: as it is  
written, the just  
shall live by faith.”  
– Romans 1:17**

Martin Luther, who has been characterized by Timothy George as “the seminal theological genius of the entire Reformation,”<sup>1</sup> was not the singular force behind the sixteenth century Reformation.

There were others persons – some who preceded him and others who were contemporaries – whose views and actions challenged the then prevailing practices and authority of the Church. Additionally there were non-religious factors – cultural, social, political, and economic, among others – that felt the ripple effects of the Protestant Reformation, which according to some scholars, existed from 1517 to 1648.<sup>2</sup> The religious revolution that began in Germany spread to Switzerland, France, throughout Europe and England. Space limitations for this narrative will not permit addressing those people and events.

### **Baptists Are Not Protestants**

Before delving into some aspects of the Protestant Reformation, it is important that a clarifying consideration be stated about Baptists and the Protestant Reformation. Most Baptist historians make the clear distinction that the modern Baptist movement was not birthed directly from the European Reformation. Out of that sixteenth century upheaval developed the Reformed Church traditions known as Lutherans, Presbyterians and the Anglicans – the so-called Protestants. Since the nineteenth century, many Baptist preachers have repeated, without giving credit to, C.H. Spurgeon’s (1834 – 1892) sermon declaration that Baptists are not Protestants.<sup>3</sup> However the exact origins of the Baptist movement have been classified into several generally accepted

theories.<sup>4</sup> One of the earliest propositions developed and promoted between the 1730s and 1920s, could be characterized as the secessionist theory. That proposition contended that Baptists could be traced all the way back to the times of Jesus and directly to the actions of John the Baptist. Among the most prominent advocates of that view were J. R. Graves (1823 – 1893), founder of the Landmark movement, and J.M. Carroll (1852 – 1931) who developed an illustrated history timeline chart called the “The Trail of Blood.”

A related theory on Baptist origins is called spiritual kinship. This viewpoint proposes that there is a spiritual kinship in continuity from the times of the sixteenth century Anabaptist sects which practiced regenerate believer’s baptism. Proponents of this view were Southwestern Seminary co-founder Albert H. Newman (1832 – 1933) and Baptist historian Thomas Armitage (1819 – 1896).<sup>5</sup> A subsequently stronger case was made that the Anabaptists were the progenitors of modern Baptists, particularly through their indirect influence upon English Separate Baptists. This well-documented view was defined by Southwestern Seminary professor William R. Estep (1920 – 2000), whose third edition of *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to 16th-Century Anabaptism* highlights the most recent scholarly research and documentation on the subject.

Finally, the English Separatist descent theory posits that Baptists began with certain sixteenth century English Separatists, who by Scripture study, practiced congregational church government and performed believers’ baptism by immersion. A widely diverse group of Baptist historians hold this viewpoint with some variations. Former Southwestern Seminary church history professor H. Leon McBeth (1931 – 2013) summarized this viewpoint by noting, “Our best historical evidence says that Baptists came into existence in England in the early seventeenth century. They apparently emerged out of the Puritan-Separatist movement in the Church of England. Some of these earnest

people read the Bible in their own language, believed it, and sought to live by it. They formed separate congregations which accepted only believers into their membership, and they baptized converts upon their profession of faith. Their opponents nicknamed them ‘Baptists,’ and the name stuck.”<sup>6</sup>

So how did the name of Protestant come about? The starting point began in 1520 when Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther for his publicly stated and written views on Scripture. Luther said that Scripture neither supported the supreme authority of the pope nor the prevailing corrupt papal practices, particularly the sale of indulgences. He further stated that salvation came by faith alone and not Church doctrine. Subsequently the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1521 issued an edict in the city of Worms that sought to rid Germany of Lutherans (those who followed Luther’s teachings) and “condemned Luther, his writings and all who supported him.”<sup>7</sup> The Edict declared Luther as a “notorious heretic” who was “guilty of high treason.”<sup>8</sup> During the 1526 Diet of Speyer (a quasi-governmental/religious territorial legislative council) suspended the Edict of Worms by approving a temporary Edict of Toleration. Three years later, during the 1529 Diet of Speyer, leaders sought to more forcibly reign in the permissive attitudes toward non-Catholics, particularly the followers of Luther – the so-called evangelicals – and the Anabaptists all of whom were practicing a non-Catholic, but Biblically-based faith. The Diet agreed to reinstate the previous Edict of Worms. Delegates representing “six Lutheran princes and 14 south German cities declared their right to answer to God alone”<sup>9</sup> signed a ‘Protestatio,’ against the diet’s decision. Their action created a new proper noun – Protestant – and a new political identity.<sup>10</sup>

### **Scripture Inspired Early Reformers**

Doubtless the reformers who took up the charge against the theology and practices of the Church were students of the Scripture who came to see the light. As a result of their desire to

share the Scriptures with the common people they set about translating the Scriptures in the common language. Combined with the newly developing technology of the printing press, the spread of the Scriptures as well as the writings of the Reformers came to have an energizing effect upon the Reformation movement. However, for those pioneer reformers, they needed an understanding of Latin that was the language used in the Vulgate, which had limited availability since 400 A.D. That translation was the work of an early Christian monk – Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, also known as Jerome (345 – 420) – who worked 23 years studying the original Hebrew texts, the Septuagint and Greek New Testament manuscripts, to produce the common language Latin translation. The Vulgate was the standard Bible “Christians used for more than 1,000 years, and in 1546 the Council of Trent declared it the only authentic Latin text of the Scriptures. Sadly, the text of the Vulgate that circulated throughout the Middle Ages was a corrupt form of Jerome's work, encumbered by copyists' errors.”<sup>11</sup>

Nearly a thousand years later, a Dutch Catholic theologian Desiderous Erasmus (c. 1466 – 1536) in 1512 began translating the Scriptures into Greek and Latin using Byzantine sources. His Greek Latin New Testament – which included the Greek text along with his revised Latin translation of Jerome's Vulgate – was completed in 1516. Erasmus subsequently twice revised his translations in 1520 and 1522.<sup>12</sup> Erasmus' translation efforts created an enlightened scriptural understanding that resulted in him becoming “an early and vociferous critic of the excesses of the Roman Church in the Middle Ages”<sup>13</sup> Although he kept his criticisms within the clerical community, through the spoken and written word, he critically challenged: the sale of indulgences; the Church's wealth and corruption; the nepotism of the papacy; and various Catholic practices he called, “superstitions,” including the practices of veneration of the saints, relics, shrines and miracles. He also was an early advocate of adult baptism by immersion.<sup>14</sup> In 1544, twelve years after his death, he was



excommunicated for many of his satirical writings which the Church deemed as “prohibited” and “objectionable.”<sup>15</sup>

The translations by Jerome and Erasmus served as source material for John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, William Tyndale and the later Geneva Bible translators, among others. Subsequent translation efforts resulted in more accurate versions of the Scriptures which were produced in the languages of the common people. Such specialty translations – English, German and French – presented a frightening challenge to the authority of the Church. A fourteenth century church historian Henry Knighton complained, that the Bible was now “more open to laity, and even to women who were able to read...”<sup>16</sup> Editors of *Christianity Today*, credited the emerging use of the printing press that expedited the availability of the language-specific translations. “Everything the Reformers said about the priesthood of all believers was rooted in the assumption that people could have access to the Bible in their own language. Thus, Luther and the other Reformers worked to translate the Scriptures so that no priest, pope, or council needed to stand between the plowboy and the Word of God.”<sup>17</sup>

### **John Wycliffe: A Reformation Forerunner**

A forerunner of the European Reformation was English parish rector John Wycliffe (1330 – 1384), who was assisted by John Purvey, to produce the first translation of the whole Bible into English. His objective was to make what he called “the law of God” available to every person who could read. Wycliffe, although an Oxford-trained Catholic theologian, in his study of the Vulgate, realized that some Catholic dogma and practices were idolatrous and unscriptural. His initial target was the Catholic view on transubstantiation, which contended the bread and wine used in the Eucharist changed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Wycliffe determined the Scriptures did not support that doctrine. A similar conclusion would be embraced by Martin Luther approximately 140-years later when he publicly

challenged the identical Church teaching. Wycliffe expanded his tirades against other church dogma and corrupt practices of the clergy, which he viewed to be sins against God's word.<sup>18</sup> In response Pope Gregory XI demanded Wycliffe's arrest by issuing five declarations of heresy (called papal bulls) which specified 18 counts that charged Wycliffe as "the master of errors."<sup>19</sup> Before he could be arrested and convicted of heresy, Wycliffe died in 1384 while working to complete his translation of the Bible. His co-laborer John Purvey subsequently completed, published and distributed the English translation.<sup>20</sup>

### **William Tyndale: An English Fugitive**

William Tyndale (c. 1492 – 1536) was another English Catholic theologian who had been trained at Oxford. Although ordained into the priesthood, Tyndale served as a chaplain and private tutor to the John Walsh family who lived near Tyndale's Gloucestershire, England, home. When he was not teaching, Tyndale engaged area clergy and educated laity in debates over church dogma. Not having an assigned parish, Tyndale became an itinerant preacher – in public parks and along the roadsides – offering forceful and passionate sermons spoken in English that were drawn from Scripture passages he read from the Latin Vulgate. "His ideas about salvation and the church often shocked and angered other Catholic clergy in the Gloucestershire area."<sup>21</sup> About this same time Tyndale translated from Latin into English Desiderius Erasmus' book titled, *The Christian Soldier's Handbook*, which "stressed that the great Christian weapons are prayer and knowledge of the Scriptures, especially the New Testament."<sup>22</sup> In that book Erasmus also "was critical of what he believed to be greed and false beliefs within the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>23</sup> This book only reinforced what Tyndale had concluded from his study, translating and preaching from the Scriptures.

Subsequently in 1523, area clergy and scholars secretly brought heresy charges and asked Chancellor John Bell, the administrator

of the diocese, to render a decision on Tyndale's orthodoxy. Although his secret accusers would not offer public testimony against Tyndale, Bell did question Tyndale on his public statements. Tyndale responded that he was only proclaiming New Testament truth. With no witnesses to speak against Tyndale, Bell released him with a stern warning. Unfortunately the evolving turmoil caused by the public statements and actions of Martin Luther – including his public burning of a papal directive demanding him to respond to heresy charges – which had been widely reported in England, came to engender further suspicion upon Tyndale.<sup>24</sup> Amid growing threats and fearing for his personal safety, Tyndale decided to relocate to London. He had hoped to translate the Bible into English upon securing permission from Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall. Denied permission, Tyndale was “furious that the bishop would deny the citizens of England a chance to read about salvation for themselves in the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately the earlier heresy charges which had followed Tyndale to London were further exposed by his public protestations against Tunstall and the Church hierarchy. This placed Tyndale in the crosshairs of the political and ecclesiastical authorities, particularly the Archbishop of York Thomas Wosley (c.1475-1530) who had been empowered by both the English Crown and the Church to rid the country of heretical practices, teaching and publications. Tyndale sailed for Hamburg in April, 1524. But as a fugitive from ecclesiastical warrants for his arrest, Tyndale had to operate in “obscurity,” even to the point of disguising “his true identity.”<sup>26</sup> During his first four months in a temporary residence, Tyndale studied the German language so that he could fully utilize Luther's 1521 New Testament translation. His other resources were Erasmus' Greek New Testament and the Latin Vulgate.<sup>27</sup> Tyndale's edition was the first English New Testament translated from the Greek, as contrasted to Wycliffe's English translation that was drawn from the Latin Vulgate.<sup>28</sup>

Printing of Tyndale's translation began in Cologne, Germany, in 1525, but when the Catholic city authorities learned that the English Bibles were being printed they raided the printer's shop. Having been warned in advance, Tyndale fled to Worms, where two complete editions were published in 1525. Copies were smuggled into England where they were at once outlawed,<sup>29</sup> but through an underground network of believers, Tyndale's translations were widely distributed and read both privately and corporately by Christians. With the help of fellow religious fugitive Franciscan monk William Roye, Tyndale began work on the Old Testament. The Pentateuch was issued in Marburg in 1530, with each of the five books being separately published and circulated.<sup>30</sup> Tyndale's Bible version was significant for its contribution to the English language through Tyndale's use of prose that "flowed in a pleasant, rhythmical way" and the use of phrases that were "unforgettable to many people."<sup>31</sup> Another chronicler noted that Tyndale's complete Scripture translation formed "the basis of almost all other English translations for the next 400 years."<sup>32</sup>

It was a 12-year endeavor evading Church authorities by maintaining a low public profile and moving secretly throughout parts of Europe. All the while Tyndale continued to publish his challenges against Church dogma and practice, which included prolific "polemical and doctrinal treatises" as well as "sermons, letters, and liturgical writings."<sup>33</sup> Finally he was tracked down and arrested May 21, 1535, in Antwerp, Belgium. While imprisoned, Catholic authorities attempted repeatedly, to no avail, to get Tyndale to recant all his anti-Catholic views. After 17 months of interrogations and having been declared guilty of heresy, on October 6, 1536, Tyndale was removed from his prison cell, taken to a public square where he was tied to a pole, strangled and his body burned.<sup>34</sup>

### **Martin Luther: Standing on God's Word**

In the introduction of this article, it was noted that Martin Luther

was not a singular force behind the Reformation, although a significant voice and reformer. “Far from seeking to found a new sect, Luther always saw himself as a faithful and obedient servant of the church,” who as early as 1522 sought to “deflate an already burgeoning ‘personality cult,’ and direct attention to the source of the reformer’s” understanding of the Word of God.<sup>35</sup> Years after his ideas had been embraced by many, Martin Brecht observed, “In contrast to others – Zwingli for example, and later Calvin – Luther obviously did not undertake a systematic expansion of the Reformation. He encouraged, supported or admonished wherever he was approached or when he considered it necessary. In general, he let things run their own course, trusting in the power of God’s Word to triumph.”<sup>36</sup>

The second son of eight children born to Hans and Margarethe Luther, Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483. His family was financially modest, due to Hans Luther’s self-disciplined work ethic to pull himself up the economic ladder from being a miner to owning a stake in a mining enterprise.<sup>37</sup> These economic resources made it possible for Martin to attend private tutorial schools during his adolescent and teenage years. Following his father’s encouragement Luther set out to study philosophy at the



University of Erfurt where he completed a baccalaureate degree in 1502 and a master’s degree in 1505, which qualified him to enter law school in May, 1505.<sup>38</sup> But by July, Luther had

**Augustinian monk Martin Luther, who questioned the Roman Catholic Church on unscriptural practices and dogma, when challenged in a public debate on charges of “erroneous, false, presumptuous, and heretical beliefs,” responded by saying, “my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”**

University of Erfurt where he completed a baccalaureate degree in 1502 and a master’s degree in 1505, which qualified him to enter law school in May, 1505.<sup>38</sup> But by July, Luther had

undergone a radical change in career pursuit with his announcement to friends that he was entering the St. Augustine monastery to prepare for the priesthood. There had been several recent encounters with death, including a bolt of lightning that struck nearby him, that may have affected Luther's vocational decision. One scholar noted that Luther likely, "was oppressed with an acute sense of mortality" which may have been coupled with his "own relationship with God, questioning if his good works were sufficient to merit salvation."<sup>39</sup>

With the same commitment by which he had pursued his university studies, "Luther was an extraordinarily conscientious monk, praying, fasting, begging, flagellating, confessing, outdoing himself and others in his attempt to lead a righteous life."<sup>40</sup> According to Hans Hillerbrand, "Despite his utterly conscientious exercise of his religious vocation as a monk, brutal self-analysis confronted him with the realization that he was nothing but a sinner, deserving to be eternally damned by God's righteousness."<sup>41</sup> Fortunately, Luther acknowledged that, "by the mercy of God, meditating day and night,"<sup>42</sup> it was Scripture that revealed the meaning of righteousness. This life changing understanding was found in Romans (1:17) that declares, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith."<sup>43</sup>

Luther was ordained into the priesthood in 1507 and began in earnest theological studies initially at Erfurt. However, through an academic acquaintance, Luther was appointed as a lecturer of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg, where he could simultaneously study and teach, "performing a dual role that was typical of the medieval system of education."<sup>44</sup> Luther spent the remainder of his life teaching biblical theology at Wittenberg. It was during the period of teaching and tutorial studies that the University faculty recognized the young student's academic excellence, which led to the conferring of a doctor of theology upon Luther in 1512. This doctorate designation afforded Luther



**About noon on October 31, 1517, Luther posted on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church – that served as the bulletin board of public events – his *Ninety-five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences***

“the authority and competence to teach before his ecclesiastical superiorities” including the pope. Between 1517 and 1521, when embroiled in the conflicts over Church and papal practices, and seeking to add legitimacy to his theological views, Luther often reminded his distractors that he was a “sworn doctor of Holy Scriptures.”<sup>45</sup>

As the next several years ensued, Luther continued his intense study of Scripture as he performed his professorial duties that utilized the Socratic teaching method of

debating suppositions to enhance critical thinking. “The conventional method of initiating academic debate within the theology faculty was to post theses in advance.”<sup>46</sup> About noon on October 31, 1517, Luther posted on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church – that served as the bulletin board of public events – his *Ninety-five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*.<sup>47</sup> In the preamble Luther, citing a “zeal for truth”<sup>48</sup> and the need to expose the practice of indulgences,<sup>49</sup> invited anyone who desired to debate the topic to be present or to send letters of response.<sup>50</sup> Of those academics present at the debate, no one challenged Luther’s propositions. Luther’s consternation toward indulgences was caused by Pope Leo X’s plenary indulgence issued March 31, 1515 – that offered pardon



for practically every sin – to generate income that “was intended to finance the building of the new St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.”<sup>51</sup> However, apart from questioning certain Church practices, the significance of those *95 Theses*, although seemingly radical, yet Biblically-based, included five Luther-defined propositions that came to reinforce the most fundamental and significant aspects of the Christian faith: sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), solus Christus (Christ alone); sola fide (faith alone); sola gratia (grace alone); and soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone).

**“The church, far from having priority over scripture, is really the creation of scripture.”**

As a dutiful priest-professor and as a professional courtesy, Luther sent copies of the *95 Theses* to the bishop and archbishop of Brandenburg. Initially there was no reaction by the church hierarchy until a letter of complaint was received by Archbishop Albert of Brandenburg that reported printed copies of the *95 Theses* were being distributed and sold in several cities, including Nuremberg, Leipzig and Basel.<sup>52</sup> Concurrently, information about the *95 Theses* made its way to Rome and by February, 1518. Pope Leo X had the theses reviewed. The pope summoned Luther to come to Rome within 60 days to answer charges that his *95 Theses* were “erroneous, false, presumptuous, or heretical.”<sup>53</sup>

Due to political upheaval in Europe and the pope’s need to endear himself to certain regional princes – too lengthy to recount in this space – Luther was granted an opportunity to answer the heresy charges in a debate between Luther and the highly respected theologian Johannes Eck (1486 – 1543) that was held in Leipzig for 18 days in July, 1519. This event proved to be Luther’s “decisive break from the Church of Rome,”<sup>54</sup> as he clearly defended his principle of *sola scriptura*. That proposition emphasized that “the church, far from having priority over Scripture, is really the creation of Scripture.”<sup>55</sup>



Although Eck succeeded in convincing the debate audience of Luther's heretical tendencies, Luther's use of Scripture continued to raise doubts on the Church's orthodoxy.

"During the years 1519 – 1521 Luther experienced a burst of enormous creativity as tracts and treatises, religious and devotional pieces, sermons, commentaries and polemics poured from his mind and pen."<sup>56</sup> As an example, in 1520 Luther produced three significant pamphlets that once printed became widely circulated.<sup>57</sup> The topics ranged from the priesthood of the Christian believers to calling upon the governments of Europe to reform the church. Although the publications contributed to Luther's growing notoriety, by the end of the year Pope Leo X issued a directive to excommunicate Luther and ordered his arrest. Undaunted Luther publicly burned the papal (bull) directive.

The following year, 1521, (as previously referenced) the Diet of Worms, convened by Charles V the Holy Roman Emperor, held hearings to consider the charges of heresy and accorded Luther the opportunity to defend his writings and public statements. Despite his scripturally based defense, Luther was ordered to recant and confess the error of his writings. In response Luther reportedly said, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Although it is more likely he said, "my conscience is captive to the Word of God."<sup>58</sup> As noted earlier in this article, Luther was declared a "notorious heretic" and "guilty of high treason." Fortunately, a regional prince, Frederick the Wise, arranged for Luther to secretly escape to Wartburg Castle in an attempt to prevent Luther's arrest and avoid the death penalty ordered by Charles V.

During that period of sanctuary – May 1521 to March, 1522 – Luther struggled against the forces he perceived to be the Devil who brought on "doubts, depression, confusion and insomnia." In his isolation Luther found he could confound the Devil with God's Word which he set about to translate from Erasmus' Greek

New Testament into German, which he completed in eleven weeks.<sup>59</sup> Luther's translation of the New Testament, once it was printed and distributed, became known as the September Bible in recognition of when it was released. Not only was it significant that this translation had been written in vernacular German, it also contained multiple "explanatory notes in which Luther formulated his hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of Scripture."<sup>60</sup> Translating the "Old Testament would occupy him for the rest of his life."<sup>61</sup>

A decade after issuing his *95 Theses* (1527) Luther was still defending his theological positions not only against the Church hierarchy but the civil authorities, including the monarchy. Luther continually stressed that discontinuing his teachings was not an option. "My doctrine is the main thing; with it I defy princes and kings, but also every devil." Luther was not intimidated by these adversaries because he believed, "Over against God and His Word, even those who were powerful were nothing but dust... He regarded the whole world as his enemy, and he knew that with God behind him, he was strong enough."<sup>62</sup> Perhaps as his own personal anthem to that belief, Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," which was among the 36 hymns he composed.

On February 18, 1546, having escaped the penalties of being declared a "notorious heretic," Martin Luther died in his hometown of Eisleben having suffered heart failure at age 62. Written on a piece of paper found on his desk, after his death, was a brief narrative that concluded, "We are beggars; this is true."<sup>63</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, 2013), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation, 1517-1559*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985), 4 – 5.

<sup>3</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 7*, (1861), (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, Reprinted 1974), 225. In a sermon, 22 *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage, Volume 19, 2017*

Spurgeon stated, “We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it.”

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (1st ed. rev.; Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1963), 18 – 21. In his first edition on p. 59, Torbet used the title “Jerusalem-Jordan-John” theory instead of “secessionist” theory. American Baptist Torbet’s classification of the “Anabaptist kinship” theory had been earlier characterized by Southern Baptist W.W. Barnes as a “spiritual succession” theory. See W.W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: 1845-1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 100-103.

<sup>5</sup> See Albert H. Newman, *A History of Antipedobaptism* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), chaps. 2-3; and Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists: Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices, from the Time of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* (New York: Bryan Taylor and Co., 1887), 2-12.

<sup>6</sup> Leon McBeth, “Baptist Beginnings,” <http://www.baptisthistory.org/baptist-origins/baptistbeginnings.html>; accessed 5/3/2017.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Reformation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.crivoice.org/creededictworms.html>; accessed 5/7/2017. Also see <http://www.thereformation.info/Protest%20at%20Speyers.htm>; accessed 5/7/2017.

