

PIRSpective

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Baptist Doctrines and Distinctives. Part II.

by James A. Billings

INTRODUCTION

Baptist doctrines and distinctives have steadily deteriorated over the last hundred years and are all but lost in our generation and culture. Millions of Americans are flocking to Mega-Churches. Mega-Churches represent the standard of excellence for the Church growth movement, Christian counseling, self-esteem programs, self-help ministries, addiction ministries, and every sin-ministry represented under the sun. Membership in a 'successful' church is the primary goal of the modern day Christian. The reason for this phenomenon is found in the definition of a 'successful church.' The term 'success' has been modified by a new breed of church-growth leaders.

The senior pastor of a 'mega-church' in Eden Prairie, Minnesota stated in his book, 'Pastors are expected to be...business administrators, counselors, public speakers, fund raisers, and visionaries,...' He also stated, 'Under the old rule the pastor functioned as the *prima donna* of the church. Other leaders were simply the extension of the pastor. The display of the senior pastor's name on the outside church sign is a strong indication that the church is operating under yesterday's rules. Under the new rule, the *prima donna* is out and the team recruiter and team builder is in.'

These series of articles on Baptist doctrine and distinctives are intended to remind us of the great heritage Baptists have maintained throughout the centuries. The pastor in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, unlike the Apostle Paul, does not understand the nature of the Church. His views of pastors and churches are diametrically opposed to Paul's admonition to Timothy: '*...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*' (1 Tim. 3:15). The Apostle Paul's staggering admonishment to the Ephesian elders needs to be re-enforced in every true church of the living God in order to combat the infiltration of humanistic influences which have ravished our land, '*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock*' (Acts 20:27-29).

Hence, a survey of Baptist doctrines and distinctives is very important in our day. In our last article we surveyed the general attitude people had and have towards Baptists, the nature of the Church, and the definition of the terms 'Baptist' and 'Anabaptist.' In this article we want to survey, historically, the genesis of the term 'Anabaptist,' the major church councils who recognized and confirmed the antiquity of the Baptists, and the existence and significance of the Pre-Reformation

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Baptists. Again, for the sake of emphasis, this study is extremely important because it proves that true New Testament Churches throughout the centuries were always in opposition to men that advanced extra-biblical inventions into their churches. This study of the witness and history of the Baptists reveals their commitment to the principles, practices, doctrines, and distinctives of true New Testament Christianity. Remember the words of the pastor from Eden Prairie, 'Under the new rule, the *prima donna* is out and the team recruiter and team builder is in.'

ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM 'ANABAPTIST'

The Rule of Bishops and the Beginning of the Church-State Union

After the Apostolic Age ended (26-100 A.D.) it took less than two generations for many churches to develop an ecclesiastical hierarchy that gave power to Bishops to oversee many churches. As time progressed it developed into a more sophisticated hierarchy. During the Era of Transition (100-313 A.D.) there

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Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics (2). Jude 3.

by Paul S. Nelson

Jude 1:3 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude 3 is an extremely important text for apologetics because it identifies what the Christian must defend. Before we consider how to defend the faith, we must know what we are defending. And therefore it is essential to first define the object of our defense. Jude 3 gives us a clear description of *'the faith'* every Christian is called to defend.

Jude was writing in the context of a perilous situation. Intruders *'crept in unawares'* and were infecting the churches with destructive teaching.¹ The seducers were propagating a form of antinomianism and *'turning the grace of God into lasciviousness'* (v.4). Their doctrine led to an immoral lifestyle. Many were being deceived. Jude says, *'it was needful for me to write unto you and to exhort you.'* He was compelled to write because of the urgency of the threat. False teachers had infiltrated the church and were among them. He points them out as *'spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear'* (v.12). The necessity of writing this letter is emphasized because action was needed. Indifference, passivity and procrastination would lead to their spiritual ruin. Their gospel witness was at stake, and the need to do apologetics was urgent.