<sup>9</sup> Spitz, 114.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, 23.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/jerome.html>; accessed 5/3/2017.

<sup>12</sup> Robert C. Jones, *The 25 Most Influential People in the Protestant Reformation*, (Kennesaw, GA: no publisher, 2014), 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>15</sup> <http://reformation500.csl.edu/bio/erasmus/>; accessed 5/6/2017.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Moynahan, *William Tyndale: If God Spare My Life*, (London: 2nd ed. Abacus Books, 2003), xx.

<sup>17</sup> “1456 Gutenberg Produces the First Printed Bible,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/1456-gutenberg-produces-first-printed-bible.html>; accessed 5/3/2017.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Wycliffe>; accessed 5/3/2017

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html>; accessed 5/3/2017

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>21</sup> Fran Rees, William Tyndale: *Bible Translator and Martyr*, (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2006), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Moynahan, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Rees, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy George, p. 332, notes, “Luther’s writings had been brought to England as early as 1518 and were publicly burned at London and Cambridge in 1521.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy George, 331.

<sup>27</sup> Moynahan, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Jones, 121.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/Later-and-modern-versions-English#ref597432>; accessed 5/6/2017.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rees, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, 122.

<sup>33</sup> George, 344.

<sup>34</sup> Rees, 85.

<sup>35</sup> George, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road of Reformation, 1483 – 1521*, James L. Schaaf, translator, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 346.

<sup>37</sup> Spitz, 59 – 60.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Protestant Reformation*, (New York: Harper-Perennial, 2009), 61 Ibid., 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>43</sup> Romans 1:17.

<sup>44</sup> Brecht, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>46</sup> Marshall, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Spitz, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Hillerbrand, 66.

<sup>49</sup> Marshall, p. 15, explains that as a part of the sacrament of penance, indulgences were a means by which a contrite sinner could reduce “punishment due in purgatory in exchange for performance of a good work.” Martin Brecht, p. 177, further explains that indulgences “would consist of praying, making pilgrimages, giving alms or making payments.”

<sup>50</sup> Hillerbrand, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Brecht, 178.

<sup>52</sup> Spitz, 68. Also see Hillerbrand, p. 69, who noted that while Luther's primary complaint was against the papal-sanctioned practices of indulgences, twenty-eight of the *Theses* were devoted to theology, while twelve challenged Aristotle philosophy, which had been incorporated into church dogma.

<sup>53</sup> Spitz, 69.

<sup>54</sup> George, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>56</sup> Spitz, 72.

<sup>57</sup> The three pamphlets and their suppositions included: (1) *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, that set forth the concept of the priesthood of the Christian believer and also challenged the Pope being the final authority for interpreting the Scriptures; (2) *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, that questioned the lack of scriptural support for at least four of the seven sacraments of the Church and condemned the non-scriptural practices of the Church and papacy; and (3) *A Treatise On Christian Liberty*, sometimes referred to as *On the Freedom of a Christian Man*, that argued the merits of freedom of conscience.

<sup>58</sup> Marshall, 16 – 17.

<sup>59</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *Rescuing the Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016) 88.

<sup>60</sup> Hillerbrand, 66.

<sup>61</sup> Lutzer, 88.

<sup>62</sup> Brecht, 348.

<sup>63</sup> George, 105.



Martin Luther's *Sola Scriptura* –  
**REDEFINED AS BAPTISTS'  
AFFIRMATION OF THE  
AUTHORITY OF  
SCRIPTURES**

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Once while sitting in a youth council meeting as a youth pastor of a rural Southern Baptist church, I was stating how I wasn't comfortable doing fundraisers in the church but preferred to do various work projects at people's homes and the like. When we needed money for a youth function, I could just ask the church and the church could respond. When asked why I didn't favor fundraisers, I mentioned how all four Gospels record Jesus cleansing the temple and how that might translate to us trying to make a profit in the church. One parent yelled, "Why do you have to bring the Bible into everything you do!?" The senior pastor immediately came to my defense and noted how we should always seek to live and minister by God's Word.

Of all the criticisms I've ever received (some rightly so), I have worn that one as a badge of honor. My parents, my pastors and my ministerial education instilled in me the principle of biblical authority, what Luther and the Reformers referred to as *sola Scriptura*. Baptists picked up on this fundamental belief of Protestants and affirmed it as the authority of Scripture. Because Scripture is the Word of God, Baptists modeled their lives and churches around the Bible's teachings. The goal of this article is to trace Luther's Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, show how (Southern) Baptists have affirmed this principle in their faith

and practice and note its implications on Southern Baptist doctrine in the face of contemporary Evangelical beliefs.

### **Luther on Sola Scriptura**

As the ignition switch of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther emphasized several key tenets in describing how a sinner is justified by God. While other articles in this journal address what Luther meant by being justified by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, all of these are found in the Scriptures alone – sola Scriptura. Luther believed the only authoritative source for God declaring one right with Him was the Bible. No pope or church council could ever carry the same weight as the word of God.

Luther's stance on sola Scriptura came early in the struggle for reformation. While on trial at the Diet of Worms for his writings in favor of Christian truth and contrary to what was being propagated by popes and the Roman Church, Luther exclaimed, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason – for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves – I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

**"All Scripture is breathed  
out by God and  
profitable for teaching,  
for reproof, for  
correction, and for  
training in righteousness,  
that the man of God may  
be complete, equipped  
for every good work."  
– 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

This stance was consistent with what he had written when he noted, "One thing and one thing alone is necessary for the

Christian life, righteousness, and freedom, and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ.... we may consider it certain and firmly established, that the soul can lack everything except the word of God. Without it absolutely nothing else satisfies the soul. But when the soul has the word, it is rich and needs nothing else, because the word of God is the word of life...”<sup>2</sup> Luther believed the Bible, and the Bible alone, is necessary for salvation.

A few years later, in a dispute with leading Catholic theologian Desiderius Erasmus, Luther observed how Erasmus had made a “promise to abide by the canonical Scriptures, since Luther holds himself bound by the authority of no other writer.”<sup>3</sup> Luther gladly acknowledged this claim and continued his argument with Erasmus.

**“My conscience  
is captive to the  
Word of God,”  
– Martin Luther**

While much more could be said about Luther on his beliefs in sola Scriptura, let these words suffice. It is also important to note: although Luther was the first to espouse this belief, he did not remain alone. Other reformers over the next few years and decades shared his view of sola Scriptura, including Ulrich Zwingli,<sup>4</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier,<sup>5</sup> John Calvin<sup>6</sup> and John Knox.<sup>7</sup>

### **Baptists’ Affirmation of the Authority of the Scriptures – People of the Book**

While various religious groups and denominations have claimed themselves as “people of the Book,” Baptists have sought to be “people of the Book” in all matters of faith and practice. Though some Baptist groups have wandered away from biblical authority, Southern Baptists fully affirm the authority of the Scriptures and agree with the Reformation doctrine of sola Scriptura. To prove this statement, the reader should consider what several (Southern) Baptist confessions of faith and notable (Southern) Baptist leaders have said.



**Baptist Confessions of Faith:** Thomas Helwys wrote one of the earliest Baptist confessions in 1611. In Article 23 on the Scriptures, he said, “That the Scriptures off the Old and New Testament are written for our instruction, 2 Timothy: 3:16, and that wee ought to search them for they testifie off Christ, Io. 5:39, and therefore to bee used with all reverence, as conteyning the Holie Word off GOD, which onelie is our direction in all things whatsoever.”<sup>8</sup>

*The First London Confession* (1644) states in Article VIII, “In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needfull for us to know, beleewe, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.”<sup>9</sup> A few decades later, the *Second London Confession* (1677, 1689) declared in the first article, “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience...”<sup>10</sup>

*The Orthodox Creed* (1678) comments on Article XXXVII, “The authority of the holy Scripture dependeth not upon the authority of any man, but only upon the authority of God, who hath delivered and revealed his mind therein unto us, and containeth all things necessary for salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Christian faith, or be thought requisite to salvation.... And we do believe that all people ought to... endeavor to frame their lives, according to the direction of God’s word, both in faith and practice.... And no decrees of popes, or councils, or writings of any person whatsoever, are of equal authority with the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>11</sup> These Baptist confessions of faith from the seventeenth century underscore biblical authority.

The next few centuries carried on the tradition of Scriptural

authority in Baptist life. Among the earliest American Baptist confessions, the *Philadelphia Confession* (1742) used the same language as the *Second London Confession* on the issue of biblical authority. *The Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association* (1816) declared in Article II “that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and only rule of faith and practice.”<sup>12</sup>

A couple of decades later, the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833) stated in article I, “We believe the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true centre of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.”<sup>13</sup> Very similar wording occurs in all three editions of the Southern Baptist Convention’s *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, 2000; hereafter, *BF&M*).

**Baptist Leaders:** In addition to Baptist confessions of faith, notable Baptist leaders have upheld their beliefs in biblical authority. Abraham Booth (1734-1806), an English Baptist, shared in his own confession: “The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, containing a well-attested revelation from God, my Maker and my Sovereign, I therefore look upon and receive as the only rule of my faith and practice.”<sup>14</sup>

Though some Baptist groups would eventually waver on biblical authority, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) formed in 1845 and had many leaders maintain the authority of the Scriptures. One of the earliest SBC theologians, John L. Dagg (1794-1884) observed, “to us, in these latter days, he speaks in his written word, the Bible, which is the perfect source of religious knowledge, and the infallible standard of religious truth.”<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, Basil Manly, Jr. (1825-1892), a co-founder of Southern Seminary, was the primary author of the seminary's confessional standard, the *Abstract of Principles*. Each professor who signed their names agreed to "teach in accordance with, and not contrary to" the fundamental laws of the school. Article I on the Scriptures states, "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience."<sup>16</sup> Manly also wrote *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration* (1888), in which he asserted, "The Bible is truly the Word of God, having both infallible truth and divine authority in all that it affirms or enjoins."<sup>17</sup>

James M. Pendleton (1811-1891), the primary theologian of the Landmark Baptist movement, which eventually broke away from the SBC, still held a high view on the authority of Scripture. On a message on divine inspiration, Pendleton claimed the Bible teaches people about "guilt and condemnation as sinners – the mediatorial scheme of mercy through Jesus Christ – justification by faith in his blood – regeneration by the Holy Spirit – the soul's immortality – the body's resurrection – the ultimate salvation of all the righteous – the damnation of the wicked, etc. Where, except from the Bible, can these important truths be learned?"<sup>18</sup> The obvious answer is nowhere.

J.M. Frost (1848-1916), the original director of the Baptist Sunday School Board, edited *Baptists Why and Why Not*. There he acknowledged, "We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice, and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the Word of God. We recognize at this point no room for division, either of practice or belief, or even sentiment. More and more we must come to feel as the deepest and mightiest power of our conviction that a 'thus saith the Lord' is the end of all controversy."<sup>19</sup>

E.Y. Mullins (1860-1928), who served as president of Southern Seminary (1899-1928), as well as president of the SBC (1921-1924), introduced soul competency as a defining characteristic of Baptist life. Later adherents to his doctrine would appeal to one's soul over Scriptural teaching in some cases, but that was not true of Mullins. Not only did he have significant influence on the convention adopting its first confession of faith, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (1925) – containing a clear statement of biblical authority (see above)<sup>20</sup> – Mullins also claimed the Bible is “God’s revelation of himself and is the sufficient and authoritative guide for all life.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the middle and latter portions of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists struggled over their understanding of biblical authority, especially in light of higher criticism. While a few persons questioned the trustworthiness of biblical revelation – such as W.T. Conner’s denial of biblical inerrancy,<sup>22</sup> Ralph H. Elliott’s *The Message of Genesis* (1961), and the original volume 1 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (1969) by G. Henton Davies, among others – the majority of Southern Baptists rallied together to denounce such writings over their belief in biblical inerrancy and its complete authority.<sup>23</sup> Space does not allow for a retracing of the events of this era, but the Conservative Resurgence (1979-1993) reestablished a high view of the authority of Scripture in the seminaries and throughout Southern Baptist life and practice.<sup>24</sup>

### **Contemporary Implications for (Southern) Baptists**

The implication for the doctrine of sola Scriptura in contemporary (Southern) Baptist life is significant, for Southern Baptists must remain “a people of the Book” in the midst of a shifting culture. Not only has the unbelieving world continued to change its mind on issues of truth and morality, but the pressures of societal change has impacted American Evangelicals at large.

In a poll from May 23, 2017 by the American Culture and Faith Institute, 30 percent of Americans responded as being “born again Christians,” for individuals noted, “after I die I know I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.” The problem with their responses, however, lies in the other areas of the survey. Even though 89 percent of Evangelicals believe in an all-knowing, all-powerful God, 79 percent believe “all people are sinners;” 64 percent believe “the Bible is totally accurate in all the life principles it teaches;” 52 percent believe “Jesus Christ lived a sinless life;” and 25 percent believe “as sinners, all people are not basically good.”<sup>25</sup> These results demonstrate a low view of biblical authority for Evangelicals at large.

If such a poll is indeed representative of modern Evangelicalism, how do Baptists, particularly Southern Baptists, continue to uphold biblical authority? If the Reformation

**If the Reformation  
doctrine of  
*sola Scriptura*  
is true (and it is),  
what kind of  
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Southern Baptists?**

doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is true (and it is), what kind of effect should it have on Southern Baptists?

### **Implications for *Sola Scriptura*/Biblical Authority on Major Doctrines of Christianity**

When considering major Christian doctrine, Southern Baptists are wise to allow the Bible to shape their beliefs. Without divine revelation, how can anyone have certainty about the character of God, God as Trinity, the deity of Christ, atonement, justification, hell and more?

Though people can believe a powerful Being exists (see Romans 1:20), Baptists argue from Scripture for a God who is sovereign, holy, loving, wise, just and more (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 6:3;

Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 1:17).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, God is Triune as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6).<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Christ is fully divine and without sin. He is God who came in the flesh (Matthew 1:18-23; John 1:1-18).<sup>28</sup> Baptists believe the atonement of Christ, while having various secondary meanings, primarily points to a penal substitutionary view (Romans 3:23-26; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Hebrews 9:12-15).<sup>29</sup>

The doctrine of justification, how one is declared right by God, is the foundational issue for sola Scriptura, for justification drove Martin Luther to search the Scriptures to see what they teach. What Luther taught on this issue, Baptists adopted: – “Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God” (see also Romans 3:23-25; 4:3ff).<sup>30</sup> Anyone who is not justified by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ will spend eternity in hell, a place of everlasting torment (Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:19-26).<sup>31</sup>

While some would want to consider other major doctrines, let these suffice. None of these key doctrines would be known in their clarity without biblical revelation. Because God’s Word states these things, Southern Baptists have rightly adopted them. Even when other Evangelicals stray on human depravity, the sinlessness of Christ and related doctrines, Southern Baptists remain “people of the Book.”

### **Implications for Sola Scriptura/Biblical Authority on Ecclesiology**

In addition to major doctrines, the doctrine of sola Scripture and biblical authority have implications on matters of ecclesiology. Southern Baptists have been “people of the Book” not only in matters of the faith, but also in matters of practice. Baptists are more consistent than their sister Evangelical denominations, among mainline Protestants, in several ecclesiological issues.

Whereas the majority of mainline denominations look to Scripture and tradition on ecclesiological matters, Southern Baptists look to the Bible and the Bible alone. Thus, adhering to sola Scriptura, rather than prima Scriptura,<sup>32</sup> demands certain practices. One of those practices is believer's baptism by immersion, for that is the only biblical position (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; John 3:23; Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:3-5).<sup>33</sup> Baptists have insisted on this position since the early seventeenth century.

Moreover, a view of sola Scriptura views the Lord's Supper as a memorial, for Jesus said "do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25).<sup>34</sup> Likewise, where Luther was less consistent with sola Scriptura in arguing for the "priesthood of the baptized," since he favored infant baptism, Southern Baptists have argued for the "priesthood of believers" and a "regenerate church membership" (Acts 2:41-42, 47; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 20:6).<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Baptists have practiced church discipline in light of biblical authority. Many denominations enacted church discipline on their members, but they failed to discern between the realms of church and state. Thus, unregenerate members could be disciplined for false belief or sinful practices, the very things depraved individuals believe and do! Baptists, on the other hand, have disciplined their own members, because those church members had personally confessed belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, joined the local church through baptismal immersion and then strayed from the faith through belief or practice (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).<sup>36</sup>

Because of their view of the authority of the Scriptures, Southern Baptists remain on solid ground. As certain Evangelicals adapt to the ever-changing culture, Southern Baptists hold to the never-changing Word. Such a commitment lies in the motto of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 19, 2017

Baptist College of Florida: “Changing the World through the Unchanging Word.”

## Conclusion

Every Evangelical should be grateful to God for the work of Martin Luther in the Protestant Reformation, especially with his doctrine of sola Scriptura. Baptists grabbed hold of this belief and championed biblical authority. Southern Baptists have best exemplified being “people of the Book” through faith and practice. In the words of Luther’s famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” even if others reject our friendships and allegiances because of our commitment to God and His Word, then “let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His Kingdom is forever.”

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Spoken on April 18, 1521. The words “here I stand, I cannot do otherwise” were probably not original with Luther; see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-luther-said.html>. Accessed 27 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition*, by Timothy J. Wengart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 490-491.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will 1525: The Annotated Luther Study Edition*, by Volker Leppin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 184.

<sup>4</sup> “The meaning of Scripture must be verified, not from the writings of the Fathers, but from the Scripture itself,” Huldrych Zwingli, “Exposition and Basis of Conclusions or Articles Published by Huldrych Zwingli, Zurich 29 January, 1523,” H. Wayne Pipkin, ed., in *Selected Writings of Huldrych Zwingli, Volume One: In Defense of the Reformed Faith*, Dikran Y. Hadidian, ed. (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 373.

<sup>5</sup> “For all divisive questions and controversies only Scripture, canonized, and sanctified by God himself, should and must be the judge, no one else: or heaven or earth must fall.... Now the judgments of God can only be known out of the divine Word, as Scriptures truly testifies to us,” *Balthasar Hubmaier*, H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, trans., eds., in *Classics of the Radical Reformation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>6</sup> “While it becomes man seriously to employ his eyes in considering the works of God, since a place has been assigned him in this most glorious theatre that he may be a spectator of them, his special duty is to give ear to the Word, that he may the better profit.... If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle

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must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture,” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge, volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 66.

<sup>7</sup> “As we beleve and confesse the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and maik the man of God perfect, so do we affirme and avow the authoritie of the same to be of God, and neather to depend on men nor angellis.” John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, collected and edited by David Laing, volume 2 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 112.

<sup>8</sup> “A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland, 1611” in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Reprint; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 122.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 324-25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 361-62.

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Booth, “Confession of Faith, 1769,” in *The Works of Abraham Booth*, volume 1, edited by Michael Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 27.

<sup>15</sup> John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston, S.C.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 21.

<sup>16</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 312.

<sup>17</sup> Basil Manly, Jr., *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888), 90.

<sup>18</sup> James Madison Pendleton, “Inspiration & Utility of the Scripture,” in *Selected Writings of James Madison Pendleton*, volume 3, compiled and edited by Thomas White (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 155.

<sup>19</sup> J. M. Frost, *Baptist Why and Why Not: Twenty-Five Papers by Twenty-Five Writers and a Declaration of Faith* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1900) 12.

<sup>20</sup> Prior to the *Baptist Faith and Message*’s adoption, the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC required its missionaries to subscribe to a statement of faith, adopted in 1920. The first article states, “I believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were written by men who were divinely inspired and that they are a sufficient and final authority in all matters of religious faith and practice.” (H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990], 485.

<sup>21</sup> E.Y. Mullins, “The Dangers and Duties of this Present Hour,” 1923 SBC Address, noted by David S. Dockery, “The Authority of Scripture: The Bible *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 19, 2017

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and Baptists,” in *Ministry By His Grace and For His Glory: Essays in Honor of Thomas J. Nettles*, edited by Thomas K. Ascol and Nathan A. Finn (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2011), 108.

<sup>22</sup> See McBeth, 497. Conner asserted, however, “I do believe in the infallibility of the fundamental teachings of the Bible.” Letter to Dr. E.B. Atwood, February 21, 1948.

<sup>23</sup> For example, W. A. Criswell put into writing what the majority of Southern Baptists believed in 1969, when he said, “The idea of the authority of the Scriptures is the conception which lies in the Scriptures themselves. The Bible itself claims to be an authoritative Book and an infallible guide to the true knowledge of God and to the way of salvation,” *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*, edited by Timothy & Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 39.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the “Report of the Presidential Theological Study Committee,” appointed by H. Edwin Young in 1992. Both Part 1 and Part 2, Article One: Holy Scripture offer numerous statements about Southern Baptist belief in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, free from errors and authoritative for all matters of faith and practice; Timothy and Denise George, eds. *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 148-52.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.culturefaith.com/where-born-again-are-missing-the-mark/>  
Accessed 27 May 2017.

<sup>26</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article II, “God” (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000), 7-10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article II.A. “God the Son,” 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article IV. “Salvation,” 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article X. “Last Things,” 15-16.

<sup>32</sup> *Prima Scriptura*, held by several Protestant denominations, looks to Scripture first while also considering reason, tradition and church history.

<sup>33</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article VII, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article VI. “The Church,” 13.

<sup>36</sup> While Southern Baptists have failed to acknowledge church discipline in their most recent confessions of faith, many churches and individuals have upheld it throughout Baptist history, as traced by Mark Dever, ed. *Church Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents) (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001).

Martin Luther's *Sola Gratis*:

## **REDEFINED AS BAPTISTS' AFFIRMATION OF GRACE ALONE**

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Grace is that eternal quality in God that manifests itself in unmerited favor and kindness towards His creation. By grace, humanity was created to enjoy a relationship with the Creator. By grace, immediate physical death did not come to Adam and Eve in their sin and rebellion. Instead, God began to reveal to them the work He would do to restore the relationship. By grace, God found favor with Noah and spared him and his family as the world flooded. By grace, God revealed Himself to Abraham to establish a lineage that would produce a Savior. By grace, God simultaneously revealed His holiness and man's sinfulness through the law given to Moses. By grace, God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice once and for all so that sinful man could be granted a salvation that he doesn't deserve and be spared from the condemnation that he deserves. Throughout the Scriptures, grace is extended to humanity, not on the basis of the character of the recipient, but on the basis of the character and will of the One extending it.

The difficulty with which humanity has struggled to embrace salvation by grace lies not with God who extends unmerited favor, but with a sinful people who by their nature feel compelled to earn it. The innate desire for independence that humanity inherited from Adam and Eve influences a need to not be obligated to anyone or anything. Therefore, from the time of Cain and Abel, humanity has struggled within the tension of faith in God and faith in self, between trusting in a grace-based salvation

**“Sin will not have  
dominion over you,  
since you are not  
under law but  
under grace.”**

**– Romans 6:14**

or a works-based salvation (in which there is no salvation). While the grace of God distinguishes Christianity from other world religions, Christendom in its history has struggled with keeping the proper perspective with regard to religious practices. Spiritual

disciplines, sacraments, and other means of grace that were supposed to help people grow in grace have often become meritorious works thought to invoke the favor of God. Such was the condition of Israel in Jesus’ day and such was the condition of the Church in Luther’s day.

### **Martin Luther’s Efforts to Find Peace with God**

Martin Luther was content to pursue an education that would lead him to follow his father’s wishes and become a lawyer.<sup>1</sup> However, in July 1505, the twenty-one year-old Martin Luther became fearful for his salvation after being knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning. He resolved that day to find acceptance with God and to live in such a way that he would find salvation through his own efforts.<sup>2</sup> For Luther, monasticism was the way to heaven providing the disciplines that he felt were required to attain holiness.<sup>3</sup> The problem was that Luther with all his piety knew that he could not satisfy God. “He tried the way of good works and discovered that he could never do enough to save himself.”<sup>4</sup>

After taking his post in Wittenberg, Luther began to explore the sacrament of penance as a way to mediate God’s help and favor. But even in confession, he was never certain that he had confessed every sin. He was plagued by the prospect of leaving confession undone. Luther’s view of God was dominated by imagery of a consuming fire, an angry God set upon judgment and condemnation and Luther felt helpless and incapable of satisfying such a being. “Luther was too obsessed with the picture

of Christ the avenger to be consoled with the thought of Christ the redeemer.”<sup>5</sup>

Life began to change for Luther when he was commissioned to occupy the chair of Bible [*sic*] and to teach at the university in Wittenberg. By occupying this particular chair, and preparing lectures that came directly from studying the Scriptures, Luther began to develop a new view of the nature and character of God. Luther identified well with Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He began to realize that Christ took the sins of humanity upon Himself, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21, NKJV). By faith a “joyful exchange” takes place whereby Christ’s righteousness freely becomes that of the sinner and the sinner’s sins become that of Christ’s.<sup>6</sup>

In the Bible, Luther found the source of the righteousness that had evaded him his entire life and ministry. Righteousness cannot be attained by human effort or religious piety. Salvation and assurance of that salvation can only be realized by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Luther’s newfound theology centered upon the affirmation of the forgiveness of sins through the utterly unmerited grace of God made possible by the cross of Christ, which reconciled wrath and mercy, routed the hosts of hell, triumphed over sin and death, and by the resurrection manifested that power which enables man to die to sin and rise to newness of life.<sup>7</sup>

**In the Bible, Luther found the source of the righteousness that had evaded him his entire life and ministry.**

### **Baptist Theology Grew Out of Scripture**

Baptists embraced Luther’s view of salvation by grace alone, but not directly through Luther. The development of Baptist

confessions of faith reflect a theological framework developed by the French Reformer, John Calvin. Calvin developed the doctrine of salvation by grace alone in terms of God's predestining will with the understanding that predestination is simply the conceptual framework that guarantees the free and unmerited nature of grace.<sup>8</sup> As such it forms the basis of assurance of salvation by removing any possibility that man can contribute in any way to his salvation.

This doctrine of salvation by grace alone was adopted by the Baptist Convention of New Hampshire in 1833, which according to Albert Mohler, is "undeniably Calvinistic in shape and substance – but its Calvinism is also undeniably a modified one."<sup>9</sup> In 1853, J. Newton Brown chose the New Hampshire Confession for inclusion in his work, *The Baptist Church Manual*. Then in 1925, Southern Baptists adopted the *Baptist Faith and Message*, a confession of faith that included the New Hampshire Confession article on the doctrine of salvation. The article begins, "The salvation of sinners is wholly of grace..."<sup>10</sup>

Grace language is used in other articles in the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message*. The article titled "Justification" clearly reflects the language of the Reformers. It reads, "Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of righteousness of all sinners who believe in Christ. This blessing is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but through the redemption that is in and through Jesus Christ. It brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God, and secures every other needed blessing." In other articles, the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message* affirms that regeneration is "a work of God's free grace conditioned upon faith in Christ." Repentance and faith are inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God. Sanctification is accomplished "by the use of all the ordinary means of grace, and particularly by the Word of God." While the Reformers were careful to say that there is no meritorious work that could be done to earn salvation,

the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925 was just as careful to point out that because of the grace of God there is no heinous act that could be done to prevent salvation, only the “voluntary refusal to accept Jesus Christ as teacher, Saviour, and Lord.”

The *Baptist Faith and Message* was revised in 1963 and again in 2000. The revisions combined the six salvation-related articles of the 1925 version into one article titled “Salvation.” Grace is used in the definition of every aspect of salvation. All three versions define God’s purpose of grace in terms of election and perseverance. It reads, “Election is the gracious purpose of God according to which He regenerates, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners... All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.”

### **Reconciling God’s Sovereignty with Man’s Free Will**

Baptists agree that the human condition requires salvation from God in order to enter His kingdom. Baptists generally agree that all of salvation, even the human faith response is a gift from God stemming from His grace. There is substantial conflict and debate with regard to the particulars of salvation specifically in the order of regeneration and conversion, the irresistibility or resistibility of grace, and the scope of the atonement that may or may not limit the ability of the evangelist to freely invite a response to the presentation of the gospel. The problem is that salvation is a spiritual, supernatural act by a sovereign, eternal God that is being offered to a physical, natural, fallen creation. Man in his fallen condition simply does not have the vocabulary or the mental capacity to fully understand the mystery of salvation. Man must live in the tension that is created in trying to reconcile the sovereignty of God in offering salvation and the free will of man in receiving it.

The words of nineteenth century Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon are helpful in addressing this tension from a Baptist

perspective. He wrote, “If any of you want to know what I preach every day, and any stranger should say, ‘Give me a summary of his doctrine,’ say this, ‘He preaches salvation all of grace, and damnation all of sin. He gives God all the glory for every soul that is saved, but he won’t have it that God is to blame for any man that is damned.’” Baptists believe that Scripture teaches that salvation is completely the work of God and that the sin of rejecting the gospel belongs entirely to the unbeliever.<sup>11</sup>

Luther found in the Scriptures his answers to questions regarding the nature and character of God, justification, and grace. The Scriptures also provide descriptions of the functions of grace that have been embraced by Baptists throughout their history.

By grace believers are saved. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV). Twice in the verses leading up to this text, the apostle Paul used the phrase “dead in trespasses” to describe man’s condition and “made alive” to describe God’s work. According to Luther grace comes to an individual through the realization of being dead in sin and hopelessly unable to do anything that would merit God’s favor.<sup>12</sup> This realization does not come easily in a worldview that sees people as inherently good. Spurgeon wrote, “We, according to the nature of our own hearts, are always talking about our own goodness and our own worthiness, and we stubbornly hold to it that there must be somewhat in us in order to win the notice of God.”<sup>13</sup> Regarding the human condition the Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NKJV), but it does not leave us in that state of hopelessness. Instead, it continues, “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24, NKJV). Spurgeon celebrated the fact that God “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:4, NKJV). He wrote, “He makes those just who are unjust, forgives those who deserve to be punished, and favors those who deserve no favor.”<sup>14</sup> When a person realizes that they are



utterly helpless in finding salvation on their own and they cry out in faith to trust in the finished work of Christ, God by His grace saves them.

### **Grace Alone Includes Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification**

By grace believers are sanctified. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13). The *Baptist Faith and Message* rightly groups justification, sanctification, and glorification into the same article on salvation. If all three words serve to describe a particular aspect of salvation, and salvation is by grace alone, then every aspect of salvation is by grace alone, including sanctification. The churches in Galatia seemed to be struggling with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as the key to sanctification. They embraced justification by faith but then were told that they needed the law to be able to truly live the Christian life. They believed they were in the covenant by grace but had to maintain their status in the covenant through works.

Luther’s struggle was very similar. Initially, he operated out of this prescribed course, but eventually he came to realize that the assurance of salvation was lost if any part of that salvation required something from him.<sup>15</sup> Carl Trueman wrote, “This is the theological shift that drove Luther at the time of the indulgence crisis of October 1517.... The notion that God’s grace could be bought by human effort was already anathema to him, a powerful point when it came to the matter of indulgences as sold by Johann Tetzel.”<sup>16</sup>

To relegate grace to justification and ignore it in sanctification is to turn away from the gospel. Paul wrote, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of

Christ, to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6, NKJV). The churches were turning back to a reliance on their performance in the covenant which Paul points out is no gospel at all. In fact it is a return to the bondage of slavery to the law from which Christ and His finished work on the cross set us free. Paul wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1, NKJV). By grace, believers live by faith in the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit that is in them at salvation.

By grace believers are sustained. “And [Jesus] said to [Paul], ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9, NKJV). In the first century, Christians were being pushed to the margins of society. The church at Corinth was compromising its convictions in many ways in order to maintain its status in the culture. They relied on their own sense of spirituality and spiritual giftedness as a measure of God’s grace upon them. They viewed Paul as weak and blamed his weakness on a faulty faith. Paul reminded them that their work for the kingdom would not be sustained by their wisdom or ingenuity or economic strength. The work of the kingdom to which they were called would only be sustained by God’s grace.

**The doctrine of salvation by grace alone has been a foundational doctrine to the development of Baptist life and mission.**

### **Salvation by Grace is a Foundational Doctrine for Baptists**

The Reformation provided the framework for Baptist theology a century before Baptists came into existence. The doctrine of salvation by grace alone has been a foundational doctrine to the development of Baptist life and mission. Even still, Southern Baptists have been susceptible to preaching a morality-based

salvation finding it their responsibility to teach moralism rather than the gospel of grace. Now that morality has been redefined by the culture and the church finds itself once again being pushed to the fringes of society, it is time that Baptist preaching return to the basic tenets of the Reformation and focus on preaching about the grace of God in salvation, sanctification, and sustenance.

The Reformation stands as a reminder to Southern Baptists in general and Florida Baptists in particular that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The majority of Southern Baptist churches gather in places where things like heritage, nationalism, and God and country are dominant cultural themes. The wealth and prosperity of the United States makes it possible for its citizens to live comfortably. The American Dream is seen as a noble economic goal and being a Christian, at least for the time being, does not interfere with a believer's livelihood or opportunity to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. American church pulpits need to constantly and consistently preach salvation by grace alone.

Florida Baptists operate in one of the most culturally diverse areas of the nation. Florida Baptist churches in North Florida face the same challenges as other Southern Baptist churches across the Bible Belt. For churches in South Florida where there is much ethnic and religious diversity, the centrality of the gospel and the truth that salvation comes by grace alone is a unifying doctrine. The influence of the Reformation on Florida Baptist life in the twenty-first century might actually lead to diverse congregations worshiping and serving together by God's grace and for the glory of His kingdom.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2013), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 25.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>6</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 125.

<sup>7</sup> Bainton, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Trueman, 136.

<sup>9</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Doctrine of Salvation,” in *Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America’s Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), 38.

<sup>10</sup> All quotes and references to the *Baptist Faith and Message* 1925, 1963 and 2000 are taken from the Appendix: Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* found in *Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America’s Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), 193-230.

<sup>11</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, cited in Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 103.

<sup>12</sup> Trueman, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>15</sup> Trueman, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Martin Luther's *Sola Fide*:

## **REDEFINED AS BAPTISTS' AFFIRMATION OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

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On October 31, 1517 (All Soul's Day Eve), Pastor Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses to the church door of Wittenberg, Germany, during daylight.<sup>1</sup> Luther's action launched what has become known as the Protestant Reformation.<sup>2</sup> The theological disputes that flourished in the wake of the *Ninety-Five Theses* represented the first full-scale exploitation of the printing press in European history."<sup>3</sup> The *Ninety-Five Theses* attacked the Catholic theology of papal authority and economic practice, but in the theses Luther neglected the defining theological doctrine of the Reformation – the doctrine of salvation. The central question of the Reformation became, "How does an individual relate to God?"

Luther affirmed that individuals are saved by grace alone (*sola gratis*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solis Christus*) resulting in justification, a legal declaration of forgiveness and relationship. The author argues that "justification by faith" became the foundational doctrinal of Luther's life and reform movement. The argument set forth in this article will proceed through the following steps. First, I will offer a brief review of Luther's life to illustrate the liberation his rediscovery of justification provided to the reformer. Second, I will provide a brief historical and biblical analysis of justification. Third, I will point out the radical implications of justification for the democratization of the church. Throughout the article, I will

**“For by grace you  
have been saved  
through faith, and that  
not of yourselves; it is  
the gift of God, not of  
works, lest anyone  
should boast.”**

**-- Ephesians 2:8-9**

attempt to connect Luther's doctrine of justification to Baptist theology.

### **Luther's Life as Preface to Faith Alone**

Luther grew up in a family that owned a small mining company. Based on his father's plans for his life, Luther enrolled as a law

student at the University of Erfurt. On a trip home, a bolt of lightning terrified him and he made a vow to St. Anne, the mother of the virgin Mary and the patron saint of miners, “Oh, save me and I will become a priest.” He hastily joined the Hermits of St. Augustine, a group that rightly deserves the nickname “Green Beret” monks, for their arduous, rigorous life style. He received ordination as a monk in 1507, and earned a doctor of theology degree from University of Wittenberg and became a professor of Bible. Lecturing on Psalms, Hebrews, and Romans led to his “Tower Experience” or salvation conversion dated in the range of 1515-1518 by most scholars. Luther's focus on Romans 1:17 led to a personal theological breakthrough. Luther commented on his breakthrough:

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...”<sup>4</sup>

Luther described his new understanding of Romans 1:17:

“Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God,

namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith.... Here I felt I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith soothed Luther’s troubled conscience.

### **Justification by Faith Alone: The Foundation of the Reformation**

Definition of terms provides the beginning point of any discussion. A common Reformed definition of “justification” is as follows: Justification is God’s verdict that in Christ and on the basis of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection our sins are forgiven and we are counted as those who are perfectly obedient in his sight. In other words, God declares us to be righteous.”<sup>6</sup>

Since the doctrine of “justification by faith alone” provided a salve to Luther’s troubled conscience, three questions require answers. In line with Luther’s understanding: First, what did the Catholic Church teach about justification that led to Luther’s spiritual angst? Second, what is the biblical basis for justification by faith alone? During the review of both questions, Baptists answers to these questions will be examined.

### **The Historical Debate**

Luther’s spiritual liberation must be understood against the backdrop of the teachings of Catholic Church on the doctrine of justification.

Luther understood justification as a forensic, legal concept. God declares believers righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ granted to an individual upon faith. Imputation “refers to the righteousness of Christ being transferred to those who believe on him for salvation.”<sup>7</sup> Luther referred to

imputation in terms of a “divine exchange.” Luther affirmed that humans are passive in justification, that is, believers receive God’s forensic justification rather than being active participants in earning salvation. Because justification is an act of God, justification is a completed act – a believer cannot be more justified at one moment in the Christian life than another moment. An individual receives justification through faith rather than merit or works. Luther defined “faith” as trust not intellectual assent.<sup>8</sup>

Catholics understand justification as transformative, that is, an individual actually is “made righteous” based on the infused righteousness of Christ that transforms us. “Infused righteousness” is “righteousness that God actually *puts into us* and changes us internally and in terms of our actual moral character.”<sup>9</sup> The Council of Trent (1541 A.D.), the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, affirms that Christians must actively cooperate with God in relation to justification, “...through his quickening and helping grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that grace....”<sup>10</sup> For Catholics, justification is a process that begins with the sacrament of baptism, continues throughout life, becomes perfected through purgatory. The Council of Trent stated, “Having been justified and made the friends and domestics of God,...they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith cooperating with good works, increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified....”<sup>11</sup>

Both Catholic responding to Luther and early Baptists analyzed the meaning of justification by means of philosophical analysis of causation. A simple explanation of the construction of a house will illustrate the types of causes. The material cause is the material used in the construction of a house – wood, brick, metal, glass. The formal cause is the pattern, nature, or essence of a house – a house blueprint. The efficient cause is the agent or force



responsible for the construction – carpenter, mason, and plumbers. The final cause is the purpose of the house – a place to live. The instrumental cause is the means through which the house was built. In response to the Protestant Reformation, Catholics set forth a response to Luther’s teaching about justification (and other issues) in the documents of the Council of Trent (1541 AD). Years later, General Baptists (non-Calvinists) set forth a Baptist understanding of justification in the *Orthodox Creed* (1678).<sup>12</sup> The General Baptists affirmed a strongly worded Trinitarian view of justification. They attributed the Efficient Cause and Final Cause to God; attributed the Meritorious and Material Cause to Christ; and they attributed the Formal Cause of Imputation and Instrumental Causes to the Holy Spirit. Catholics did not set forth justification in Trinitarian terms.

<b>Catholic View of Justification</b>	<b>Baptist View of Justification</b>
<i>Efficient Cause:</i> Merciful God who washes and sanctifies	<i>Efficient Cause:</i> God’s free Grace
<i>Meritorious Cause:</i> most beloved only-begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, ... merited for us justification by his most holy passion on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.	<i>Meritorious Cause:</i> the blood of Christ
Statement of Trent does not mention Material Cause	<i>Material Cause:</i> Christ’s Active Obedience
<i>Instrumental Cause:</i> Sacrament of baptism	<i>Instrumental Cause:</i> Faith
<i>Formal Cause:</i> Justice of God by which he makes us just.	<i>Formal Cause:</i> Imputation of Christ’s Obedience to Us and God’s declarative, judicial sentence
<i>Final Cause:</i> Glory of God and life everlasting	<i>Final Cause:</i> God’s Glory and Man’s Salvation

The major differences between the Catholic and Baptist statements are the formal (essence) and instrumental cause (agency by which justification received). For Catholics, the formal essence of justification is God making humans right; for Baptists, the formal essence of justification is the imputation of Christ's obedience. For Catholics, the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism; for Baptists, the instrumental cause is faith.

All the major confessions utilized by Baptists in the American South follow the *Orthodox Creed* and affirm justification as a legal declaration of acquittal, including the *Philadelphia/Charleston Confession*, *New Hampshire Confession*, and all three versions of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, 2000). Southern Baptist theologians Dale Moody (d. 1992) and Frank Stagg (d. 2001) denied the forensic understanding of justification in favor of the transformative understanding of justification; thus, each of these individuals taught in opposition to the *Baptist Faith and Message* and/or the statement of faith of the seminary at which each man taught.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Biblical Meaning of Justification in Luther's Thought**

Luther understood "justification" as the centerpiece of biblical theology and vital to the health of the Church and the Christian life.

"Wherefore this doctrine [justification] can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine be lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost and gone. If this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish, religion, the true service of God, the glory of God, the right knowledge of all things and states of life."<sup>14</sup>

If "justification" is the central truth of the truth, life, and salvation, then what does the Bible teach about justification? A summary of the biblical teachings about justification is as

follows. First, the great biblical teacher of justification was the Apostle Paul. Second, the key Old Testament passages for Paul's understanding of justification are Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4. Third, both the Old Testament and New Testament highlight Abraham as the exemplar of one justified by God. Fourth, the term "counted" underscores the nature of justification.

In the New Testament, Paul is the theologian of justification. In the Greek New Testament, "righteousness and justification" are synonymous terms with the same root (*diakaio*). The frequency of these terms by Paul is significant: "Thus out of some 230 occurrences of this word group in the NT, the Pauline corpus accounts for almost half of them, and Romans in turn for more than half of these."<sup>15</sup>

Second, Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4 function as the key to Paul's understanding of the meaning of justification/righteousness. Paul quoted

**In the New Testament, Paul is the theologian of justification. In the Greek New Testament, "righteousness and justification" are synonymous terms with the same root (*diakaio*).**

Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3, 9, 27; and Galatians 3:6 in the context of scriptural support for his position on justification.<sup>16</sup> On the basis of the childless Abraham's continual belief in God's promise, God viewed Abraham as meeting the standards of a relationship with Him. In Romans 4:1-5, Paul emphasizes that God viewed

Abraham as just/righteous prior to circumcision or works. Paul cited Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11.<sup>17</sup> Instead of arrogance and a lack of integrity, the one that meets God's standard [the just or righteous] continually lives by faith.

Third, Abram or Abraham is the exemplar of the one whom God justifies. Grace dominates the Genesis narrative of Abraham's

life. God graciously called an unworthy Abraham out of a pagan culture to leave his land, family, and home. God promised to bless the world through Abraham (Genesis. 12:1-4).

Fourth, in Genesis 15:6, Paul used a bookkeeping term “counted” to describe God’s action based on Abraham’s faith. God applied “righteousness” to Abraham’s bankrupt account. Luther perceived of the substitutionary death of Jesus for human sin as the undergirding reality for a believer receiving the “alien righteousness” of Christ applied to the account of a believer. On a popular level, Luther’s thought is summarized in terms of a “divine exchange.” “We have given to Christ what is not his, namely, our sins; He has given to us what is not ours, namely, His righteousness.” Luther described this “exchange” as “alien righteousness” or the “first righteousness.” Luther described the “second righteousness” as fruit of the life of a believer in a relationship between Christ and a believer. Rather than a legal declaration of acquittal, Luther described the “second righteousness” in terms of a personal relationship of marriage between the groom (Christ) and the bride (the believer or church). The biblical concept of “justification” in Luther’s thought was much more than a mere legal or bookkeeping transaction.

Southern Baptist theologian James Garrett provided a helpful biblical and Luther-like synopsis of Paul’s teachings about justification.

The Pauline doctrine of justification may be summarized as follows. The *object* of justification is sinful, unrighteous, or ungodly human beings (Romans 4:5b). The *agent* of justification is God, or the God of grace (Galatians 3:8a; Romans 3:24; 8:30). The *ground or basis* of justification is the death or the saving work of Christ (Romans 3:24–25; 5:9a). The *condition* of justification is faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16a; 3:8a, 24; Romans 3:26, 28). The *blessings* issuing from justification include “peace

with God,” “access” to God’s “grace,” joy, and hope” (Romans 5:1–2). The *central meaning* of justification, despite some objection thereto, is “to accept as righteous, to regard as righteous, [or] to declare righteous.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Building A Reformation One Brick at a Time: The Democratizing of Faith**

Luther’s rediscovery of the biblical teachings about justification was revolutionary. Justification by faith alone became one plank in an interconnected attack on the spiritual and institutional edifice of the Medieval Catholic sacramental system. Once Luther rediscovered the biblical teachings of justification by faith, he redeveloped other key theological concepts that birthed the Protestant Reformation. In response to Pope Leo’s excommunication of Luther in 1520, Luther rapidly responded with four building blocks to reform the church. In 1520, Luther in rapid succession wrote three major books crucial to reform: *Appeal to the German Nobility*, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*. In 1522, Luther released his German New Testament, followed by the Old Testament in 1530.

The building blocks of major works of Luther in the period after his excommunication from the Catholic Church as well as his German translation of the Bible transformed the vision of the church from an edifice of papal hierarchy to a democratizing of the church that appears to be a planned coordinated program.<sup>19</sup>

First, Luther chose the radical step of democratizing theological debate through communicating with laypeople through the use of vernacular language. During Luther’s era, theology functioned as a domain of specialists because theologians wrote in Latin. “Luther’s decision to publish in German was iconic, in that it made a statement about the inclusive nature of the reformation he proposed to pursue.”<sup>20</sup>

The translation of the New Testament from Greek to German created a significant crack in the Catholic sacramental concept of penance. *Ad Fontes* – meaning “back to the sources” – served as a key theme of the renaissance, or rebirth, of classical learning. The primary source for the Christian church is the Greek New Testament. Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus published his Greek New Testament in 1516 and he provided ammunition for the critics of the Catholic sacramental system. For example, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translated Matthew 4:17 as “Do Penance for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” In contrast, the Greek New Testament commands, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” “The Council of Trent (1551) stated that the sacrament of penance was absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of postbaptismal sin, and consisted in confession, contrition, absolution, and satisfaction.”<sup>21</sup> The New Testament does not support the Catholic penance system.