Jude asserts his purpose for writing the letter by exhorting his readers *'to earnestly contend for the faith.'* It is an expression that describes the act of defending the faith. In the Greek this term (ἐπαγωνίζομαι) means to struggle on behalf of. It is an intensive form of ἀγωνίζομαι from which we get our English word agonize. It only occurs here in the N.T., but was commonly used to denote athletic contests or military battles. In our text, this strong metaphor is probably used to denote a wrestling match, or some other athletic contest. Whether athletic or military, one thing is for sure, this imagery describes apologetics as a rigorous fight and intense struggle. There will always be those that oppose the faith, and every Christian, sooner or later, will be called upon *'to fight the good fight'* (1 Tim. 4:7; 2 Tim. 6:12). The need for apologetics is urgent in every generation.

When Jude exhorts his readers to earnestly contend for *'the faith'*, he is not referring to a Christian's personal faith in Christ, but rather to the content of faith. In the Greek, faith possesses a definite article (τῆ πίστει) and is objective. Jude is referring to a definite body of truth that was articulated at the time of the apostles. Similarly, the apostle Paul refers many times to *'the faith'* (τῆ πίστει) as a recognized system of doctrinal truth (Gal. 1:23; 6:10; 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 1:27; 1 Tim. 3:13; Tit. 1:13; 2:2). Other N.T. terms used to describe this objective body of truth include *'the doctrine'* (1 Tim. 4:6; 4:13, 16; 6:1, 3), *'the sound doctrine'* (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1), *'the doctrine of Christ'* (2 John 1:9), *'the apostles' doctrine'* (Acts 2:42), *'that form of doctrine'* (Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13), *'the deposit of truth'* (2 Tim. 6:20), *'the message'* (1 John 1:5; 3:11), and *'the tradition'* (2 Thess. 3:6). These terms indicate that at the time of the apostles and N.T. authors there was a clearly

defined and authoritative system of Christian doctrine; a definite theology derived from Scripture that was the true expression of the Christian faith.² This is what Jude exhorts his readers *'to earnestly contend for.'*

Furthermore, Jude describes *'the faith'* by use of the participial phrase *'once-delivered-unto-the-saints.'* In the Greek, this participial phrase is sandwiched in between the definite article and noun functioning as an adjective. Literally, it is *the once-delivered-unto-the-saints faith*. The participle calls our attention to three elements of this body of doctrinal truth collectively referred to as *'the faith'*: 1) revealed once for all, 2) handed down to us by God himself, and 3) entrusted to all Christians.

First, this objective system of truth was revealed *once* for all (ἄπαξ). God's revelation is complete in Christ. *'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...'* (Heb. 1:1-2). The faith we defend is founded upon the completed work of Christ – his death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:2-4). And the inspired writing down of this revelation is complete, never to be altered, supplemented, subtracted from, or added to. To do so would be to deny the inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. Any new doctrine inconsistent with this system of truth is a falsehood and should invoke all Christians *'to earnestly contend for the faith.'*

Second, this objective system of truth has been handed down to us by God himself. Jude uses the term *'delivered'* (παράδωμι) which means to commit to someone, i.e., to entrust someone to keep and take care of. This system of truth has been committed to us by God himself; he is the source of this objective body of truth. It is not a human invention or something that the apostles made up. We are defending truths given to us by God. And if it has been given to us by God, then our defense of it is credentialed with divine authority.

Third, this objective system of truth was entrusted to all Christians. Jude uses the term *'the saints'* (τοῖς ἁγίοις) which denotes all Christians. Defending the faith is not just for biblical scholars, or pastors and teachers. It is the duty of every Christian to defend the faith. All believers and every N.T. church must safeguard the purity of sound doctrine. We must keep the gospel pristine and free from human innovations, self-righteous works or any other worldly pollution. This body of truth is to be preserved for future ages. In our generation we have seen the onslaught of pragmatism, secular philosophies of church growth, and worldly entertainment pervert the worship of God and the gospel message to the point of blasphemy. Christians need to rise up and defend the faith against such evil practices and restore the scriptural, God-centered, and reverent worship of God.