Second, Luther’s rediscovery of the biblical teachings about the priesthood of the believer helped democratize the church.<sup>22</sup> The priesthood of the believer broke down one of the three walls the Catholic Church built to protect itself.<sup>23</sup> The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer democratized the church by removing the priest/laity divide. Because Luther eliminated the priestly/laity divide, his understanding of the priesthood of the believer provided a less than subtle attack on the Catholic penance system. Luther understood the priesthood of the believer in a congregational sense. Luther elevated the responsibility of priestly service to one another over the individualistic privilege. The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer entails both privilege and responsibility.

The priesthood means: We stand before God, pray for others, intercede with, and sacrifice ourselves to God and proclaim the word to one another. Luther never understood the priesthood of all believers merely in the ‘Protestant’ senses of the Christian’s freedom to stand in direct relationship to God without a human

mediator. Rather he constantly emphasizes the Christian's evangelical authority to come before God on behalf of the brethren and also of the world. "The universal priesthood expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community."<sup>24</sup>

For Luther, because all believers are priests, all believers share in the responsibility to proclaim and spread God's Word.

Third, Luther democratized the church by emphasizing the nature of church as a community rather than the church as an institution. Luther disliked the German term for "church" preferring the terms "community" or "assembly."<sup>25</sup> Baptists, in official doctrine, would agree with Luther in the distinction between "church" and "community." Baptists would disagree with Luther in terms of ecclesiology in three areas. First, Luther did not affirm the nature of the church as a "believers' church," meaning that the Reformer followed the Augustinian view of the church as a "mixed multitude" resulting from infant baptism.<sup>26</sup> Second, a Baptist perspective would stipulate that Luther did not develop a proper perspective either biblically or theologically for religious freedom. Luther, as with other sixteenth-century Magisterial Reformers, claimed that the government has a right to reform the church.<sup>27</sup> Third, Luther's doctrine of "two kingdoms," thus separated the realms of the church and state, led to the church forfeiting a prophetic mission to the government and culture.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

When Luther nailed the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the church door of Wittenburg, he desired a conversation on the topics of purgatory and papal authority. As he developed his thought, his ministry gives evidence of a planned program of reform. Luther's doctrine of justification functioned as the key theme uniting his program of reform in theology and the nature of the church.

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Church historians debate if Luther nailed the theses to the church door. In commemoration of the theses, the current church door of the church has the ninety-five theses engraved on the church door to commemorate the launch of the Reformation. For a discussion, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*. Translated by Robert C. Schultz. (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press, 1986), 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Protestant” developed as a result of the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529. To unify German forces against the threat of Muslims from the East, the Diet of Speyer demanded the enforcement of the Diet of Worms throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Six German princes and fourteen representatives of imperial cities formally protested against this restriction of religious liberty and the Diet labeled the movement “Protesters” Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution – A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*. (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007), 6. The Diet of Speyer allowed each German prince to lead ecclesiastical affairs in his state according to his own conscience.

<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 160.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to Latin Writings,” in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1962) 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, ed. Robert A. Peterson. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 183.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>8</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Florida Baptist Association (Tallahassee area) expelled a church for teaching Sandemanism. Sandemanism adhered to the teaching of Scottish preacher Robert Sandeman (d. 1771) who defined “faith” as mere intellectual assent rather than “trust.”

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 728.

<sup>10</sup> “Decree and Canons of Justification,” in Denis R. Jenz, ed. *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introduction*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 350.

<sup>11</sup> Jenz, 352.



<sup>12</sup> W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. Article XXIV Of Justification by Christ. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> Dale Moody approval the modern rejection of a legal or forensic understanding of justification by some biblical theologians. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 1981), 328. Frank Stagg defined “justification” as a process of “making man right.” Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1962), 95.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, “A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians,” in Dillenger, 100.

<sup>15</sup> “δικαιοσύνη [righteousness]” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Moises Silvia. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2014), 731.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 15:6, “Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (HCSB).

<sup>17</sup> Habakkuk 2:4, “But the righteous one will live by his faith” (HCSB).

<sup>18</sup> James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, Second Edition., vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 289–290.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to McGrath for the concept of democratization. McGrath, 51. The claim that Luther seemed to have a coordinated program is my opinion.

<sup>20</sup> McGrath, 51.

<sup>21</sup> J. G. G. Norman, “Penance,” *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised Ed.*, ed. J. D. Douglas. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing 1978), 762.

<sup>22</sup> Baptist theologian Timothy George wrote, “Luther’s greatest contribution to Protestant ecclesiology was his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.” Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, Revised Ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 96-97. For Luther, 1 Peter 2.9 and Revelation 1.6 served as the key texts for the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. Within Southern Baptist life, the doctrine of the priesthood of believers has received two variant interpretations. On one side are Southern Baptists that define “priesthood of believers” in terms of privilege - “The teaching that every Christian has direct access to God through the mediatorship of Christ without the necessity of earthly priests (1 Tim. 2.5) is frequently called the priesthood of believers. Each person is his own priest, and approach to God is a priestly function.” W. Barry Garrett, “Priesthood of the Believer,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists II*, ed. Norman W. Cox. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 1115. In this interpretation, the emphasis falls upon the priesthood of the individual believer. The second understanding places emphasis upon the “priesthood of the believers” (plural) and highlights accountability rather than individual privilege. For correctives to the individualist interpretations of priesthood of believers *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 19, 2017

from both the non-Calvinist and Calvinist perspective within the Southern Baptist Convention see Malcom Yarnell, "On the Priesthood of Believers," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, eds. Thomas White, Jason G. Guesing, and Malcom B. Yarnell III. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), Kindle; Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, eds. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991): 85-95.

<sup>23</sup> In his work *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reformation of the Christian Estate*, Luther identified the three walls by which the Catholic church built a wall of protection around itself as the elevation of the spiritual power of the church over temporal magisterial powers, the mastery and control of Scripture through the offices of the Roman priestly magisterium, and the duty of magistrates to convene a council to reform the church as evidenced by Constantine conveying the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. The doctrine of the priesthood of believers attacks the first wall. See "To the Christian Nobility," in Dennis R. Jenz, *The Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 90-97.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 314.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, revised edition. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 88.

<sup>26</sup> "Luther insisted that the great masses of baptized Germans were not true Christians." Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2d. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 208.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 18. McGrath noted that in Luther's view, "God governs the world, including the church, through the princes and magistrates." McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 209.

<sup>28</sup> Lohse, 190; "The way was opened to the eventual domination of the church by the state, which was to become a virtual universal feature of Lutheranism." McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 209-210.

Martin Luther's *Solus Christus*:  
**REDEFINED AS BAPTISTS'  
AFFIRMATION OF  
CHRIST ALONE**

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Of all the great hymns of faith, one of my all-time favorites contains the words “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.”<sup>1</sup> I have had the pleasure of being present at more than one Baptist convention where hundreds and thousands of preachers belted out the words to this song. Baptists know well the heart of this song – Jesus Christ and His blood and righteousness are the sinner’s only hope in standing before God in judgment.

This focus on the exclusivity of Christ and His atoning work in justification has its roots in the New Testament message, but it sprouted afresh through the work of Martin Luther in the early years of the Protestant Reformation. What Luther and the Reformers referred to as *solus Christus*, Baptists latched onto in their affirmation of Christ alone. This article will consider Luther’s view of *solus Christus*, note the biblical basis for this view, highlight (Southern) Baptists’ promotion of Christ alone and look at a contemporary implication for Southern Baptists.

**Lutheran Solus Christus**

In the spring of 1517, Johann Tetzel, a German Dominican friar traveled throughout portions of Germany to sell indulgences to complete the construction of St. Peter’s Basilica. He sold

indulgences to aid the souls of loved ones in purgatory and he emphasized this meritorious act through the slogan: “As soon as a coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs.”<sup>2</sup>

When Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and professor of theology at Wittenberg, heard of Tetzel coming to his region, he

**“Jesus said to him,  
I am the way, and the  
truth and the life.  
No one comes to the  
Father except through me.”**

**– John 14:6**

grew angry at the thought of the poor contributing to the ornate basilica. As Luther contemplated these matters, he grew angry and wrote his *95 Theses*, posting them to the church door at Wittenberg, hoping

for public and/or written debate. That debate would never come as the Roman Catholic Church attempted to disregard him, and once he grew in popularity, tried him as a heretic. Over the next few years, Luther charged the Roman Church with several others errors in addition to indulgences.

At the heart of Luther’s questions and subsequent writings was the issue of justification: how is a sinner right with God? Moreover, the combined issues of selling indulgences and justification raised a number of inter-related questions, such as: Who has authority to forgive sins, Christ or the Pope? Is Christ or the church mediator between God and man? Can the selling of indulgences grant assurance of salvation?

Luther addressed some of these questions in his *95 Theses*. He wrote, “It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, “to say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.”<sup>4</sup> Luther believed eternal security could not be found

in the pope nor was the symbol of the pope in any way comparable to the symbol of Christ – the cross.

In concluding his document, Luther charged, “Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, ‘Peace, peace,’ and there is no peace! (Jeremiah 6:14). . . . Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, death and hell. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22).”<sup>5</sup> Luther argued peace with God could never be found in the purchasing of indulgences but only in following Christ. Thus, the doctrine of *solus Christus* was reborn in the Protestant Reformation.

Luther’s views on *solus Christus* only grew stronger in the subsequent years. In 1529 he composed *The Small Catechism*. In the conclusion Luther offered 20 questions and answers. Question 16 asks, “Why should we remember and proclaim His death? First, so that we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only Christ, true God and man, could do that. Second, so we may learn to be horrified by our sins, and to regard them as very serious. Third, so we may find joy and comfort in Christ alone, and through faith in Him be saved.”<sup>6</sup> The first response puts the full hope of the believer’s atonement of sin to be in Christ and Christ alone.

Added to these writings, Luther frequently addressed the doctrine of *solus Christus* in his sermons. For example, Luther claimed:

“...The devil does not intend to allow this testimony about Christ. He devotes all his energy to opposing it and will not desist until he has struck it down and suppressed it. In this respect, we humans are weak and stubbornly perverse and are more likely to become attached to saints than to Christ. Within the papacy they have preached about the service rendered by these beloved saints that one ought to rely on their merit.

“And I, too, believed and preached thus. St. Anne was my idol, and St. Thomas my apostle. I patterned myself substantially after them. Others ran to St. James and strongly believed and firmly trusted that, if they conformed, they would receive all they wished and hoped for. Prayers were said to St. Barbara and St. Christopher in order to avert an early and sudden death, and there was no uncertainty here. So completely is man by nature bent on renouncing this testimony of John the Baptist.

“For this reason it is necessary constantly to persevere and adhere to John’s testimony concerning Christ. For it requires toil and effort to continue with word and testimony, for a person at death to be able to say, I must die, but I have a Savior concerning whom John the Baptist testifies; on him and on no other creature, either in heaven or on earth, do I rely. However, that a person can die as cheerfully by believing in St. Barbara, in an indulgence, or in a pilgrimage to Rome, as in the man to whom alone John the Baptist points, is out of the question. Also, that a person can build as strongly on monkery or monastery life as on holy baptism is a forlorn hope.”<sup>7</sup>

Luther put absolutely no hope in praying to the saints. Praying to Christ is the only way to be heard by God. Where Luther stood on this matter carried over into other significant Reformers, including Ulrich Zwingli,<sup>8</sup> John Calvin<sup>9</sup> and John Knox.<sup>10</sup>

### **Justification Comes through Christ Alone and No One Else**

As noted previously, Luther and the Reformers primarily dealt with the issue of justification – how is a person right with God? Because of the Roman Catholic teaching of justification through believing in Jesus and performing good deeds (like indulgences), and in light of the Catholic teaching that the Pope and priests (and dead saints) helped with intercession, the Reformers underscored *solus Christus*.

This emphasis has its roots in the Scripture. The Bible is clear – God justifies sinners through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not works (see Romans 3:21-4:25; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:1-29). Moreover, God’s Word declares only Christ is the Mediator between God and man (see John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). No one else is able to fulfill the role of the God-Man but Jesus Christ.

### **Baptists’ Affirmation of Christ Alone – Christ, Not Priests!**

When Baptists emerged on the scene a few decades after the Protestant Reformation through the likes of John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and Roger Williams, they quickly stood in the same vein as their Reformation forbearers on the issue of *solus Christus*.<sup>11</sup> They stood for the exclusive mediation role of Jesus Christ between God and man. Popes, saints and the priests would not suffice. Baptists made their commitment to justification by Christ alone through their confessions of faith and notable Baptist voices.

### **Baptist Confessions of Faith**

**Early Baptist Confessions:** Often declared the first genuine Baptist confession of faith, John Smyth’s *Short Confession of Faith* (1609) observed in Article 7, Jesus Christ “...ascended into heaven; and that to himself as only King, Priest, and Prophet of the church...”<sup>12</sup> The following year, Thomas Helwys wrote *A Short Confession*, where Article 9 concerning Jesus Christ, stated, “therefore now acknowledge him to be the only Mediator,



In the spring of 1517, Johann Tetzel, a German Dominican friar, was commissioned by Pope Leo X to travel throughout portions of Germany to sell indulgences as a fundraising effort to complete the construction of Rome’s St. Peter’s Basilica.

King, Priest and Prophet, Lawgiver and Teacher...”<sup>13</sup> These individual confessions from the early seventeenth century show Baptists in the same vein as the Reformers on Jesus Christ as the only Mediator for mankind.

By the middle and late-seventeenth century, Baptist groups and associations collaborated on their beliefs and became even clearer on the work of Christ alone for salvation. *The First London Confession* (1644) stated, “Touching his Office, Jesus Christ onely is made the Mediator of the new Covenant, even the everlasting Covenant of grace between God and Man...”<sup>14</sup> Similar statements occurred in *The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations* (1651) in Articles 22 and 23: “That this Prince of Peace, *Jesus Christ*, is the only, or principal high Priest, which offered up sacrifice, or made reconciliation, for the Sins of the people...”<sup>15</sup> *The Midland Association Confession* (1655) in its ninth article noted: “That Christ is the only true King, Priest, and Prophet of the Church.”<sup>16</sup> Parallel statements can be found in: *The Somerset Confession* (1656) in its article XVIII;<sup>17</sup> the *Orthodox Creed* (1678) in its Article VI;<sup>18</sup> and *The Second London Confession* (1677, 1689) all of which declares, “*Christ*, the only *Mediator* between *God* and *Man*.”<sup>19</sup>

The following centuries continued this stream of Baptist belief that Christ alone provided mediation and atonement, and faith in Him alone resulted in salvation. *The Philadelphia Confession* (1742) reiterated the language of the *Second London Confession*. Even the *Articles of Religion of the New Connexion* (1770), as brief as they are, include articles three and four that declares Christ alone working a complete salvation, which is found only to those who look to Him in faith.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the exclusive role of the mediating work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in salvation is by grace. *The New Hampshire Confession* (1833) speaks how a sinner’s salvation “is wholly of grace; through the Mediatorial Offices of the Son of God...”<sup>21</sup>



**Southern Baptist Confessions:** When the Southern Baptist Convention formed in 1845, its congregations often looked to existing confessions of faith, like the *Second London Confession*, the *Philadelphia Confession* or the *New Hampshire Confession*. After James P. Boyce successfully argued for a Southern Baptist Seminary, the institution's co-founders adopted *The Abstract of Principles* (1858) as the governing document for faculty to teach "in accordance with and not contrary to" these principles. Article VII on "The Mediator" claims, "Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed mediator between God and man.... ascended to Father, at whose right hand He ever liveth to make intercession for His people. He is the only Mediator..."<sup>22</sup>

**"He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man." – Article II, B, Baptist Faith and Message (2000)**

The *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), slightly revised from the 1963 version, on God the Son, in Article II. B, observes: "He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man."<sup>23</sup> These Southern Baptist statements of faith demonstrate how Southern Baptists were consistent with previous Baptist views on Christ's unique work as mediator in salvation as *solus Christus*, views which were handed down from Martin Luther and the Reformers.

**Baptist Leaders:** Not only does one find numerous Baptist confessions of faith claiming belief in the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, but Baptist leaders have regularly declared this doctrine. For the sake of

space, this work will focus on Southern Baptists leaders and their belief in Christ alone.

One of the most well-known Southern Baptist theologians of the mid-nineteenth century, **John L. Dagg** wrote much on Christian doctrine. He went to great lengths to explain the offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king, but he introduced the discussion by expounding the role of mediator. Dagg wrote:

“The duty of a mediator differs, according to the relation of the parties. When the variance between them arises wholly from misunderstanding, an explanation is all that is necessary to effect reconciliation. In this case a mediator is simply an interpreter. When an offence has been given, but such a one as may be pardoned on mere entreaty, the mediator becomes an intercessor. But when the circumstances are such as to require satisfaction for the offence, the mediator must render that satisfaction or become surety for the offender. On God’s part, as he has committed no wrong, nothing more is required than an Interpreter, to show to man his uprightness. But, on the part of the guilty man, it is necessary that the Mediator should be both Intercessor and Surety.

“The union of two natures in Christ [as man and God] qualifies him for the work of mediation... These qualifications are found in no other person, and accordingly ‘There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved’.”<sup>24</sup>

Dagg taught the necessity of trusting in Christ alone in His role as mediator.

**James P. Boyce**, one of the founders of Southern Seminary, wrote about the uniqueness of Christ’s priesthood, being greater than a normal high priest: “Christ’s priesthood is perpetual, is in one person, without predecessor or successor, making one offering, once for all...”<sup>25</sup> Later, Boyce connected justification

to “the meritorious work of Christ, imputed to a sinner and received by him through faith...”<sup>26</sup> Boyce proclaimed belief in the doctrine of Christ alone.

Similarly, **J. M. Pendleton**, a Landmark Baptist who also served as a Southern Baptist, preached “Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” based on John 14:6. After referencing several passages in Romans about justification, Pendleton noted, “It is manifest from these passages that justification is through Christ alone. A condemned sinner can approach the Lawgiver only through the mediator. The mediator is emphatically the way. There is no other mediator. There are neither co-mediators, nor sub-mediators.... The zealous martyr going to the stake, said, ‘None but Christ – none but Christ.’ And so the pardoned sinner... says out of the fullness of his heart, ‘None but Christ – none but Christ’.”<sup>27</sup>

A few decades later, **B. H. Carroll**, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, preached a message entitled “The Sinning Christian and His Sins.” After making much of the work of Christ as Intercessor, Carroll discussed a decree he had read from Pope Pius IX on the immaculate conception of Blessed Virgin Mary from 1854. To contrast the greatest of Christ over Mary, Carroll added, “The point is that whoever goes as a mediator between God and men must be righteous. John says, ‘We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ The proof must be made out that the mediator is holy, undefiled and separated from sinners; there must not be a spot, or a blemish, or a wrinkle upon the character of the one who mediates between God and man.”<sup>28</sup> Carroll went on to explain how Mary cannot be a mediator, because she was neither sinless nor did she die in the place of sinners – “That could not be affirmed of Mary or any other woman, or any man, or any angel, but it was true of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and men.”<sup>29</sup>

Over the last few decades, Southern Baptists have not written as distinctively on the issue of Christ alone as mediator. It is not a denial of the doctrine, for they still stress the work of Christ throughout their writing and preaching. It seems to have become less of a distinction as Southern Baptists have aged and addressed other controversial issues. Some Southern Baptist systematic theologies and works of Christology do not even mention Christ as sole mediator, seemingly taking the doctrine for granted.<sup>30</sup> In more recent times, however, **Paige Patterson** has noted, Jesus Christ “came to serve as Prophet (revealer), Priest (mediator), and King (ruler). He can fill these offices because of who he is. No founder or leader of any other religion compares to this one.”<sup>31</sup>

In summary, Baptist confessions of faith and Southern Baptist leaders have declared belief in justification found in Christ alone. Furthermore, Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Mary, popes, priests and other religious teachers do not compare to the matchless Lord Jesus Christ.

### **A Contemporary Implication of Solus Christus/Christ Alone for Southern Baptists**

Nearly two decades into the twenty-first century, Southern Baptists are coming to yet another fork in the road. Just as previous generations questioned the authority of the Bible, the nature of missions, the methods of evangelism and such, Southern Baptists must decide where we will stand on the issue of justification and salvation, especially pertaining to the doctrine of Christ alone.

Society is constantly changing and the last few years have moved culture further along at a neck-breaking speed. Within a mere five weeks during the summer of 2015, decisions by the Supreme Court of the United States and issues heavily promoted in society pushed American culture further left than it had ever been before. These rapid changes included legalization of same-sex marriage

(6-26-15), promotion of transgenderism via Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner (7-15-15), the Boy Scouts of America allowing gay leaders (7-27-15) and videos on Planned Parenthood selling fetal tissue and organs (late July and early August). Add to these cultural issues the transgender bathroom laws of 2016 and Southern Baptists (and conservative Evangelicals) are being hard-pressed to stand their ground on biblical morals.

In light of the quick changes in culture, it is only a matter of time before Evangelicals will be pressured to jettison the doctrine of solus Christus in the name of religious tolerance. It is beginning to happen now and will only get worse.<sup>32</sup> If no other groups take a stand, Southern Baptists must do so. We must be willing to be mocked and ridiculed for holding onto an ancient faith coming out of an ancient Book which teaches about the Ancient of Days and His Messiah. A firm belief in and proclamation of justification by faith in Christ alone as well as His unique role as our Mediator must continue or the world will return to the dark days prior to the Reformation.

## **Conclusion**

As Southern Baptists look at the 500 year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, we can rejoice in the Lord for opening the eyes of the monk Martin Luther to see the doctrine of justification. We can grab hold of the doctrine of solus Christus and preach the exclusivity of faith in Christ alone. We must do so until He returns or calls us home. When we stand before Him in judgment, we will truly know our “hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” May our hope ever be in Christ and Christ alone!

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Edward Mote, “The Solid Rock,” *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), #406.

<sup>2</sup> A slight adaption from Thesis 27 in Martin Luther, *95 Theses*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/creeds-confessions/luther-95-theses.html>. Accessed 29 May 2017.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., thesis 52.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., thesis 79.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., theses 92, 94-95.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php>. Accessed 29 May 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5 (Reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 79. Luther often argued against the value of praying to the saints or the pope.

<sup>8</sup> “Christ is the only way of salvation of all who were, are now, or shall be” (Article 3 in Ulrich Zwingli, 67 Articles, <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/zwinglis-sixty-seven-articles/>. Accessed 29 May 2017). Furthermore, “Christ has borne all our pain and labor. Therefore whoever assigns to works of penance what belongs to Christ errs and slanders God” (Article 54, *ibid.*).

<sup>9</sup> Calvin wrote, “God never showed himself propitious to his ancient people, nor gave them any hope of grace without a Mediator. I say nothing of the sacrifices of the Law, by which believers were plainly and openly taught that salvation was not to be found anywhere but in the expiation which Christ alone completed” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 2, trans. Henry Beveridge [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 294); in distinction of the Levitical priests, “The case with Christ is wholly different; for he himself needed no sacrifice, as he was sprinkled with no spot of sin; and such was the sacrifice, that it was alone sufficient to the end of the world, for he offered himself.” (*Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, edited by John Owen in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. XXII [Reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005], 177).

<sup>10</sup> Knox argued that only Jesus Christ as the God-Man could fulfill the office of mediator between God and man: “without Sanctis haif theis tuo, Godheid equall with the Father, and Humanitie without sin, the office of mediatouris Sanctis may not usurpe.... May any other (Jesus Chryst exceptit) in theis wrodis mak intercessioun for synneris? Yf thai may not, than ar thai neither mediatouris nor yit intercessouris. ‘For albeit (sayith Augustine) Christianis do commend ane another unto God in thair prayeris, yit mak thai not intercessioun, neither dar thai usurpe the office of a Mediatour” (*A Declaration of the True Nature and Object of Prayer, 1553: A Confession of Prayer on the Death of Edward VI in Works of John Knox*, edited by David Laing, volume 3 [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014], 96-97).

<sup>11</sup> How much the Anabaptist movement influenced the English Baptist movement has been the subject of debate for hundreds of years. Regardless of direct influence, Anabaptists held to a Christ alone position, as shown in these examples: “Since Christ alone has died for our sins and in his name we have all

been baptized, therefore he must be for us the only intercessor and mediator” (*Eighteen Dissertations concerning the Entire Christian Life and of What It Consists*, 1524, Article 9 in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Revised) [Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969], 21.); “This person, God and Man, Son of the living God, came into this world that he might save sinners, or that he might reconcile the world, polluted by sins, to God the Father. On this account we confess him to be our only Mediator...” (*The Waterland Confession*, 1580, Article IX in Lumpkin, 49); “That touching [the Lord Jesus’] Office, hee only is made the Mediator of the nev Testament, even of the euerlasting Couenant of grace betveen God & man, to bee perfectly & fully the Prophet, Priest & King of the Church of God for euermore” (*A True Confession*, 1596, Article 10 in Lumpkin, 85.)

<sup>12</sup> Lumpkin, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 105. Similar statements are made in *A Declaration of Faith of English People*, 1611, Article 9 in *ibid.*, 119; *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion*, 1612-1614, Article 30 in *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> *First London Confession*, Article X in Lumpkin, 159.

<sup>15</sup> Lumpkin, 178-179.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, 207.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, 343.

<sup>21</sup> Article iv in *ibid.*, 362.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.sbts.edu/about/abstract/>. Accessed 1 June 2017. This confession was also adopted by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>23</sup> *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Dagg, *Manual of Theology in Two Parts: First Part...Christian Doctrine* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857), 207-08.

<sup>25</sup> James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville: James P. Boyce, 1887), 292.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>27</sup> J. M. Pendleton, *Selected Writings of James Madison Pendleton*, vol. 3, edited by Thomas White (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 160.

<sup>28</sup> B. H. Carroll, *Jesus the Christ: A Compilation of Sermons concerning Our Lord and Saviour, and Touching upon the Mountain-peaks of His Ministry, His Earthly Life and His Messiahship*, compiled by J. W. Crowder, edited by J. B. Cranfield (Nashville: Baird-Ward Press, 1937), 144-45.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, W. T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1945); Frank Staggs, *The Doctrine of Christ* (Nashville: *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 19, 2017

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Convention Press, 1984); and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). Such a statement does not imply these authors reject the doctrine of Christ alone but they do not emphasize it like previous writers.

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, "The Work of Christ," in *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 551.

<sup>32</sup> In January 2016 and May 2017, I was asked to take part in an inter-faith dialogue between various Christian denominations and Jews on the subjects of "Who was Jesus?" and "What is the meaning of Divine Revelation in light of Pentecost?" I was shocked to hear other Christian pastors insist that one does not need to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, so long as they are loving toward their neighbor. Moreover, they asserted God's revelation comes through groups of people opening up to discuss differences and that as long as people are open, they can receive God's revelation and be right with Him. They had little use for the arguments I made from the Bible concerning believing in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord to be saved.



Martin Luther's *Soli Deo Gloria*:  
**REDEFINED AS BAPTISTS'  
AFFIRMATION OF GLORY  
TO GOD ALONE  
THROUGH WORSHIP  
AND MUSIC**

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**Introduction**

*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!* [James 3:5].

In 1517, an obscure German monk in unassuming Wittenberg<sup>1</sup> struck the spark “that ignited the flames of the Reformation, a 130-year upheaval in the religious and political life of Western Europe that saw the rise of protesting and dissenting groups of Christians who sought freedom to worship according to what they felt were the Bible’s guidelines, not those of any earthly ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>2</sup>

Martin Luther (1483-1546) and other Reformers ushered in this seismic shift in the Church that was all about words and the Word. It was a time that saw Western church services switch from Latin to German, French, English or other vernacular languages; a season of Bible translation, when God’s Word was heard in the common language of the common man; an age when that Word was studied intensely to deduce theological concepts; and a period when great convictions could be encapsulated in small phrases: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria* – “to God alone be the glory,” the affirmation that “because salvation is of God and has been

**“The heavens declare  
the glory of God,  
and the sky above  
proclaims his  
handiwork.”  
– Psalm 19:1**

accomplished by God, it is for God’s glory...and for his glory alone.”<sup>3</sup>

A great concern of the Reformers was that only God would receive glory in worship. One of Luther’s students wrote:

“On Christmas Eve of 1538 Dr. Martin Luther was very jocund... [Luther said:] ‘[T]he angels proclaim and preach and sing, and their song is fair and sums up the whole Christian religion, for “glory to God in the highest” is the very heart of worship... The dear angels summon fallen men once more to...give to God alone the honor.’”<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, Luther told a preacher: “Look solely to [God’s] honor and not to applause.”<sup>5</sup>

John Calvin (1509-1564) “stands alongside Luther as the most notable of the sixteenth century Reformers.”<sup>6</sup> In the “Prefatory Address...to Francis I, King of France” (1536) in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he writes: “Your duty, most serene Prince, is, not to shut either your ears or mind against a cause involving such mighty interests as these: how the glory of God is to be maintained on the earth inviolate...”<sup>7</sup>

One way the Reformers sought to glorify God was by returning the musical praise of God to the people. Before and during the time of Christ, the people provided music in both public, corporate experiences<sup>8</sup> and in small, intimate settings.<sup>9</sup> Many first-generation believers were Jews who sang the psalms of their predecessors. But “as persecution began to grow, Christians resorted to meeting at night and early in the morning in homes, caves, and secret locations. Even modest singing in those circumstances could be dangerous, so Christians did not develop extensive musical practices beyond singing.”<sup>10</sup>

As Christianity became accepted, worship music expanded as new songs, instruments, and performers emerged. The early church fathers Jerome (330-420), Augustine (354-430), Ambrose (340-397) and John Chrysostom (345-407) all recognized the power of music.<sup>11</sup> Church historian Eusebius stated that psalm singing was universal and that the whole congregation, including the women, sang.<sup>12</sup> But over time, the role of the laity in worship diminished. Instead of active participants, they became passive observers as the clergy did all of the music-making. By the Middle Ages, “the Western church congregations were silenced and forbidden to read Scripture aloud or sing during corporate worship services. The congregation’s role in church was minimized by the priests to protect the ‘integrity’ of the service.”<sup>13</sup>

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With the Reformation came an emphasis on the involvement of all the worshippers, with congregational singing being the chief means of participation. John Smyth, founder of the first identifiable Baptist church of modern times in Amsterdam (1609), wrote in *Differences of the Churches of the Separation* (1608), “Wee hould that...singing a psalme is a part of spirituall worship.”<sup>14</sup> So did Luther and Calvin. When Luther revised the Catholic Mass, “the new services were jammed full of music... Against Catholic tradition, Luther insisted that all the people of God sing not just the priests and specially prepared choirs... [H]is great concern was what could be called the musical priesthood of all believers. Because God’s grace in Christ was for all, all should sing. Because Christ made his people a royal priesthood before God, the voices of all priests (that is, all Christians) should be raised in song.”<sup>15</sup>

Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) also valued music in worship.<sup>16</sup> “But these Reformed leaders [looked for] specific scriptural guidelines. Thus, since the Bible said nothing specific about polyphonic music (the complex singing of multiple lines of tunes and texts), the use of the organ, or the free composition of new hymns, their churches would use only biblical materials (usually paraphrased Psalms) as their church music.”<sup>17</sup> “Furthermore, in Calvin’s view the metrical psalms were to be sung only in unison and without instrumental accompaniment.”<sup>18</sup>

When Baptists emerged as a distinct denomination early in the seventeenth century, they came from English stock. “Influences from the Continent, particularly from the more biblical groups of Anabaptists, may have played some role in their origin, but Baptist origins and early motifs are primarily British.”<sup>19</sup> When English Protestants fled the island during the tumultuous reign of Mary, many went to Geneva and came under the influence of John Calvin. Upon Elizabeth’s coronation, they returned to England, bringing with them both Calvin’s theology and enthusiasm for congregational singing.<sup>20</sup> From these humble beginnings, music has grown to become “the dominant art form” for Baptists.<sup>21</sup>

### **Theological Propositions of Soli Deo Gloria**

**The Ultimate Authority of the Bible:** The first great principle of Protestant theology is that the Bible “was the sole authority over doctrine... The Word was alive, not simply a text. It was the source for truth and could always be trusted.”<sup>22</sup> From precursors like John Wycliffe (1320-1384), who believed that everyone should be able to read God’s Word in his own language, and John Hus (1369-1415), who held that “authority on earth was the Bible,”<sup>23</sup> to Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, Reformers taught that to the Scriptures alone should Christians turn for guidance. This emphasis on Sola Scriptura opposed Catholic teaching, which, while accepting the authority of the Bible, “also placed tradition alongside Scripture as pathways to the truth [i.e., as

co-authoritative]. The tradition was expressed in the decrees of popes and councils and was seen as the only legitimate interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>24</sup>

**Justification by Faith:** A second overarching truth was that salvation was accomplished by grace granted by Christ, and that “the mechanism that brought grace to the believer was faith. Through faith the believer came into direct relation with Christ... This approach was in sharp contrast with the practice of the church. Church doctrine had placed levels of mediation and activity between the believer and grace.... For the Roman Catholic works were placed alongside God’s grace as factors in salvation.”<sup>25</sup>

**Priesthood of the Believer:** The third foundational principle was the priesthood of all believers. Catholic theology held that priests were necessary to dispense God’s grace through the sacraments, while the Reformers “argued that there was no evidence in Scripture that a Christian needed a priestly mediator. Every person could be his or her own priest.”<sup>26</sup> In *The Address to the German Nobility* (1520), Luther contended that “all Christians belong to the same spiritual estate [i.e., clergy are not spiritually superior to the laity] by virtue of their baptism and faith.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Biblical Basis for Soli Deo Gloria**

Since the Reformers taught that the Bible was the only authority for faith and practice, they studied it to deduce its teachings. In *The Address to the German Nobility* (1520), Martin Luther rejected the idea that only the pope could authoritatively interpret the Bible, insisting instead that “laypeople have the right to read and interpret the Scripture for themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

One such layman was John Calvin who, as a young man in law school, read the works of first-generation Reformers, including Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. In the early 1530s, he experienced “a ‘sudden conversion,’ being convicted of the authority of the Scriptures and sensing a personal call to

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obedience.”<sup>29</sup> He soon began writing *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as he searched the Scriptures to determine the Biblical basis for his theology.

In reference to *Soli Deo Gloria*, Calvin wrote that the enemies of Protestantism “cannot bear that the entire praise and glory of all goodness, virtue, justice, and wisdom should remain with God...nor are they greatly concerned though they should see the glory of God dishonored.”<sup>30</sup> Citing John 7:18 <sup>31</sup> and John 8:50,<sup>32</sup> Calvin declared that “the mark of sound doctrine given by our Savior himself is its tendency to promote the glory not of men, but of God.”<sup>33</sup>

The Reformers also wanted to show that salvation was obtained by faith alone with no human addition of good works. Thus Calvin wrote, “The proper remedy [to righteousness by works is] to be found in a consideration of the majesty of God and [by contrast] our own misery”<sup>34</sup> and “we see how often and how anxiously Scripture exhorts us to give the whole praise of [righteousness] to God.”<sup>35</sup> For him, Romans 3:19<sup>36</sup> proved that “the righteousness of God is not sufficiently displayed, unless he alone is held to be righteous, and freely communicates righteousness to the undeserving.”<sup>37</sup> *Soli Deo Gloria* assured that humanity took no credit for salvation for “the glory of the Lord is infringed when man glories in himself... [Instead,] all the parts of our salvation are treasured up with Christ, that we may glory only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:29).”<sup>38</sup>

Calvin also found evidence that to God and God alone should glory be given for salvation in other sections of both Testaments: Isaiah 45:25; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Ezekiel 20:43-44; Ephesians 1:6; Ephesians 2:8; and 1 Peter 2:9.<sup>39</sup>

### **How *Soli Deo Gloria* Was Embraced and Defined by Baptists**

In 2007, LifeWay Research released the findings of a study of Protestant adult church-goers who had switched churches voluntarily.<sup>40</sup> Four of the top five reasons given for transferring

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church attendance were: (1) beliefs and doctrine of the church [89 percent]; (2) preaching [87 percent]; (3) worship style [80 percent]; and (4) music [69 percent].

**Primacy of the Bible and Preaching:** It is not surprising, given a demographic whose forbearers so highly valued Scripture, that doctrine and preaching would be the two most important factors in the decision to switch churches. The Reformers placed ultimate authority in the Bible, and preaching became the focal point of the service.



**Martin Luther wrote “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” which was among the 36 hymns he composed. In 1524 he collaborated with Johann Walter to produce the first Protestant (Lutheran) hymn book.**

**Congregational Singing:** Nor is it unexpected that two of the remaining three “top five” concerned worship and music. Luther said, “Music is to be praised as second only to the Word of God because by her are all the emotions swayed... This precious gift has been bestowed on men alone to remind them that they are created to praise and magnify the Lord.”<sup>41</sup> He not only promoted congregational singing in his church, but also published some of the first hymn books.<sup>42</sup>

But early Baptists followed the lead of John Calvin, who allowed only congregational singing. (This was a midway point between

the musical concepts of Luther, who encouraged choirs and instruments as well as congregational singing, and those of Zwingli who, although a fine musician himself, did not initially believe that music belonged in church.<sup>43</sup>) Particular Baptists early in their history allowed singing, but only by an individual. In the latter part of the seventeenth century they “began to expand their use of music..., from strictly solo singing to congregational singing, and from biblical texts only to newly composed ones as well.”<sup>44</sup>

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), pastor of a Particular Baptist church in London, led his congregation in 1673 to sing a hymn at the conclusion of the Lord’s Supper because Jesus and his disciples had done so.<sup>45</sup> Slowly and with opposition in some parts, Baptists over the years have embraced congregational singing, until by 1821, when organized Baptist life began in Florida, “music had become, along with prayer and preaching, an indispensable element in worship.”<sup>46</sup>

**Instrumental Music:** “When Baptist churches began to emerge in England early in the seventeenth century, their members shared the Calvinist mistrust of instrumental music. For many years, Baptists made no use of ‘mechanical music.’”<sup>47</sup> But by the middle of the 1700s, Particular Baptists began to allow instruments. In America, however, “opposition to musical instruments was characteristic of many Baptist churches until well into the nineteenth century... Only through a long and sometimes painful process did musical instruments come to be accepted in Baptist churches in America.”<sup>48</sup>

In Florida, there is no evidence of any major controversy surrounding instrumental music. “Organs began to be used in Northern Baptist churches early in the nineteenth century; just about the time the first Baptist church in Florida was founded. Perhaps the reason Florida Baptists did not become embroiled in the controversy was the fact that they were still in their pioneer



stage. The struggle to merely survive took their energy, and no churches were in financial condition to even consider using instrumental music.”<sup>49</sup>

**Choral Music:** “Luther thought it was biblical to use every form of God-honoring expression to praise the God of grace... Lutheran church music, as a result, almost immediately created a rich culture of choir directors, choristers, organists, composers, and performers.”<sup>50</sup> But to early English Baptists, “choral music was associated with Catholicism, which Baptists at the time strongly opposed... [E]ven after the idea of choirs was accepted, practical concerns slowed the growth of choirs in Florida’s Baptist churches.”<sup>51</sup>

“[B]y the time Florida Baptist churches had grown to the point that they could sustain choirs... [they] had become universally accepted. Even the change from paid quartet choirs to large volunteer choruses at the beginning of the twentieth century seems to have been accomplished with no discernible acrimony.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Contemporary Implications of Soli Deo Gloria**

Today’s Florida Baptists owe much to the monk from Wittenberg, including the principle that all believers are to be contributors to, not merely consumers of, worship. Throughout the state, lay people sing, pray, speak, read Scripture, and play instruments during services. Pastors and ministerial staff do not have the exclusive voice in worship.

Perhaps a word of caution is due at this point. In some churches, the music that is used during worship does not encourage widespread congregational involvement. When worship leaders consistently present songs in a key (usually too high) that is not easily singable, untrained singers may be discouraged from participating. Overly elaborate melodies, lyrics more appropriate to eros than agape, a constant infusion of new songs, and too great an emphasis on the instruments can also stifle lay input.

Rick Muchow offers suggestions to worship leaders to help facilitate congregational singing: “lead songs in the culture of the congregation... sing songs in the key of the congregation... sing familiar songs – incorporate new congregational songs regularly but sparingly... [and] feature vocal melody as the prominent sound in the mix: congregations sing to singers.”<sup>53</sup>

Another Reformation idea that still shapes Florida Baptist worship is the (musical) priesthood of all believers. Although lay people are now involved in all aspects of musical worship, churches would be wise to guard against anything which creates a sense of separation between the “stage people” and the congregation. Such practices as dimming the house lights and lighting only the stage during singing can generate a “performer/spectator” impression.

A third Reformation principle Baptists still embrace concerns the language of the service. Florida Baptist churches worship in English, Spanish, French Creole, Portuguese, Russian, Korean, American Sign Language and a dozen more tongues, each service expressing the elements in the vernacular of the local congregation.

A final practice of some of the Reformers was freedom for pastors to preach and read from any section of Scripture, not just from the assigned lectionary passages, and to not observe the Christian calendar year. Luther himself followed “the Christian year and the lessons assigned by long usage to each Sunday,”<sup>54</sup> but “Zwingli...abolished the use of lectionaries along with the observation of the church year. Calvin took a somewhat more restrained approach, abolishing both church year and lectionary but substituting a *lectio continua*”<sup>55</sup> since he saw homiletical value in having some sort of assigned reading.”<sup>56</sup>

But not every Florida Baptist worship practice of the twenty-first century is a contrast to the Catholic liturgy of the sixteenth. Choirs and choral music remains a staple in many Baptist

churches as they were in the Catholic churches of Luther's time, although the singers now are volunteer lay people, not clergy. Luther encouraged "the use of choirs and instruments and did not forbid them just because of their previous use by the Catholic Church."<sup>57</sup> Other Reformers, like Calvin, "rejected completely the Catholic heritage of organs, choirs, and 'hymns of human composure'."<sup>58</sup>

Instrumental music, whether from a pipe organ or an electric guitar, is another universal Florida Baptist worship practice that Luther would have praised but Calvin and Zwingli would have panned. "Under [Zwingli's] influence, Zurich's magistrates banned all playing of organs, and some of Zwingli's followers went about smashing organs in their churches... [Calvin] considered instrumental music 'senseless and absurd.'"<sup>59</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the small town of Eisenach stands St. George's Church where Luther preached while traveling to and from the Diet of Worms, and where, 164 years later, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1759) was baptized. Bach, a devout Lutheran, served as cantor for St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, for the last 27 years of his life. His personal library included a three-volume "Calov Bible" (Luther's translation with commentary selected from his works) in which he made personal notes and two sets of the complete works of Luther (one in German, the other in Latin).<sup>60</sup>

When Bach composed a piece of church music, he wrote J.J. (Jesu Juva—"Jesus, help") at the top of the manuscript, a prayer for his Lord's assistance. When he completed it, he signified his intent for the piece by writing at the bottom S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria!<sup>61</sup>

As John Calvin neared the end of his life, he noted that "[A]lways I have faithfully attempted what I believed to be for the glory of God."<sup>62</sup>

How much richer would Florida Baptist worship be today if all who gather in our churches implored the help of Jesus, not just in our times of worship, but in all of life; if we would see all of life as opportunities for worship (“whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”<sup>63</sup>); and if each of us could honestly claim that we have faithfully attempted all for the glory of God.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Contemporaries of Luther wrote: “The poor, miserable, filthy little town of Wittenberg,...isn’t even worthy to be called a town in Germany;” “a hamlet comprised, not of regular houses, but only of little ones, bad huts, built out of clay and covered with hay and straw.” (Gottfried Krüger, “How Did the Town of Wittenberg Look at the Time of Luther?” trans. Holger Sonntag, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://thewittenbergproject.org/about/how-did-the-town-of-wittenberg-look-at-the-time-of-luther>.)

<sup>2</sup> Joe David Elder, Jr., “A History of Florida Baptist Church Music” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2000), 15.

<sup>3</sup> “Cambridge Declaration,” accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration>.

<sup>4</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1950), 221.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>6</sup> Preface to *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2008), xi.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, “Prefatory Address by John Calvin to Francis I, King of France,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2008), xxi.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 15:1-21—the people of Israel celebrated their deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army in song; 1 Chronicles 15:16-24—King David appointed Levites as musicians, both singers and instrumentalists; Nehemiah 12:1-47—the people dedicated the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem with music.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 26:30—Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn at the conclusion of the Last Supper; Acts 16:25—Paul and Silas sang while imprisoned in Philippi.

<sup>10</sup> Elder, “Florida Baptist Church Music,” 13.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Abraham, *The Concise Oxford History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Rick Muchow, “Telling the Story with Congregational Singing,” *Worship Leader*, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://worshipleader.com/telling-the-story-with-congregational-singing>.

<sup>14</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Noll, "Singing the Word of God," *Christian History*, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-95/singing-word-of-god>.

<sup>16</sup> Zwingli came to this conclusion later in his ministry. He eventually permitted some vocal music in services, but never allowed instrumental music. (Paul J. Grime, "Changing the Tempo of Worship," *Christianity Today*, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-39/changing-tempo-of-worship>.)

<sup>17</sup> Noll, "Singing the Word of God."

<sup>18</sup> Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Church Street Press, 1995), 78.

<sup>19</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 11.

<sup>21</sup> John P. Newport, "The Musical Heritage of Baptists," *Baptist History and Heritage* vol. 19, no. 1 (January 1984), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Smith and Roddy Smith, *The Ultimate Guide to Christian History* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2001), 300.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 255-56.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 301-02.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>27</sup> John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History, volume 2: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 121.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> Preface to *Institutes*, xii.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, "Prefatory Address," xxii-xxiii.

<sup>31</sup> Jesus said, "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true."