From this text we learn that Christianity is to be defended as a coherent whole. We must defend the system of truth contained in Scripture as a unit. Thus it is apparent that systematic theology is more closely related to apologetics than any other discipline.³ If one is to know the content of the Christian faith, he must go to Scripture; comparing Scripture with Scripture,⁴ collating, deducing and framing doctrinal statements.⁵ Scripture alone determines the content of faith, and the business of systematic theology is to set forth the coherent truth presented in Scripture. The biblical doctrines of God, man,

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A Biblical Philosophy of History

by Michael A. Carling

In his work *Lecture Notes on Historiography and Early Church History* to 313 A.D., Dr. W. R. Downing states that 'A philosophy of history is necessary for a consistent, relevant comprehension and application of historical data.'¹ Where does one go to establish a philosophy of history? For every believer the answer is simple - the very Word of God. Again from Dr. Downing, 'There is but one philosophy of history for the Christian, and that is a philosophy derived from the Scriptures...This forms the ultimate basis for both a consistent Christian world-and-life view and a Biblical philosophy of history.'² If the Word of God forms the 'ultimate basis,' then one should find within the Scriptures source material for a rational investigation of the truths and principles of history. A cursory search of the Scriptures will yield the knowledge that God has a predetermined plan; that God created time in which to unfold this plan; and that this plan is eternal.

In the first place, God has a predetermined plan. Every true believer will agree that 'God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity... whatsoever comes to pass.'³ If this is true, then God has already decreed every event of history and is working out that decree or plan with flawless execution every single day. Loraine Boettner suggests, 'If we could see the world in all its relations, past, present, and future, we would see that it is following a predetermined course with exact precision.'⁴ The events of tomorrow as yet unseen to us, are fully known to God and will come to pass as He has ordained them. Again, Boettner suggests, 'If God had not foreordained the course of events but waited until some undetermined condition was or was not fulfilled; His decrees could be neither eternal nor immutable.'⁵ Since God has foreordained all things, the course of history (and therefore church history) is already laid out in God's eternal redemptive purpose. Peter alluded to this in his address on the day of Pentecost. Referring to our Lord, Peter said, 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:' (Acts 2:23). According to the grammatical construction of this verse, the words 'counsel' and 'foreknowledge' refer to the same thing.⁶ God did not look down through the avenues of time and see that Jesus would be crucified and then laid His plans accordingly. God's 'foreknowledge' is based on His 'determinate counsel.' The historic event of Jesus being crucified on the cross for the sins of His elect was part of God's eternal redemptive plan.⁷

In his speech to the men of Athens, the Apostle Paul noted that all men come from a common origin and that God is their Creator. 'And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26a). Paul then reveals under inspiration that God has appointed the seasons of history for those whom He created. '...and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;' (Acts 17:26b). The Greek word for *hath determined* comes from ὀρίζω 'to define,' 'to mark out the boundaries or limits,' 'to determine or appoint.' What is it that God has determined? Literally, it is the 'having been appointed seasons.' The Greek word for 'before appointed' comes from προτάσσω (prot-as'-so) 'to place before,' 'to appoint before,' 'to define beforehand.' This word is also in the perfect tense denoting that what was

appointed will remain as such. The word for *times*, καιρός, expresses a type of time. 'Broadly speaking,' writes W. E. Vine, 'chronos [χρόνος] expresses the duration of a period, kairos [καιρός] stresses it as marked by certain features.'⁸ God has fixed the features of time that He has appointed and these will remain as such. John Gill reminds us of some of those *features of time* when he writes,

'...how long the world he has made shall continue; and the several distinct periods, ages, and generations, in which such and such men should live, such and such nations should exist, and such monarchies should be in being...and how long they should subsist; as also the several seasons of the year, as seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night; ...and likewise the several years, months, and days of every man's life; to which may be added, the times of the law and Gospel; the time of Christ's birth and death; the time of the conversion of particular persons; and all their times of desertion, temptation, affliction, and comfort; the times of the church's sufferings, both under Rome Pagan and Rome Papal; ...All these are appointed times, and determined by the Creator and Governor of the world:'⁹