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said, "I seek not mine own praise: but there is one that seeketh it, and judgeth." Both of these quotations are from the 1599 Geneva Bible, "the most widely read and influential English Bible of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was one of the Bibles taken to America on the Mayflower... It was the first Bible to use chapters and numbered verses and became the most popular version of its time because of its extensive marginal notes. These notes, written by Reformation leaders including John Calvin and others, were intended to help explain and interpret the Scriptures for the average reader." ("Version Information," accessed May 16, 2017, <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/1599-Geneva-Bible-GNV>)

Dr. J. David Elder, Jr.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, "Prefatory Address," xxiv.

<sup>34</sup> *John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2008), 492.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>36</sup> "...every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 498.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> This did not include adults who had moved their residence and thus were compelled to find another church. ("Church Switchers Move to Larger, More Contemporary Church," accessed March 9, 2017, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2007/03/30/church-switchers-move-to-larger-more-contemporary-church>; "LifeWay Research Finds Major Decision Makers for Those Who Switch Churches," accessed March 8, 2017, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2007/03/30/lifeway-research-finds-major-decision-makers-for-those-who-switch-churches>.)

<sup>41</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 354.

<sup>42</sup> "This Changed Everything: 500 Years of the Reformation," DVD, Christian History Institute.

<sup>43</sup> "This Changed Everything."

<sup>44</sup> Elder, "Florida Baptist Church Music," 16.

<sup>45</sup> William J. Reynolds, "Our History of Baptist Hymnody in America," *Baptist History and Heritage* vol. 11, no. 4 (October 1976): 209.

<sup>46</sup> Elder, "Florida Baptist Church Music," 84.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>48</sup> Harry Eskew, David W. Music and Paul A. Richardson, *Singing Baptists: Studies in Baptist Hymnody in America* (Nashville: Church Street Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>49</sup> Elder, "Florida Baptist Church Music," 366.

<sup>50</sup> Noll, "Singing the Word of God."

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>53</sup> Muchow, "Congregational Singing."

<sup>54</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 361.

<sup>55</sup> The continuous reading of a book from Sunday to Sunday.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Ring, "The Path of Understanding: The Development of Lectionaries and Their Use in the Lutheran Church," accessed May 25, 2017, <https://www.blc.edu/comm/gargy/gargy1/AlexRing.gpc>.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh T. McElrath, "The Minister of Music in Southern Baptist Life," *Baptist History and Heritage* vol. 21, no. 3 (July 1986): 10.

<sup>58</sup> Elder, "Florida Baptist Church Music," 16.

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<sup>59</sup> Grime, “Changing the Tempo.”

<sup>60</sup> Calvin R. Stapert, “To the Glory of God Alone,” *Christian History*, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-95/to-glory-of-god-alone>. Noll, “Singing the Word of God.”

<sup>61</sup> Roger Kamien, *Music: An Appreciation* 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), 165.

<sup>62</sup> Preface to *Institutes*, xiv.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV).

## THE REFORMATION AND BAPTISTS' PRACTICE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

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As this narrative begins, would you please close your eyes and think about the greatest dunk you have ever witnessed. As you close your eyes just marvel for a few moments!

If you are like me, when you think of a dunk, you immediately have a sense of excitement and joy. You may think of the crowd and how yells fill the air every time a basketball dunk occurs. I have witnessed the rim-rattling aura of a Vince Carter dunk, and long before his predecessors Wilt Chamberlain, Julius Erving, Michael Jordan and company popularized the dunk. Baptists have been dunking since the seventeenth century. Obviously, I'm not talking about basketball (I am not even talking about cookies and donuts – our waistlines give us away!), but I am writing about dunking new believers in the Lord Jesus Christ into baptismal waters.

Such dunks get Baptists excited! Dunking new believers helps us forget, at least momentarily, of our petty battles in business meetings. Witnessing dunks helps us tolerate a worship service which pushed past the noon hour. Watching a family member or friend take the plunge floods our minds with memories of our own spiritual conversion and subsequent baptism, filling our hearts with gratitude toward God.



But why make a fuss over and insist on dunking? Cannot sprinkling or pouring of water accomplish the same thing? And why not cover as many people as possible, starting when people are infants? Doesn't it confer some special grace (and which of us couldn't receive a little extra helping of that)?

**Baptism is not essential for salvation, or it would be seen as a work, but it is important because it is tied to the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection.**

Baptists' insistence on baptism (dunking) goes back to the early seventeenth century, a few decades after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. While Martin Luther and company initiated a return

to the biblical teaching on soteriology – the study of salvation – they said little on matters pertaining to ecclesiology – the study of the church. The Reformers insistence on the Scriptures as the greatest authority for faith<sup>1</sup> became the Baptists' argument in the first decade of the seventeenth century of how they practiced the faith. Thus, believer's baptism by immersion is directly tied to the Protestant Reformation doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*.

For the sake of clarity, the central argument concerning believer's baptism by immersion has never been about history or tradition, rather it is the very Word of God. (Although this work will reference some Baptist theologians, preachers and historical documents, the primary source is the Bible). This article argues that the Baptist view of believer's baptism by immersion is first and foremost a biblical position. Any other argument must subject itself to God's Word. From a biblical perspective, I will argue that baptism is for believers only and that it is always by immersion. This article should help us keep "dunking" as a major expression of our Baptist faith and practice – a practice rooted in Scripture and springing forth after the Protestant Reformation.

## **Believer's Baptism**

The first truth the Bible underscores about this subject is that baptism is for believers. We call this kind of baptism “credo-baptism.”

**Belief First, Then Baptism:** It is fair to say the Bible connects baptism with faith in a way that faith always precedes baptism. Although space does not permit me to include every passage of Scripture, numerous texts share baptism of believers in common. People who received the gospel message expressed their belief in Christ through baptism. The baptism of believers occurred in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38-41), Samaria (Acts 8:12), Damascus (Acts 9:17-18), Caesarea (Acts 10:47-48), Galatia (Acts 13-14; in light of Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21), Philippi (Philippians 16:14-15, 31-33), Corinth (1Corinthians 18:8; see also 1 Corinthians 1:2, 13-16), Ephesus (Ephesians 19:4-5; see also Ephesians 4:5), Rome (Romans 6:3-11) and Colossae (Colossians 2:11-12).

This believer's baptism is important, because there is no Scriptural argument for infant baptism (even acknowledged by R. C. Sproul, who sprinkles infants)<sup>2</sup> for “household” baptisms (see Acts 10:44-48; 16:31-34) do not include infants (an argument from silence) and baptism is always of believers. As an aside, someone claiming to be “baptized as a baby” is citing a misnomer, because that “baptism” was not immersion (you could drown a baby if you dunked him) and it was not as a believer (infants do not have the capacity to believe); so it was not baptism.

A tract has made its way around to several Baptist pastors. The tract is entitled “What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism.” As one opens the single-folded tract, there is nothing inside! On the back of this tract the reader can find this quote from a Presbyterian: “If some intelligent being from Mars should visit... and we hand him our Bible... he would learn of the great doctrine and practices

of the Christian religion without any other aid. He would find the Lord's Supper, the organization of the church, with elders and deacons, and ADULT BAPTISM, but it is safe to say he would never get it into his head that little children are to be baptized. He would not find infant baptism in the Bible because it is not there and cannot be gotten out of the Bible."<sup>3</sup> Now, if one cannot find infant baptism (paedo-baptism) in the Bible, why would he practice it?

**New Covenant Believers in the New Testament Took on Water Baptism:** On another related issue, the Bible never speaks of a new covenant believer who has not professed his faith through baptism. Part of the disciples' mission was to baptize those who had been taught Christ (Matthew 28:19). Baptism was (and is) an essential part of Christian discipleship; it was inconceivable for a person in the first century to become a Christian and not get baptized. Just to be crystal clear: *baptism is not essential for salvation, or it would be seen as a work, but it is important because it is tied to the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection.* New Testament believers expressed their belief in Christ through baptism (seen in the multitude of biblical texts referenced above).

### **Baptism Is by Immersion**

Not only should one realize baptism is for believers, but a second truth in the Bible is that baptism is by immersion.

**The Meaning of Baptism:** The meaning of "baptism" is immerse, dip, plunge, or even dunk. The passive of the verb "baptize" was used of ships which sunk. Non-Baptist believers who argue baptism can be via sprinkling beg the question: "Can a little water sprinkled over a ship cause it to sink?"

An important point to bring up here is the word "baptism" is not a translation but a transliteration. English churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the dates for most of the earliest English Bible translations) had carried much of their

ecclesiology over from Roman Catholic practices. Sixteenth century Protestants had kept the word “baptize” (from Greek) because their practice had allowed for modes other than total submersion to be used. Baptists addressed this matter of baptism when they came on the scene in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible clearly has immersion in mind with the use of “baptism.” The people who came to John the Baptist found him at the “river Jordan” (Matthew 3:6). Why would John use a river for baptism if mere water drops would suffice? Likewise, the Bible says, “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). Again, why would John be baptizing in a place with “plentiful water” if a cup or pitcher of water would have been an ample supply?

Moreover, the Scriptures describe the recipients of baptism in terms of being immersed or dunked. Matthew 3:16 states Jesus “went up” from the water during His baptism. When reading Acts 8:36, 38, why would the Ethiopian eunuch make a big deal about coming to water if water in his canteen would have been adequate?<sup>5</sup> The text also notes Phillip and the eunuch “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water.” Can the reader think of any other possible mode of baptism to fit this language other than that of immersion? Furthermore, why would the Philippian jailer and his family leave their house for baptism if just a little water could have done the job (see Acts 16:32-34)? These examples underscore the exclusive meaning of baptism as immersion (dunking).

Someone may object: “Baptism does not always refer to water baptism in the New Testament.” Agreed. Baptism sometimes occurs as a metaphor for Christ’s suffering and crucifixion (Mark 10:38-40). The question to ask, however, is this: “Was Jesus completely immersed by God’s wrath or sprinkled by it?” The fact God set Christ forward as a propitiation reveals that Jesus bore the full wrath of God in His sacrifice (see Romans 3:25).<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, baptism may refer to baptism in the Spirit. One should ask, “Does a new believer get a little bit of the Spirit sprinkled on him or does the Lord immerse the new believer in the Spirit so that he is completely affected by Him?”<sup>7</sup> Baptism can even refer to washing one’s hands (Mark 7:4), but the Jews would plunge their hands into a basin of water to wash them, so baptism still means to submerge in these contexts.

**“Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.”**

**— Article VII, *Baptist Faith and Message***

Furthermore, the Jewish mikvahs, popularized by the Essene community near Qumran, were the equivalent of ancient baptistery pools. At least 63 have been discovered near the Southern Steps of the Jerusalem temple. Jews who were about to offer a sacrifice had to first be cleansed before entering the temple. They would strip off their clothes, step down into the mikvah, fully immerse themselves, ascend the other side of the steps and put on clean clothes to enter the temple. These Jewish immersions were predecessors to Christian baptism and the new converts at Pentecost undoubtedly used the mikvahs for their baptisms (see Acts 2:38-41).<sup>8</sup>

On another note, some of the oldest church buildings in antiquity utilized baptismal pools for dunking new believers. Large baptisteries which could hold several feet of water have been discovered in the churches at Constantinople (early fourth

century AD), ancient Serdica (modern Sophia, Bulgaria, ca. AD 313), Hippo (late fourth century AD) and more. While history has never been the deciding factor for Baptists, these instances prove baptism-as-immersion were common and not at all foreign to the New Testament and Early Church.

**The Message of Baptism:** In addition to the meaning of baptism, one should not overlook the message of baptism. Baptism shows and proclaims Christ's death, burial and resurrection as well as the believer's identity in Christ in dying to his old life, being buried with Christ and being raised to walk in a new quality of life. The Apostle Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). Related passages where baptism signifies at least one element of Christ's death, burial or resurrection include Colossians 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:29; and 1 Peter 3:21. Baptism, then, is truly a gospel ordinance, for it is a command given by Christ which represents the gospel message of Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

Advocates of pouring water have sought to make their case by saying, "In the case of sprinkling, the water being poured over the head of the person represents the death of Jesus. The water running off represents the resurrection."<sup>9</sup> However, this is not the same thing. The picture is reversed from the subject in the water to the water on the subject. The Scriptures *always* speak of the believer acting in the water (going down, coming up) and *never* talk of the water acting on the believer (pouring over, running off). Moreover, in no instance in the Scriptures does one read of water being brought to baptize the believer, but the believer goes to the water to get baptized. Thus, the believer dipped and raised in water shows death, burial and resurrection. The believer in any other mode simply does not express that gospel truth.

### **The Meaning of Baptism Magnified in Baptist Confessions:**

Numerous confessions of faith in Baptist life have pointed to the meaning and message of baptism in the same way the Scriptures present them. As a matter of fact, the issue of baptism is among the most common denominator in Baptist confessions. An example from the seventeenth century includes *A Declaration of Faith of English People* (1611). This statement connects baptism with confession of faith as well as the outward sign of one's dying to sin and walking in newness of life.<sup>10</sup>

Also, the *First London Confession* (1644) describes baptism as “an Ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized” and “the way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water,” signifying the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Eighteenth century Baptist life continued to propagate this belief about baptism. *The Philadelphia Confession* (1742) added a couple of articles to the *Second London Confession* (1689), but retained the language about baptism, stating that “those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordination [ordinance]” and “immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.”<sup>12</sup> The *Articles of Religion of the New Connexion* (1770) declared “that it is the indispensable duty of all who repent and believe the gospel, to be baptized, by immersion in water.”<sup>13</sup>

An example from the nineteenth century is the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833), which declared “that Christian Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water... to show... our faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour.”<sup>14</sup> A quarter-century later, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the pen of

Basil Manly, Jr., adopted *The Abstract of Principles* (1859), which stated, “Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus, obligatory upon every believer, wherein he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up to God, to live and walk in newness of life.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the best expressions of Baptist faith in the twentieth century comes from Southern Baptists’ own *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, 2000). This confession states, “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.”<sup>16</sup>

Again, let it be said that history, tradition and even confessions of faith, as helpful as they may be, never carry the same weight as the biblical witness. This appeal to Baptist confessions simply underscores what the Bible says about believer’s baptism by immersion.

### **The Model for Baptism**

The greatest foci in the discussion on believer’s baptism by immersion are the questions of “who?” (believers) and “how?” (immersion). Often overlooked is the question “by whom?” This issue hones in on the model for baptism: one committed Christian baptizing one who is committing himself to Christ through a public confession. The Great Commission and the recorded baptisms in Scripture show believers as responsible for carrying out the ordinance, whether it be the original disciples (Matthew 28:16-20), Philip (Acts 8:38), Paul or other believers (1 Corinthians 1:12-16).<sup>17</sup>



## **The Mandate for Baptism**

While the model for baptism address the question “by whom?” (baptized believers), the mandate for baptism answers the question “when?” In the Bible, those who received the Word were apparently baptized immediately. When Peter preached at Pentecost, “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Similarly, the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized shortly after hearing the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35-38). Other immediate responses of baptism to one’s conversion include Paul, aka Saul (Acts 9:17-18), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47-48), Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15) and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:32-33). Each narrative is either explicit or implicit about new believers getting baptized as soon as they could.

Ultimately, baptism is an issue of obedience to our Lord. How many parents have told their kids something to do and then watched them postpone it? Adults often want their children to respond immediately – Now! What makes people think the Lord wants them to delay their obedience to His command?<sup>18</sup>

Now, someone may begin to think, “Does the way we understand baptism make us better than other denominations which sprinkle or pour?” No, but our stance is the biblical position and other modes place history and tradition over Scripture. Furthermore, when considering church history, it is inescapable to observe that baptisteries in ancient churches from the first few centuries were not bowls or pitchers but huge pools. Surely immersion was far more common than non-Baptist groups care to admit.

## **A Test Case—Clarity about Jesus in Matthew 3:13-17**

With all of that said about baptism, one begins to see the real meaning and message about Christian baptism. This may very well have been in the mind of Matthew in recording Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3.

[13] Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. [14] John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” [15] But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. [16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Some would say that baptism has little to do with the meaning of Matthew 3:13-17, but hang in there for a moment. Clearly, as seen in the previous Scripture, baptism portrays the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (cf. Romans 6:3). I am proposing Matthew may very well have recorded Jesus’ baptism to foreshadow His death and resurrection. Sprinkling or pouring water as “baptism” fails to make sense of the gospel truth of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. The reader of Matthew’s Gospel knows that Matthew has already alluded to Jesus’ death in vs. 1:21 – “He will save His people from their sins,” where salvation from sin points to a sacrifice by death. Moreover, the myrrh as a gift from the Magi in vs. 2:11 may also refer to the burial spice to be used for the body of Jesus. I simply mention these items to point out that it is not unlike Matthew to record an event or saying to foreshadow his ultimate purpose – to prove to Jews (and Gentiles) Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.

God can say He is “well pleased” with His Son because Jesus obeyed Him even unto death (Philippians 2:6-8). The Bible says it pleased the LORD to crush Him (Isaiah 53:10). On another note, when Matthew cites the voice of God the Father from heaven, he incorporates two messianic texts from the Old Testament – “this is My Son” (from Psalm 2:7) and “My Beloved, in Whom I am well pleased” (from Isaiah 41:1b). These two

messianic texts combine the Divine Son of Psalm 2 with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42-53 into one Person. God's verbal declaration of Jesus as His Beloved Son is nothing less than an exclamation of Jesus as the Christ.

The Apostle Paul, like Matthew, recognized God's declaration is powerful, for God declared, in a visual way, Jesus to be the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). Therefore, Matthew's inclusion of the voice from heaven citing Scripture reveals how central Jesus is within God's plan. No one can reject Jesus, who is the Christ via His baptism (death-burial-resurrection), and be pleasing to the Father!

So the imperative that Matthew is building toward for his readers from this text dealing with the baptism of Jesus Christ is to believe in Jesus Christ, once-crucified-yet-risen and then be baptized to declare your faith in Christ as Lord. Now the reader does not get all of that simply by reading up to Matthew 3, but when he understands baptism biblically, he cannot help but come to that kind of conclusion from Matthew's narrative.

The reason this response is important is because God has placed His seal of approval on Jesus. The only way any person can receive God's seal of approval and hear "Well done, good and faithful servant" is to align with Jesus Christ, for God has placed His seal of approval on Him and accepts all those who are in Him (cf. Luke 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:19).

### **Conclusion – The Older Baptists Get, the More They Dunk**

This mini-sermon from a biblical text brings to memory what other Protestant denominations have called Baptists: "people of the Book." Such a label is appropriate because Baptists, more than any other group of Christians, continually go back to the Bible for matters of faith and practice. This moniker is especially true of Southern Baptists, because we have battled over the Bible and concluded we will take our stand with what it teaches.

History and tradition will never replace biblical authority for every genuine Baptist.

The Baptist commitment to the Bible helps the reader understand the Baptist position on believer's baptism by immersion – Baptists hold this view because it is biblical. That same commitment drives Baptists to evangelize the world, for without hearing the gospel of Christ, none can be saved. Whenever people from various tribes, tongues and nations receive the gospel, Baptists do what they do best – dunk them in baptismal waters. Several years over the last few decades, Southern Baptists have baptized more than one million people worldwide (not to mention other Baptist groups). Florida Baptists have been among the state Baptist conventions leading in baptisms on most years, even if we don't baptize as many as we should. From baptisteries and horse troughs to rivers, lakes and beaches, Florida Baptists keep dunking tens of thousands each year. In many ways, it surely seems Baptists are able to fight off the effects of age. Since shortly after the Protestant Reformation, many dazzling dunks continue to be the high marks of Baptist life!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See my article elsewhere in this journal on “Martin Luther’s Sola Scriptura—Redefined as Baptists’ Affirmation of the Authority of Scriptures.”

<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul writes, “The first direct mention of infant baptism is around the middle of the second century A.D.” (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992], 228). Of course, Sproul does not make the same appeals to early church history for development of the Eucharist tradition or apostolic succession. While history and tradition can help shed light on our understanding of biblical issues, they should never be allowed to usurp clear biblical teachings.

<sup>3</sup> A. Pieters, *Why We Baptize Infants*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Several early Baptist writings on believer's baptism and/or baptism by immersion from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century are in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), including John Smyth, *The Character of the Beast* (1609); “A Declaration of Faith of English People” (1611); Edward Barber, *A Small Treatise on Baptisme, or Dipping* (1641); Christopher Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist* (1644);

“The First London Confession” (1644); and “The Kiffin Manuscript” (ca. 1640s). The reader may find helpful a few additional works which trace these issues: Abraham Booth, *An Apology for the Baptists: In Which They Are Vindicated from the Imputation of Laying an Unwarrantable Stress on the Ordinance of Baptism* (Boston: Manny and Loring, 1808); William H. Whitsitt, *A Question in Baptist History* (Louisville: Chas. T. Dearing, 1896); J.M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931); and Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawnn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Now the text does not say the Ethiopian eunuch had a canteen with him, but he would certainly not make the long trip without some sort of liquid, including water, to quench his thirst.

<sup>6</sup> For a defense of “propitiation,” see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 144-213.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 3:27 may refer to Spirit baptism, water baptism or both. A study of conversion in the New Testament church reveals that Spirit baptism and water baptism went hand-in-hand (not in terms of water baptism as a work for salvation, but in terms of it being unheard for a recipient of God’s Spirit not to express that new life through water baptism. See John B. Polhill, “Acts” in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 116-117.

<sup>8</sup> Several dozen miqvaḥs used for Christian immersion explains how 3,000 believers were baptized without disturbing the religious leaders in Jerusalem, because of the assumption of ritual cleansing (see Acts 2).

<sup>9</sup> Paraphrase of Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Essential Truths for Becoming Strong in the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 363.

<sup>10</sup> Articles 13 and 14 in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 120.

<sup>11</sup> Articles XXXIX and XL in Lumpkin, 167. The original language has been retained in several of the quotations, resulting in modern-day misspellings.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 30, points 2 and 4 in *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 2007, reprint edition), 65.

<sup>13</sup> Article 6 in Lumpkin, 344.

<sup>14</sup> Article xiv in Lumpkin, 366.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Spencer Haygood, *The Faith: A Commentary on the Abstract of Principles, Introduction*, Revised ed. (Campobello, SC: Jackson Memorial Baptist Church, 1995), 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message*, “Article VII. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000), 14. The quotation comes from the 1963 and 2000 editions (identical in language). The 1925 version is slightly shorter than its successors. For comparisons of the three editions, see <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

<sup>17</sup> Although I appreciate the influence of J.R. Graves and the Landmark Baptist movement on highlighting the importance of baptizers having been immersed themselves, the Landmark Baptists' insistence on the validity of one's baptism being tied up in an unbroken chain of succession back to the New Testament seems unfounded and impossible to prove.

<sup>18</sup> Though outside the scope of this work, one could add that the New Testament teaches baptism is the entrance into the church. The New Testament has numerous examples where groups of people believe the gospel, express that belief through baptism and then those baptized believers form a church. The Book of Acts records how several churches got their start, and when we compare the Acts' accounts with some of the epistles written to the churches, we get a pretty clear picture of how the belief-baptism-church issues are intricately linked together. This kind of order among churches, comprised of baptized believers, are found in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38, 41, 47); Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia and Bythynia (Acts 2:9, 38, 41; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21); places like Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra, all of which were part of Galatia (Acts 13-14; 16:1-5; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 1:1; 3:21); Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 31-34; Philippians); Corinth (Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:12-16); Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5; Ephesians 4:5) and Rome (Acts 2:10, 38, 41; Romans 6:3-11). This impressive list of New Testament churches should set the record straight about baptism's connection to the church. Baptist confessions have also noted "a New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers..." (*The Baptist Faith & Message* [2000], "VI. The Church," 13).