In the second place, God created time in order to unfold His plan. The great 'I AM' is not bound by time, but man is. Early in the book of Genesis we are told 'And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years' (Gen. 1:14). Man is to live in the realm of time, in the realm of history; therefore, man needs 'seasons' and 'days' and 'years.' God is supratemporal, that is, He is above and beyond time, and yet 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world' (Acts 15:18). In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul explains 'That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he [God] might gather together all things in Christ...' (Eph. 1:10). The mystery of God's will which He purposed in Christ was with a view to ordering or directing the fullness of times. The words 'he might gather together' is one word in the Greek from ἀνακεφαλαιόω and means 'to head up' or 'sum up.' According to Justin A. Smith, D. D., 'The thought is that of a divine purpose directing all times and events with reference to an end ultimately to be reached, and which, when the time for it should arrive, must surely be accomplished.'¹⁰ In v.11 Paul then refers to the comprehensive, eternal purpose of God, 'In whom also [referring to Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:' Smith suggests that 'The all things must mean all things, whatever they may be, that can in any way affect the salvation and security of that saved people who have been made his heritage.'¹¹ In addition, Paul told the Galatians 'But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son...' (Gal. 4:4). Although God had from all eternity purposed His Son to be the savior of sinners, it wasn't until our Lord actually became incarnate that God's plan became a reality for mankind. Although God chose His elect from before the foundation of the world and are as good as glorified with Him in heaven, the salvation and glorification of each saint must first come through the process of time and experience.

In the third place, the Scriptures plainly teach that God's plan is eternal. This plan is for all time '...for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' (Isa. 46:9-10). This plan reaches to eternity in heaven, 'Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed

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Grammarians Facilitate Our Understanding

by Mark A. Bailon

There are some benefits to understanding the original language of the New Testament, especially when using commentaries while studying a Biblical passage. But not all issues are made clear even when armed with some knowledge of the Biblical Greek. As anyone who has used a commentary knows, it is important to know the theological viewpoint of the commentator. Even expert knowledge of the Greek New Testament cannot keep a commentator who holds a low view of inspiration or other erroneous theological presuppositions from drawing weak or even heretical conclusions in his or her book. However, in this article we discover that grammarians facilitate our understanding of the comments made by commentators on the Greek text.

One text in particular clearly demonstrates the point. In John chapter 5 our Lord heals the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda by the sheer power of His word. But our Lord commands the man to take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath.

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father making himself equal with God.

It is not really necessary to turn to the commentaries in order to understand this text. It is clear that the phrase *'sought all the more'* entails the idea that the Jews had been seeking an opportunity to kill Jesus and were now, all the more, determined to kill Him. But we can still ask ourselves, 'How did the translators come to this translation?' As I have discovered, much of the time the Biblical writers are much more vivid in their telling of the Gospel than the KJV or any other English versions of the Bible.

A critical commentary tells us that the verb *'[they] sought'* is not a simple statement of fact. Rather, it is in the imperfect tense, which usually denotes continuous action in the past. The verb 'to seek' in the imperfect tense can usually be translated as had continued to seek, or, were continually seeking. But in our text a rendering along these lines is a little awkward. It would read, 'Therefore, the Jews who had been seeking to kill Him continued to seek all the more to kill Him.' But John uses the imperfect to highlight the fact that the Jewish leaders had not just made up their minds to kill our Lord. The Jews were, in fact, renewing their ongoing efforts to kill Him. I grant you that this idea seems clear enough in the English. However, turning to a Greek grammar rewards us with an even clearer understanding of this point. Grasping the Greek makes this observation much more vivid. Here is what the grammarians have to say:

'The present and imperfect, since they cannot denote the completion of an act, often express an *attempted* action.'¹ And, the 'imperfect is often incomplete and focuses on the process of the action.'²

The imperfect is used, in this instance, to show intent or purpose of action only. The Jews had been seeking to kill Him and were still seeking to kill Him and, moreover, were determined to kill Him! We get this from the use of the imperfect tense.

However, this text is also telling us, explicitly, that the Jews sought all the more to kill him. The apostle John makes this striking in two ways. First, looking at the beginning of verse the conjunction is emphatic in the way it conveys a consequence. In the English we have the single word *'therefore.'* But in the

Greek it is 'because of this then.'³ We could construe the Greek thusly, as a consequence therefore. This seems redundant in the English but it accurately renders the Greek. This strengthened conjunction highlights the intensity of the Jewish reaction to our Lord's breach of their Sabbath tradition. As a consequence, therefore, of our Lord breaking the Sabbath and making Himself equal with God, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him.

In addition, to further make his point, John uses the word *μᾶλλον* translated *'all the more'* in our text. It is according to Thayer:

'1. added to verbs and adjectives, it denotes increase, a greater quantity, a larger measure, a higher degree, more, more fully'

Since they were not doing anything new we should translate this as 'the Jews then resolved all the more to pursue their plot to kill him.' Now the English translation is clear but the Greek makes us stop to really think about the text. Literally, 'the Jews were, to a greater degree, seeking to kill Him.' In order for one to want to kill someone and conspire with others in authority to do so, that person must be very upset. So with the strong language that John uses we see that the Jews were livid with our Lord and their murderous and envious hearts were aflame with hate. John uses a strong consequential conjunction, the imperfect tense of the verb, and the adverb 'all the more' to portray the hateful and murderous hearts of the Jewish leaders.

In a similar way John implies that our Lord made it a habit to violate the Sabbath by healing the sick and the lame on that day. He does this by using the imperfect tense when he writes, according to the King James Version, that *'not only had He broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father.'* This translation does not bring out the fact that an imperfect is used. We should take into account the 'incompleteness' of the imperfect. So, the thought is that our Lord's actions on the Sabbath betrayed His abiding disregard for the Sabbath restrictions imposed by the Jewish leaders.⁴ They knew that our Lord was as likely to violate their Sabbath on any given Sabbath day as He was to go and teach in one of their synagogues. That is, to them, it was an ongoing opinion in the mind of our Lord that their Sabbath rules were not worthy of His compliance. This is how the Jews interpreted His actions. But it doesn't completely explain their intense anger.

The Jews said that He *'said also that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.'* Literally, John writes, 'He also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.' So, He not only was a disobedient teacher but He was an arrogant blasphemer as well because He claimed to be a god on equal footing with Jehovah. This, of course, is how the Jewish leaders saw our Lord through their unbelieving and hateful hearts. In the following verses (vv.19-47) our Lord tells them how wrong they are.

These brief comments on John's use of the imperfect tense in chapter five of his gospel are not profound, nor do they provide an essential key to understanding these verses. However, looking into the grammar, even briefly, does make one think harder about the text and it can make the inspired descriptions and teaching vivid and vibrant. In this way the text of Scripture is easier to keep in our minds with the expectation that our lives will be conformed more and more into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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was wide spread state persecution of New Testament Christians throughout the Eastern and Western world. For example, in 177 A.D. intense persecution of Christians began in France. In 200 A.D. the Bishop of Rome was first called 'Pope.' In 303 A.D. Diocletian rendered all Christians outlaws.

313 A.D. began The Imperial Age (313–476 A.D.) which opened with the Edict of Milan. Emperor Constantine incorporated New Testament principles of the Church into his Monolithic society and granted protection to New Testament Christianity. This edict ended Roman state persecution of Christians. Through this Church–State union many churches lost their autonomy and became increasingly dominated by the Emperor. Through the Edict of Milan New Testament Christianity was officially turned into a State approved apostate religion. On the other hand, there were local, independent churches that were persevering in their obedience to the New Testament.

The Rise of Infant Baptism

The earliest evidence of the doctrinal controversy that introduced infant baptism into some of the churches is found in the year 185 A.D. Tertullian penned a defense of adult Believers Baptism. The only logical reason that Tertullian would write a theological defense of Believer's Baptism is because of the entrance of infant baptism into the churches. The first evidence in favor of infant baptism is from the pen of Cyprian (Council of Carthage, 253 A.D.). Cyprian stated, writing to Fidus, 'infants should be baptized as soon as they are born.' In its infancy, infant baptism was generally rejected but still had its apologists from the beginning of the second century. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo–Regius, North Africa (353–430 A.D.) was the first major defender of the heresy. He decreed at the Council of Mela, Numidia (416 A.D.), 'Also, it is the pleasure of the bishops (extra-biblical overseers of several churches) in order that whoever denies that infants newly born of their mothers, are to be baptized or says that baptism is administered for the remission of their own sins, but not on account of original sin, delivered from Adam, and to be expiated by the laver of regeneration, be accursed.' This statement, from the pen of Augustine, proves there were those that opposed this unscriptural view during that period.