# TRACING BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL/ THREADS FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT

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The five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the theological impact of the Reformation for Florida Baptists. We are blessed inheritors of the Baptist tradition, which is a stem on the larger trunk of Protestantism. We should be supremely grateful for the Lord's work through the Reformers of restoring the authority of his Word and the primacy of the gospel to his church. Even as we differ from many of the Reformers and subsequent Protestant groups along lower-tier theological lines, we can rejoice at our unity in higher-tier theological matters. And from the Reformation forward, we can trace important theological threads that have influenced or been incorporated into Southern Baptist theological convictions. Reviewing this segment of historical theology can benefit us, not only through granting us a sincere heart of gratitude to the Lord for our heritage, but also through helping us to understand our own beliefs better and to avoid theological error.

This essay will briefly trace theological threads from the Reformation to the present day in the lives of Florida Baptists in the following areas: the centrality of the Word, believer's baptism, Calvinism/Arminianism, and the Great Commission.

## **The Centrality of the Word**

The key theological issue for Martin Luther in his struggle with

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the Roman Catholic Church of his era was the gospel of justification. Yet the root problem that created this issue was the divergence from the Bible as the authority for Christian faith and practice. Catholic tradition had been elevated to the same level of authority as biblical authority, and the vast majority of laypeople had little to no access to Scripture. Separated from the Word whose key theme is the story of God's redemption of men through Christ, and instructed by papal and other proclamations that advocated salvation by works, the common people lost the truth of the gospel. Luther and other Reformers emphasized a return to the Scriptures themselves, and in so doing restored the gospel to its proper place in the framework of Christian theology.

Three of the five Protestant Reformation *solas* are related to the centrality of the gospel in our theology: *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola Christus*. The Roman Catholic Church of Martin Luther's era tied one's salvation and eternal destiny to personal works, as well as to earthly financial contributions.<sup>1</sup> In response, Martin Luther emphasized that salvation was only appropriated by *faith* in the *grace* of *Jesus Christ*, which Jesus provided through his perfect life, his atoning death, and his triumphant resurrection. Luther finally understood this for himself from Romans 1:17: "For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith."<sup>2</sup>

Luther was joined in this understanding by the host of Reformation leaders. John Calvin, for example, specifically denounced the Roman Catholic works-based position in his biblical commentary on Ephesians 2:9, writing, "This passage affords an easy refutation of the idle cavil by which Papists attempt to evade the argument, that we are justified without works."<sup>3</sup> Moving to the next century and the early days of the Baptist movement, John Bunyan – who suffered much for his Baptist convictions and his unwillingness to submit his preaching to the authority of the state – demonstrated clearly in the



*Pilgrim's Progress* that only the cross of Christ can remove the burden of sin:



**Protestant Reformer John Calvin in 1536 published *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which, demonstrated from Scripture that personal faith in the grace of Christ was necessary for salvation.**

“Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Isaiah 26:1. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so

continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, ‘He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.’”<sup>4</sup>

Baptists in North America held to the same convictions regarding the primacy of the Word and the gospel all the way up to the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, and have continued to do so since that time. But the focus on the Word of God that was recovered at the Reformation had other important impacts on the life and beliefs of Baptists, including the institution of believer’s baptism.

## **Believer's Baptism**

Believer's baptism was by no means an innovation that occurred as a result of the Protestant Reformation. Rather, most of the Reformers – including both Luther and Calvin – practiced and argued for infant baptism. But believer's baptism is the only type of Christian baptism that is found in the New Testament!<sup>5</sup> Thus, the practice of believer's baptism for both Baptists and Anabaptists was a return to the biblical model. However, it is not difficult to see how an emphasis on the authority of God's Word over against the tradition of men would lead to a recovery of baptism in the biblical order: personal reception of the gospel, confession and repentance of sin, belief in Christ alone as Savior, and evidence of that commitment through public baptism.

Not only that, with the Reformation's emphasis on the gospel itself as the only means of salvation, the progression to baptism for believers was natural. The Reformation was a backlash against an empty form of religion that not only labeled people as Christians who subscribed to a works gospel, but also included people in the Church merely because of their earthly citizenship. Civil and ecclesial authority structures overlapped to such a degree that individual citizens' religious identities were swept up and included in their national or geographical designations. But all of this was fruitless in genuinely saving and changing the hearts of men. The Reformers demonstrated from the Bible that personal faith in the grace of Christ was necessary for salvation. And if other religious rituals were shown to be empty, it only made sense that baptism also was re-evaluated and given a new vitality and basis in the biblical text.

There were early Reformers that came to just these conclusions, including the Anabaptists Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, and George Blaurock, all of Zurich. In fact, they suffered death for these convictions at the hands of the leadership in Zurich, including Huldrych Zwingli.<sup>6</sup> Although most scholars do not draw a line of ancestry from Anabaptists to Baptists today,<sup>7</sup>

parallel lines of theological reasoning do exist, and they flowed logically and naturally from the return to the authority of the Bible, as well as the Reformation's emphasis on the gospel and our personal response to it.

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were the leaders of an English separatist congregation which departed for the Netherlands in 1607 due to persecution. Based on their eventual adoption of baptism for believers only, that congregation ultimately became the first Baptist church ever constituted. Although Smyth later became a Mennonite, Helwys continued to lead the congregation and moved it to London in 1611.<sup>8</sup> Gradually, this fledgling movement grew. That same century, the *Baptist Second London Confession* of 1689 made clear the position on baptism that Florida Baptists still hold to today: "Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience, to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance."<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the Baptist emphasis on local church autonomy seems to have been drawn in some measure from this emphasis on regenerate church membership and believer's baptism. Regenerate church membership is not recognized in connection with one's earthly citizenship or by completing a simple set of rituals, but rather through an individual's personal testimony and evidences of conversion. These evidences cannot be evaluated except in the context of local community and personal relationship. Believing firmly in regenerate church membership and credobaptism, Baptist churches were unwilling to give up their autonomy in determining who met these criteria.

Gregory Wills describes the development of this connection: "English dissenters introduced covenant-based churches during the reign of Mary Tudor... Church covenants were a natural development of the Puritan move to the voluntary church. Pure churches could not admit persons based on parish boundaries, for that would mean admitting many unconverted persons. They

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could admit those only who were converted and who voluntarily pledged to separate from the world.”<sup>10</sup> For Baptists, “The apostolic charter [of Matthew 18:17] decreed that ecclesiastical authority resided in the local church alone.

Church government was congregational, Baptists taught; each church was autonomous, possessing full power to exercise its rights and duties, whether exercising discipline, *admitting members*, appointing

officers, or observing ordinances”<sup>11</sup> [emphasis added]. If membership was based on individual response to the gospel, Baptist churches insisted on the right to evaluate that response at the local church level.

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### **Calvinism/Arminianism**

Interestingly, Thomas Helwys’s church in London held to Arminian theological beliefs, designating it as a General Baptist church.<sup>12</sup> As Baptist churches multiplied, however, many of them were Particular Baptist,<sup>13</sup> holding to Calvinistic beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Calvinism stemmed from the theology of Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509 – 1564), and Arminian theology, which stemmed in part from objections to Calvinism’s teaching on predestination, made by Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609), who lived and wrote as a member of the generation immediately following the Protestant Reformation.

As the Baptist movement spilled over into the New World, the vast majority of Baptist churches were staunchly Calvinist. As an example, *The Christian Index* – our nation’s oldest continuously published religious newspaper<sup>15</sup> and now the state newspaper of

the Georgia Baptist Convention – while it was published by the influential Jesse Mercer, “reassured subscribers by advertising his Calvinist orthodoxy,” and “as late as 1899, the paper ran a six-month series on Calvinism’s ‘doctrines of grace.’”<sup>16</sup> However, from early days of the growth of the Baptist movement in America, there were Baptists of both theological persuasions, in some cases worshipping together in the same churches.<sup>17</sup>

The existence of both Arminian and Calvinistic Baptist believers and congregations from the beginning is important to note, especially for the sake of irenic and cooperative relations within the Southern Baptist Convention today. It is common knowledge that for much of the twentieth century in the SBC, Arminian beliefs held sway, and that in recent years, Calvinistic convictions have made a resurgence. Historically, Baptists have always had multiple viewpoints on this issue, even predating by multiple centuries the birth of the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition to its conformity to our history, it would be healthy and helpful for the sake of gospel work if both ends of this theological spectrum appreciated our Baptist theological diversity and worked together for the goal of completing the Great Commission, to which we now turn.

### **Great Commission**

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation are not typically known as examples of international missionary zeal. Some of this is because of unfortunate doctrine among some of the Reformers asserting that the Great Commission had already been completed during the Apostolic Age.<sup>18</sup> But it is also important to remember the context in which the Reformers lived and ministered – they had only just recovered the gospel *itself*, and Martin Luther, for example, spent years in hiding because of outright threats on his life. It is not widely known that John Calvin actually did exhibit an overt desire to fulfill the Great Commission by sending missionaries both to his native France and to Brazil.<sup>19</sup>

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As the Protestant Reformation matured, however, more Christians moved from their newfound understanding of the gospel to a newfound understanding of lostness in the world around them. The Moravians of the eighteenth century were arguably the first Protestant group that, as a whole, owned their responsibility to the Great Commission, and they did so by sending missionaries to North America, Asia, and Africa.<sup>20</sup> Baptist commitment to the Great Commission can be traced to the man often called the “Father of Modern Missions,” the Englishman William Carey.<sup>21</sup> Carey’s founding of the Baptist Missionary Society and subsequent faithfulness in difficult work in India has been an inspiration to many modern-day missionaries. Adoniram Judson had a similar legacy in Burma, becoming “the father of the American Baptist missionary movement.”<sup>22</sup> And Lottie Moon would not only give her life in service to Christ on the mission field of China, but her legacy would launch the massive annual missionary offering that bears her name in Southern Baptist life today. In short, after God blessed his people with the recovery of the gospel itself, he blessed them with a gripping vision of the need to take that gospel to those who have never heard.

Moving toward the present day, there has been a parallel set of events in the Southern Baptist Convention. In the late twentieth century, a battle was waged for the theological soul of the SBC. In the end, due to God’s grace and the courage of many Florida Baptists and other Baptists across the nation, our commitment to the authority and inerrancy of God’s Word prevailed. As a result, there has been a renewed focus on getting the gospel to the areas of the world where people are both unreached and unengaged with the message of salvation. We have re-evaluated our financial allocations in light of worldwide accessibility to the gospel. Just as the Protestant Reformation naturally led to the modern missions movement, the Conservative Resurgence in the SBC naturally led to our Great Commission Resurgence. In recent days, Florida Baptists have helped set the pace for all Southern

Baptists by sending more and more to the nations for the sake of completing the Great Commission. May we be faithful to honor the legacy of the Protestant Reformers and the legacy of our Baptist forbears, as we glorify Christ by making disciples of every tribe and language and people and nation.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example, the notorious preaching of John Tetzel claimed a significant reduction of time in purgatory in return for the purchase of indulgences.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references are from the Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians, Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 228.

<sup>4</sup> John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1875), 51-52.

<sup>5</sup> I utilize the term "Christian baptism" to differentiate from the baptism of John the Baptist, which was a baptism of repentance and preparation for the work of the Lord in one's heart. Besides, John was not baptizing infants, either. In addition, one of the texts that paedobaptists point to as an instance of infant baptism is Acts 16:33, in which the Philippian jailer "and all his family were baptized." However, there is zero indication in the text that there were infants in the home.

<sup>6</sup> Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 627-628.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this historical debate, see Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 18-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 605-606.

<sup>9</sup> William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 291.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> "General" refers to the general (or unlimited) extent of the atonement of Christ – meaning that the death of Jesus provided atonement from sin for all men.

<sup>13</sup> "Particular" here (or definite, or limited) refers to the atonement of Jesus – meaning that the death of Jesus is sufficient to atone only for the sins of the elect.

<sup>14</sup> Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*, 606.

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<sup>15</sup> From the *Christian Index* website, <https://christianindex.org/our-history/>, accessed 30 May 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 105.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, “William Carey as a Missiologist: An Assessment,” in *Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things*, Allen Yeh and Chris Chun, eds. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013) 17.

<sup>19</sup> Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 241.

<sup>20</sup> B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 278.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

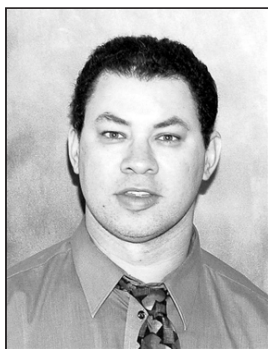
<sup>22</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Five Who Changed the World* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 19.



# THE REFORMATION AND BAPTISTS' TAKING UP THE CAUSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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Baptists have a long and proud history of battling for religious liberty and separation of church and state. Where did it all begin? There are two sources for early Baptist history: The Puritans/Separatists and the Anabaptists. Although, the Reformation, led by Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin, sought to reform the practices and theological beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, these men did not encourage religious liberty for all.

However, it was the Anabaptists who lit the torch for religious liberty for all. There is strong evidence that sixteenth century Anabaptists influenced the development of prominent beliefs embraced subsequently by Baptists: Believers' baptism; a believers' church; and religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Before Baptists came to America, "the foundation for religious liberty had been laid by the Anabaptists and the English Baptists."<sup>1</sup> Methodist Frank Mead noted the contribution of Baptists to religious liberty: "They are God's patriots, putting allegiance to him always above allegiance to Caesar. Freedom of conscience and complete divorce of church and state! How they suffered for that! They have faced mockery and mud, fines, whippings and iron bars; they have been burned at the stake and pulled on the rack, but they have held to it."<sup>2</sup> Baptists have stood for religious liberty from their beginning.

“This convictional principle,” observed William Brackney, “grows out of Baptist experience and Baptist thought.”<sup>3</sup> They have held this principle and the closely related principle, separation of church and state throughout their history.

### **The Anabaptists and English Baptists Defended Religious Liberty**

The Anabaptists were persecuted by both Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church. About three thousand people were executed for heresy from 1520 to 1560. Most of those executed were Anabaptists.<sup>4</sup> Anabaptists produced some of the earliest writings defending complete religious liberty. Balthasar Hubmaier wrote *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* and Sebastian Castellio wrote *How Are They to Be Treated*.<sup>5</sup> The defense of religious liberty continued to be defended “through the Anabaptist movement which included the Waterland Mennonite Church.”<sup>6</sup> It was the Waterland Mennonite Church that “influenced John Smyth’s beliefs about religious liberty and thus impacted the English Baptists.”<sup>7</sup> Timothy George asserted, “Baptist historians have sometimes gone to great lengths to prove that Smyth’s theological development was free from Anabaptist influence. Whatever may be said about his acceptance of believer’s baptism and his break with Calvinistic theology, this case can hardly be made with reference to his view of church and state.”<sup>8</sup> It seems clear that Anabaptists influenced the beliefs of English Baptists in regards to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. The Anabaptists and the English Baptists held “six common beliefs supporting religious liberty”: (1) that there existed two kingdoms: spiritual and secular; (2) that the civil power had no authority over the individual soul; (3) that discipline of church members should be handled by the spiritual power; (4) that faith cannot or should not be coerced; (5) killing heretics; (6) opening that complete religious liberty should be extended to all groups – even heretics.”<sup>9</sup>

## John Smyth

John Smyth (c. 1570 – 1612) founded the General Baptist Movement. Around 1607, Smyth and his congregation left England because of persecution and settled in Amsterdam because of the religious freedom that existed in that city. In 1609, Smyth baptized himself and members of his congregation who agreed with him that the baptism they received in the Church of England was not valid. They took the Anabaptist position that baptism should be reserved for those who made a confession of faith. Smyth's congregation sought to join with the Waterlander Mennonites. This action split Smyth's group from fellow Baptist Thomas Helwys who subsequently led a group back to England in 1612. Those who remained would eventually merge with the Mennonites after Smyth's death in 1612. Smyth's group that remained in Amsterdam drafted a confession after 1612. Article 84 of the confession stated:

“That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man to man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and the lawgiver of the Church and conscience (James IV; 12).”<sup>10</sup>

This statement divided the spiritual and worldly kingdoms. In addition, it argued for complete religious liberty. Leon McBeth commented on this article,

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**John Smyth founded the General Baptist Movement and embraced the Anabaptist position that baptism by immersion should be made by persons who make a confession of faith in Christ**

“Article eighty-four is the clearest Baptist statement up to this time on religious liberty. It is properly regarded as the first major landmark among Baptists, and indeed among English speaking peoples, of the doctrine of absolute religious liberty.”<sup>11</sup>

These principles existed in the earliest Baptist’s confessions of faith in seventeenth century England. For example, in 1660 the General Baptists of England created what was called *The Standard Confession*. Article 24 of that confession affirmed: “That it is the will, and Mind of God...that all men should have the free liberty of their consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution... and that for any in Authority otherwise to act, we believe is expressly contrary to the mind of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> That statement is similar to the statements made earlier by Anabaptists. It argues that all people should have religious liberty and should not be persecuted for their beliefs.

### **Thomas Helwys**

Baptists have affirmed the religious freedom of all people throughout its history. They have stood for the idea that all religions should be treated equally before the law and none of them should receive preferential treatment. One of the first Baptist leaders to champion these ideas was Thomas Helwys (1550-1616). Helwys wrote the following:

“We still pray for our lord the King that wee be free from suspect, for having anie thoughts of provoking evill against them of the Romish religion in regard to their profession, if they be true and faithful subjects to the king for wee do freely professe, that our lord the king hath no more power over their consciences than ours, and that is none at all: for our lord the king is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a King but in earthly causes, and if the Kings people be obedient and true subjects,

obeying all humane laws made by the King, our lord the King can require no more: for mens religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the king shall not answer for it, neither may he be judg between God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.”<sup>13</sup>

Helwys was a prominent pastor of the first Baptist church in England. He wrote a book entitled, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. This book defended the right to religious freedom for all. Helwys wrote in his own copy of the book that was given to the king these words: “The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore hath no power over immortall soules of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast to advocates for religious tolerance, Helwys argued for absolute religious liberty. Like earlier Anabaptists, he thought that two kingdoms existed and the ruler should exercise control only in the political kingdom. Baptist Historian William Estep wrote that, “such a bold declaration of the principle of religious freedom and the limitation of the king’s authority could hardly have evoked from James’ mentality anything other than total rejection.”<sup>15</sup> Helwys also thought faith should not be coerced. Thomas White noted, “Helwys, like the Anabaptists before him, felt that spiritual decisions were personal decisions which must be made through faith and that no amount of force could coerce a sincere decision.”<sup>16</sup> Helwys was arrested and imprisoned around 1613. It is believed that he died while in jail.

### **Leonard Busher and John Murton**

First, Smyth argued for religious liberty; then, Helwys argued for religious liberty and sealed his witness with a martyr’s death. Two other early English Baptists who proclaimed religious liberty were Leonard Busher and John Murton. Busher (ca. 1573 – 1651), an early advocate for religious toleration, defined his views in *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage, Volume 19, 2017*

*Religion's Peace: or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, published in 1614. Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth called it the “first Baptist treatise devoted entirely to religious liberty.”<sup>17</sup> Busher asserted that neither king nor bishop could “command faith.” Busher argued against the use of force in religion. To strongly emphasize his principle belief, Busher wrote his position in capital letters:

“IT IS NOT ONLY UNMERCIFUL, BUT UNNATURAL  
AND ABOMINABLE; YEA, MONSTROUS FOR ONE  
CHRISTIAN TO VEX AND DESTROY ANOTHER FOR  
DIFFERENCE AND QUESTIONS OF RELIGION.”<sup>18</sup>

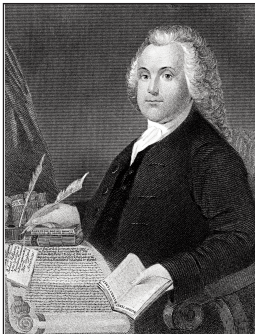
Based on that declaration, it is clear Busher thought it was wrong to persecute people because of their beliefs because it was not supported by the New Testament. Yet it was Busher’s defense of religious liberty that was a stark contrast to mere religious toleration: “Liberty is no civil favor to be granted or withheld by the whim of the king; it is a God-given right of man and is essential because of the very nature of Christianity.”<sup>19</sup>

John Murton (ca. 1583 – 1626) was a friend of Helwys who succeeded Helwys as the leader of General Baptists in England. He advocated religious liberty in his treatise, *Persecution for Religion Judg’d and Condemn’d*. First released in 1615, the publication was twice revised in 1620 and 1662. Murton wrote: “how heinous it is in the sight of the Lord to force men and women by cruel persecutions, to bring their bodies to a worship whereunto they cannot bring their spirits... No man ought to be persecuted for his religion, be it true or false...”<sup>20</sup> Murton thought that faith could not be coerced. Instead, it required a free response.

### **Roger Williams**

The next pioneer of religious liberty was to be found in the

American colonies. Roger Williams (ca. 1603 – 1683) was called a prophet of religious liberty by Harvard professor, Perry Miller. Miller wrote of Williams: “Now, as all the world knows, these separatist figures in history as the pioneer of religious freedom, even of democracy...Some even hail him as the precursor of Jefferson... Call him the prophet of the splendid doctrine that a man’s right to worship as he pleases inalienably given him by nature and nature’s God.”<sup>21</sup> Comparing Williams with Jefferson,



**Roger Williams was the pioneer of religious liberty in the American colonies by his founding of the first Baptist church in America at Providence, Rhode Island.**

Perry said that Williams wanted to free the church from the state; in contrast, Jefferson wanted to free the state from the church.<sup>22</sup>

Roger Williams was born in London in 1603. He was educated at Cambridge University. He was friends with Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. Because of his theological views that were contrary to the Church of England, Williams was forced to leave England or go to jail. He travelled to Boston where he was welcomed by friends. But soon his teachings on freedom of conscience, which conflicted with the Puritan-led Congregational Church, forced Williams to leave Boston. In 1636 he bought a piece of land from Rhode Island Indians which he named Providence, and designated it as a settlement that encouraged freedom of conscience.

Williams later returned to England to secure a charter for the newly established colony of Rhode Island which would guarantee religious freedom. He was successful and returned to America with the charter for Rhode Island. The passage within the charter that addressed religious liberty read: “...that no person within said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anywhere molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question

for any difference in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of said colony; but that all and any persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concernments.”<sup>23</sup> Roland H. Bainton, the famous church historian at Yale, thought that Williams’ ideas of separation of church and state influenced the nation’s founders and as they drafted the Constitution. Bainton noted that Williams’ policy of separating church and state liberated the church and secularized the state. He preached that the church consisted only of believers, while, the state included everybody. This idea was accepted by the nation’s founders who included in the Constitution the principle to keep church and state separate.

### **John Clarke**

Roger Williams was soon joined by another advocate for religious liberty, John Clarke (1609 – 1676), an English physician and Baptist minister. In 1637, Clarke and his wife Elizabeth, after departing England, “sailed into Boston harbor, just a few years after Roger Williams and his wife had made a similar escape from England.”<sup>24</sup> Clarke arrived at the time of the trial of Anne Hutchinson [during the so-called Free Grace Controversy occurring between 1636 -1638]. The Puritan leadership of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was upset with the strong-minded Hutchinson because she “dared to challenge male and clerical authority, [and] dared to have theological opinions. The Bay Colony authorities did not approve of her ‘doing’ theology at all, nor did they approve of the particular theology she did.”<sup>25</sup> Clarke had more sympathy for Hutchinson than he had for her persecutors. He wrote about this religious tyranny in his diary:

“A year in this hotbed of religious tyranny is enough for me. I cannot bear to see men in these uttermost parts of the earth not able to bear with others in matters of conscience and live peaceable together. With so much



land before us, I for one will turn aside, shake the dust of Boston off my feet, and betake me to a new place. There I shall make a haven for all those who, like myself, are disgusted and sickened by the Puritan dictatorship. I shall make it a place where there will be full freedom of thought and religious conscience.”<sup>26</sup>

Clarke and other like-minded believers decided to leave Boston to find a place where freedom of conscience could be realized. Roger Williams helped Clarke and his followers to purchase land from the Indians in Narragansett Bay. It is at this place Clarke began his “settlement and town, which he named Newport.”<sup>27</sup> Clarke and his followers organized the First Baptist Church of Newport, the second Baptist church in America. Clarke served as pastor of the Newport congregation until his death in 1676.

In 1651, Clarke along with John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes, members of his congregation, walked eighty miles to visit an aged, blind, Baptist friend, William Witter, in Lynn, Massachusetts. They led a prayer meeting in his home. All three – Crandall, Holmes and Clarke – were arrested. “Here was a serious offense, for it was against the law for anyone to hold divine services except under the auspices or with the consent of the established Congregational Church of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.”<sup>28</sup> The judge at the trial initially said they should be put to death. However the judge ruled that if they paid a fine, he would release them. If they did not pay the fine, they would be publicly whipped. Clarke and Crandall’s fine was paid, but Holmes refused for his fine to be paid. “Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped, thirty lashes well laid on, in Boston’s Market Square.”<sup>29</sup>

Roger Williams and John Clarke decided to return to England in 1651 to obtain a more secure constitutional charter for the Rhode Island settlement from the newly crowned monarchy of Charles II. Although Williams returned to Rhode Island, Clarke stayed in

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London for twelve years submitting repeated petitions to King Charles before securing in 1663 the Rhode Island Royal Charter. “Not only did the charter confirm the right to the land, but it gave the colonists’ permission to attempt ‘a lively experiment’ in which they could enjoy complete religious liberty.”<sup>30</sup> Clark’s book, *Ill Newes from New England: Or, a Narrative of New England’s Persecution*, played a major role in providing support for the new charter. The book, published in London, set forth Clarke’s definitive arguments in support of the practice of the Baptist faith that had been denied him in Boston. “Clarke himself,” observed Edwin Gaustad, “emerged as the leading denominational spokesmen for a true religious liberty.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Isaac Backus and John Leland**

Among the other American advocates for religious liberty were Baptist pioneers Isaac Backus and John Leland. Isaac Backus (1724-1806) was a Baptist minister and champion of religious liberty during the American Revolutionary era. He was converted during the Great Awakening in 1742. He was an independent evangelist for over ten years. On January 16, 1756, he became a Baptist and organized a Baptist church in Middleborough, Massachusetts. It was mostly through his pen that Isaac Backus fought for religious liberty. He wrote tracts, pamphlets and petitions arguing for freedom of conscience. “In 1773 his most important tract, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty against the Oppression of the Present Day*, appeared – the best exposition of the eighteenth century evangelical concept of separation of church and state,”<sup>32</sup> according to B. L. Shelly.

John Leland (1754-1841) was another early proponent for religious liberty and separation of church and state. He was converted and then baptized by a Baptist minister. Though born and raised in Massachusetts, he later served as a pastor of Baptist churches in Virginia. Leland and Virginia Baptists would have a major influence on the thinking of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Southwestern Seminary professor William Estep

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stated, “Through his preaching, writing and personal friendship with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Leland exercised notable influence in the struggle to disestablish the Anglican Church and establish religious liberty.”<sup>33</sup> Leland pressed Madison and the founders to include a guarantee of religious freedom in the Constitution. This protection would later be included in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. E.Y. Mullins, in the *The Axioms of Religion*, asserted that the First Amendment was the result of Baptist insistence. Mullins wrote, “Their view of soul freedom and separation of church and state is seen in their earliest known confessions of faith, and their practice as a denomination has never parted company with their doctrine.”<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

We have seen that important Baptist leaders carried the torch of religious liberty begun by the Anabaptists. Baptists have made important contributions to religious liberty and separation of church and state. Anabaptists and early English Baptists fought for freedom of conscience, and some even sacrificed their own lives in its defense. Roger Williams and John Clarke were co-founders of Rhode Island and its charter of religious liberty. John Leland and Virginia Baptists were influential in getting religious liberty protected by law in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. William Brackney speaking on this Baptist heritage said that, “the principles of soul freedom, liberty of conscience, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and all their cognates and correlatives are integral to Baptist identity over four centuries of denominational heritage.”<sup>35</sup>

There was much controversy in the last two decades over changes in Southern Baptists’ theological declaration known as the *Baptist Faith and Message*. (1963, rev. 2000). However, one article (XVII) of the *Baptist Faith and Message* that has not changed addresses religious liberty. The retention of that statement underscores the continuing importance of religious liberty for

Baptists. Jerry Johnson asserts, “Religious liberty protects the gospel from corruption by the state,”<sup>36</sup> because Article XVII states, “The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.” Religious liberty protects the church’s programs of worship, evangelism, and missions. Johnson wrote, that the, “state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends.” Also inherent in the article is the proposition that, “The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work.” Religious liberty keeps the state from controlling the church and the church from dominating the state. As a result, “Church and state should be separate.” It is good for individual freedom, for it asserts the right, “to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without the interference by the civil power.” Religious liberty affirms the freedom of conscience because it affirms, “God alone is Lord of conscience.” Johnson concludes, “Religious liberty is thus good for the gospel, good for the church, good for the state, and good for the individual.”<sup>37</sup> Baptists must continue their support for religious liberty for all.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomas White, “The Defense of Religious Liberty by the Anabaptists and the English Baptists” in *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty* edited by Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs and E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Brackney, *A Capsule History of Baptist Principles* (Atlanta: Baptist History and Heritage, 2009), 85.

<sup>4</sup> White, *Defense of Religious Liberty*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, “Between Pacifism and Coercion: The English Baptist Doctrine of Religious Toleration,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58 (January 1984) quoted in White, “Defense of Religious Liberty,” 58.

<sup>9</sup> White, “Defense of Religious Liberty,” 50.

<sup>10</sup> Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 41-42.

- <sup>11</sup> Leon McBeth, *English Baptist Literature on Religious Liberty to 1689* (New York: Arno, 1980), 26.
- <sup>12</sup> Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 42.
- <sup>13</sup> William R. Estep, Jr., "Thomas Helwys: Bold Architect of Baptist Polity on Church-State Relations," *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 no 3 (JL 1985):32
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>16</sup> White, "Defense of Liberty," 61.
- <sup>17</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *Source Book*, 72-73.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>19</sup> McBeth, *English Baptist Literature on Religious Liberty to 1689*, 47.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>21</sup> Joseph Martin Dawson, *Baptists and the American Republic* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1956) 16.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>24</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, "John Clarke: 'Good Newes from Rhode Island'," *Baptist History and Heritage* 24 no 4 (Oct 1989): 20.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>26</sup> O.K. Armstrong and Majorie Moore Armstrong, *Baptists Who Shaped a Nation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 55.
- <sup>27</sup> O.K. Armstrong and Majorie Moore Armstrong, *The Indomitable Baptists: A Narrative of Their Role In Shaping American History*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 59.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>29</sup> Gaustad, John Clarke, 22.
- <sup>30</sup> W.R. Estep, "John Clarke," in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, 85.
- <sup>31</sup> Gaustad, 24.
- <sup>32</sup> B.L. Shelly, "Isaac Backus", in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, edited by Bill J. Leonard. (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 36.
- <sup>33</sup> W.R. Estep, "John Leland," in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, edited by Bill J. Leonard, 171-172.
- <sup>34</sup> Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 131.
- <sup>35</sup> Brackney, 85.
- <sup>36</sup> Jerry A. Johnson, "Article XVII: Religious Liberty." IN *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestants Denomination*, eds. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 180.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

## Timeline of Key Events in the Protestant Reformation 1517 – 1648

**1517** (October 31<sup>st</sup>) – Martin Luther made a protest against the Catholic practice of indulgences by nailing his *Ninety-five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg;

**1519** – Luther defends and debates his theses against renown Catholic theologian Johannes Eck in Leipzig, Germany; Charles V, King of Spain, elected as the Holy Roman Emperor;

**1520** – Luther is excommunicated and burns papal bull (a directive from Pope Leo X) which charged Luther for “erroneous, false, presumptuous, and heretical” beliefs;

**1520** (August) – Martin Luther published *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* that set forth the concept of the priesthood of the Christian believer and also challenged the Pope being the final authority for interpreting the scriptures;

**1520** (October) – Martin Luther published *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that questioned the lack of scriptural support for at least four of the seven sacraments of the Church and condemned the non-scriptural practices of the Church and papacy;

**1520** (November) – Martin Luther published *A Treatise On Christian Liberty* sometimes referred to as *On the Freedom of a Christian Man* that argued the merits of freedom of conscience.

**1521** (January – May) – Diet of Worms, a quasi-governmental/religious territorial legislative council convened by Charles V Holy Roman Emperor that sought from Martin Luther answers to charges of his religious heresy. Luther was found guilty and declared a “notorious heretic” and “guilty of high treason;”

**1521** (May 4<sup>th</sup>) – Elector Frederick the Wise allowed Martin Luther to live at Wartburg Castle. He hoped that removing him from the limelight would reduce his popularity, as well prevent his arrest and avoid the death penalty issued by the pope;

**1521** (October) – King Henry VIII of England wrote *Septem Sacramentorum*, a pamphlet defending the Catholic Seven Sacraments against the attack made by Luther in *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. The Pope gave King Henry the title ‘Fidei Defensor’ (Defendor of the Faith);

**1522** (September) – Martin Luther, after eleven weeks of work, completed his translation of the New Testament into German and the book was published;

**1523-26** – Reformation in Zurich as the results of preaching by Huldrych Zwingli;

**1524** – Luther and Johan Walter produce first Protestant (Lutheran) hymn book; during his life Luther composed 36 hymns;

**1525** (February) – The Anabaptist movement began. Anabaptists believed that baptism should not occur until later in life (age of accountability) when a person is able to acknowledge and confess their sins. Anabaptists were persecuted and killed by both Catholics and Protestants;

**1526** – William Tyndale’s translation of the Bible into English was published;

**1529** (October 1 – 4) – Marburg Colloquy which served as the dialog meeting between Martin Luther and the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli at Marburg Castle, Marburg, Hesse, Germany. The two attempted to find common ground on interpretation of the Eucharist (communion) but they were unable to settle their differences over whether it is the symbolic or real presence of Christ during Communion;

**1529** “Protestatio” at Diet of Speyer gives its name to “Protestants”;

**1530** (June 25<sup>th</sup>) – Augsburg Confession adopted Lutheran doctrine. The 28 articles of faith were presented to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V by Philip Melancthon;

**1531** (October 11<sup>th</sup>) – Huldrych Zwingli was killed during the battle of Kappel which was fought between the Catholic and Protestant Cantons in Switzerland;

**1532-35** – King Henry VIII breaks with Rome over his divorce and re-marriage, and declares himself the “Supreme Head of Church of England.” In 1533 Henry VIII was excommunicated by the Pope;

**1534** – Francis I imposes crackdown on Protestants in France and John Calvin flees to Geneva;

**1536** (October 6<sup>th</sup>) – William Tyndale was found guilty of heresy for his translation and commentary on the Bible. He was tied to a stake, strangled, and then burnt.

*Timeline of Key Events*

**1536** – John Calvin published *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which defined the Protestant religion according to Calvin (Calvinism). Divided into four sections the book defines – God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Church;

**1536** (March 11<sup>th</sup>) – The English Parliament passed a bill that authorized the closure of all monasteries with revenue of less than 200 pounds per year. About 376 monasteries fell into this category;

**1542** (January 1<sup>st</sup>) – The Catholic Order of Jesuits was given control of the Spanish and Italian Inquisitions. Their aim was to remove non-Catholics either by forced recantation or death and re-affirm Catholicism;

**1544** – Dutch Catholic theologian Desiderous Erasmus – who in 1516 completed translating the scriptures into Greek and Latin using Byzantine sources – twelve years after his death, was excommunicated by the Catholic Church for his heretical writings;

**1545** (December) – Pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent – acting as the 19th Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church – sought to examine and clarify Catholic Doctrine. Protestantism was firmly repudiated and Catholic Doctrine clearly defined;

**1546** (February 18<sup>th</sup>) – Martin Luther died in Eisleben, Germany. He was aged 62.

**1549** (January 15<sup>th</sup>) – In England the *Book of Common Prayer* was introduced. Written in English by Thomas Cranmer the book outlined details of Anglican Services;

**1553** (October) – Queen Mary I restored Catholicism to England;

**1555** (September 25<sup>th</sup>) – The Peace of Augsburg was a treaty made between Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor) and the Lutheran Schmalkaldic League whereby Lutherans were permitted to exercise their faith and practice within the Holy Roman Empire;

**1558** – Queen Elizabeth I restored Protestantism to England;

**1559** (January) – John Knox helped to establish a Protestant Church of Scotland;

**1560** – The *Geneva Bible* was published, making it the first mechanically printed, mass produced Bible. Printed in English it was compiled by a number of English scholars that had fled England under Mary I and sought refuge in Geneva, Switzerland;

**1564** (May 27<sup>th</sup>) – John Calvin died in Geneva, Switzerland;



**1598** (April 30<sup>th</sup>) – King Henry IV of France granted toleration to the French Protestant Huguenots;

**1611** – The *King James Bible* was published – having been authorized by King James I to be used in England and Scotland.

**1633** (January) – Galileo was declared a heretic for supporting the scientific theories of Copernicus;

**1648** (October) – The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War and brought religious toleration to Europe.

**SOURCE:** Adapted from two resources: (1) Heather Y. Wheeler. (2015). titled, *The Reformation 1517 – 1648*, found at: <http://www.totallytimelines.com/the-reformation-1517-1648>; and (2) Peter Marshall, *The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137 – 149.

## ***Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences***

[The 95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenburg.  
October 31, 1517.]

PREAMBLE: Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent”, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.

10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.
11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept.
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.
18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or by Scripture that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.
19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.
20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words “plenary remission of all penalties,” does not actually mean “all penalties,” but only those imposed by himself.
21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.
22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.
23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.
24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

25. That power which the pope has in general over purgatory corresponds to the power which any bishop or curate has in a particular way in his own diocese and parish.

26. The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them.

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.

29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed, since we have exceptions in St. Severinus and St. Paschal, as related in a legend.

30. No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.

31. The man who actually buys indulgences is as rare as he who is really penitent; indeed, he is exceedingly rare.

32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

33. Men must especially be on guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to him.

34. For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction established by man.

35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges preach unchristian doctrine.

36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.

37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.

38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said (Thesis 6), the proclamation of the divine remission.

39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.
40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them -- at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.
41. Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.
44. Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better. Man does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.
46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians are to be taught that they buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.
49. Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.

52. It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.
53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done to the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.
55. It is certainly the pope's sentiment that if indulgences, which are a very insignificant thing, are celebrated with one bell, one procession, and one ceremony, then the gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The true treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ.
57. That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many indulgence sellers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.
59. St. Lawrence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure.
61. For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved by himself.
62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.
68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.
69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.
70. But they are much more bound to strain their eyes and ears lest these men preach their own dreams instead of what the pope has commissioned.
71. Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.
72. But let him who guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed.
73. Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.
74. Much more does he intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.
75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.
76. We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.
77. To say that even St. Peter if he were now pope, could not grant greater graces is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.
78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written.
79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned men to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity.

82. Such as: “Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.”

83. Again, “Why are funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continued and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded for them, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?”

84. Again, “What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God and do not rather, because of the need of that pious and beloved soul, free it for pure love's sake?”

85. Again, “Why are the penitential canons, long since abrogated and dead in actual fact and through disuse, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences as though they were still alive and in force?”

86. Again, “Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?”

87. Again, “What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?”

88. Again, “What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?”

89. “Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?”

90. To repress these very sharp arguments of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved.

Indeed, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Peace, peace,” and there is no peace!



93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ,  
“Cross, cross,” and there is no cross!
94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ,  
their Head, through penalties, death and hell.
95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many  
tribulations rather than through the false security of peace.

**Source:** <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/creeds-confessions/luther-95-theses.html>

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Membership Information:

- \*actively support Florida Baptist research
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- \*receive our annual journal issue on Florida Baptist work
- \*encourage seminary students in church history study
- \*invitation to attend all FBHS meetings and seminars

Request for Membership

The Florida Baptist Historical Society is a member-based society of individuals, churches, associations, and institutions interested in Florida Baptist history. Annual membership dues are as follows:

Student.....	\$10
Individual.....	\$15
Joint (Husband and Wife).....	\$25
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# **Florida Baptist Historical Society Endowment**

In 2015, the Florida Baptist Historical Society created an endowment fund for the express purpose of supporting the Florida Baptist Historical Society and its work. Specific ministries of the society include collection, preservation, publication and interpretation of Florida Southern Baptist materials. The society serves the local church by offering assistance in research, writing and publication of local church documentaries and histories. The society maintains over 3,000 Florida Baptist church files and more than 2,000 biographical sketches of past and present Florida Southern Baptist leaders. The endowment funds may also be used to help sponsor society meetings and Florida Baptist topical research. Funds may be used to reimburse research costs and society special events. Gifts to this fund are tax deductible and all checks may be made out to the Florida Baptist Historical Society Endowment Fund. The motto and goal of the Florida Baptist Historical Society is to honor those who honor Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

# Church Anniversary Celebrations in 2017

## **175 Years**

Aenon, Tallahassee

## **150 Years**

Concord, Chiefland

Jonesville, Newberry

## **125 Years**

CityGate formerly Ft Myers First

Palmett First

Quincy First

St. Petersburg First

Mary Belle, Live Oak

Mt. Olive, Bascom

Mt. Olive, Live Oak

## **100 Years**

East Chelsea, Tampa

First, Bagdad

First, Crestview

First, Lake Alfred

First, Vero Beach

Gully Springs, Bonifay

## **75 Years**

Collins Chapel, Malone

Eastside, Milton

Eastside, Plant City

Ensley, Pensacola

First, Wabasso

Heckscher Drive, Jacksonville

Midway, Palatka

## **50 Years**

Buchanan, Tampa

Christ Memorial, Lakeland

Elwood Park, Bradenton

Faith, Tallahassee

First, Panama City Beach

First, South Daytona

Gateway, Blountstown

Hernando Beach First

Lakeview, Delray Beach

Living Faith, Crestview

New Hope, Gainesville

North Palm, Hialeah

North Peninsula, Ormond Beach

Oak Harbor, Atlantic Beach

Oakland, Fort Walton Beach

One Hundred Third Street,

Jacksonville

Southside, Brandon

Suwannee

## **25 Years**

Church at Viera, Melbourne

Clay Community, Orange Park

Countryside, Ocala

Crescent Beach, St. Augustine

Family of God, Panama City

First, Poinciana

Grand Island

Island Chapel, Tierra Verde

Maranatha, Hialeah

Misionera, Miami

Mt. Hope Fellowship, Miami

New Beginnings, Crestview

New Hope, Hudson

Northside, Lakeland

## 25 Years Continued

Pines, Pembroke Pines  
Renaissance Evangelical, Fort Lauderdale  
Rima Ridge, Ormond Beach  
Salem Evangelical, Miami  
Shindler Drive, Jacksonville  
Sparta Road, Sebring  
Sugarloaf, Summerland Key  
Treasure Coast Community, Jensen Beach  
Westside, Bunnell



Aeon Baptist Church, Tallahassee, which continues to function today, likely may have been constituted as early as 1842. The church's pastor Thomas Lang held a meeting in October, 1842, with Middle Florida church leaders to consider the feasibility for organizing an indigenous association of Florida Baptist churches. The existence of the church is confirmed by a cemetery that was established in the early 1840s in a pine tree thicket of Leon County approximately five miles west of the Tallahassee settlement. The church's Minutes book records that Thomas Lang served as Aeon's first pastor until March, 1848, when he was excommunicated for "irreligious" and "immoral conduct." During this same period Elder Lang was serving as pastor of the Shilo [sic] Church, also in Leon County, and the Providence Church (Quincy) located in Gadsden County.

# Church Anniversary Celebrations in 2018

## 175 Years

Providence, Quincy

## 150 Years

Clayland, Live Oak

Gillette First, Palmetto

Live Oak First

Orange Hill, Chipley

## 125 Years

Clay Sink, Groveland

Lecanto First

Riverview First

Scrub Creek, Cross City

## 100 Years

Brownsville, Arcadia

Darlington, Westville

Pinetta First

Stanton Memorial, Miami

Woodstock, Jacksonville

## 75 Years

Cater's, Lakeland

Gulf Beach, Panama City Beach

Hiland First, Panama City

Lake Shore, Jacksonville

Park Place, Pensacola

Parker First, Panama City

Springfield, Panama City

## 50 Years

Argyle

Garcon Point First, Bagdad

Horseshoe Beach First

New Life, Tallahassee

## 50 Years Continued

Shamrock First, Haines City

Southside, Mulberry

Trinity, Palatka

Windermere First

University, Tampa

## 25 Years

Adonai, Miami

Evangelica, Gainesville

Sunrise First Haitian, Sunrise

Victory Community, Haines City



**Providence Baptist Church, Quincy  
will celebrate 175 years in 2018.**

# Heritage Award Recipients

1997	Earl Joiner
1998	Adolph Bedsole
1999	Joe Bamberg
2000	Ruth Bagwell
2001	John C. Hillhouse
2002	Martha Trotter
2003	Wiley Richards
2004	Edwin B. Browning, Sr.
2005	Edwin H. Rennolds, Sr.
2006	Harry Crawford Garwood
2007	Pope Duncan
2008	John L. Rosser
2009	Doak Campbell
2010	Judith Richbourg Jolly
2011	Jack Dalton
2012	James Bryant
2013	David Elder
2014	Mark Rathel
2015	No recipient
2016	David Raul Lema, Jr. Roger Richards
2017	Jerry M. Windsor

Jerry Windsor began working as the part-time Secretary-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society in 2002 while concurrently serving on the faculty of The Baptist College of Florida. In 2006, Dr. Windsor retired from his faculty position, having completed 16 years' service as a professor of preaching. Since that time he has worked to enhance the role, purpose and Florida Baptists' awareness of the Historical Society as it seeks to help individuals and churches research significant Florida Baptist history. He led the Society from 2002-2016.



"I felt led to teach (1953), called to preach (1956) and called to research, write and publish in successive order," Windsor told the Society directors in his retirement announcement. "The Florida Baptist Historical Society was very fitting for my interest, my calling and training."  
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