Early New Testament Church Dissenters

The most conspicuous of the early conservative churches were known as the Novatians, the Montanists, and the Donatists. The Novatians were named after Novatian, Pastor of the Church at Rome (251 A.D.). Novatian would have no fellowship with the Catholic Party. Many ministers during that time were determined to exercise power over many churches. They denied the independence of the local church and sought to rule over many churches as an overseer or a Bishop. Montanus opposed the rise of a pastor of a local church to oversee many churches and also opposed infant baptism. Novation diligently opposed Cornelius as the Pastor of the church at Rome because that man desired to rule over many churches. Cornelius prevailed and Montanus resigned his membership, carrying many churches with him in protest. These newly formed New Testament churches flourished for many centuries afterward.

The most significant issue that set these conservatives apart from the liberal churches was that they would not let those who had left the church during times of persecution back into

their assemblies after the persecutions had stopped. Also of significance is that some had left the churches because they had lapsed in their faith. Some repented and desired to return to their church. The Montanists, Novations, and Donatists held 'they had denied Christ and ought to be baptized anew.' For maintaining this position they were labeled 'Anabaptists' by their antagonist.

As time progressed, the division between the true New Testament churches and the liberal churches widened. The true New Testament churches held to the perseverance of the saints, even during persecution. They also held, tenaciously to Believer's Baptism, and the autonomy of the local church. As persecutions persisted, the Novatians were forced into hiding and were afforded many names, among the best name given them was 'Cathari' ('the pure' because of the purity of their lives). The Donatists began in Numidia and eventually extended all over Africa. They believed in Believer's Baptism, the purity of church members, church discipline, independency of the church, and New Testament Believer's Baptism of those who were formerly unscripturally baptized. Augustus Neander said they were 'the most influential church division which we have to mention in this period.'

GREAT CHURCH COUNCILS

In 331 A.D., Constantine moved the capitol of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. The State–Church in the East became increasingly dominated by the political power of the Emperor, while the State–Church in West became steadily less influenced by Constantinople. Gradually, the Bishop at Rome became the most influential leader in the West, both politically and spiritually. This was the genesis of the Roman Catholic Church that dominated the political and spiritual lives of the masses for the next twelve hundred years.

During this era, The Imperial Age (313–476 A.D.), great theological controversies were hammered out. Ecumenical councils were formed to think through (dogma) and resolve the conflicts. The most notable of the great councils were the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Constantinople, the Council of Ephesus, and the Council of Chalcedon.

The greatest theological controversies discussed at these councils were: Arianism (Christ as a created being), Macedonianism (denied the Deity of the Spirit of God), Apollinarianism (believed Christ did not take on a complete human nature), Pelagianism (believed Adam was a bad example), Nestorianism (divided Christ into two persons, human and divine), Monophysitism (believed that the humanity of Jesus was absorbed into his deity), and Eutychianism (the belief that Jesus had only one nature).

The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) is the great focal point of the first seven centuries of Church history because of its condemnation of the heresy termed Arianism. During their council they took notice of two dissenting groups, the Cathari and the Paulianists. The statement reads, 'The first held the doctrine of the Trinity, as the Athanasians in the church did; but thinking the church a worldly community, they baptized all that joined their assemblies by triune immersion, in the name of the the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, on their own personal profession of faith, and if they had been baptized

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of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:’ (Matt. 25:34). This plan is also a present reality based on an eternal calling, ‘Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ. before the world began’ (2 Tim. 1:9). This plan is eternally unchangeable, ‘...I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.’ (Isa. 46:11) ‘God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?’ (Num. 23:19). And this plan will be brought to a culmination, ‘Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all’ (1Cor. 15:24-28).

In conclusion, Downing rightly claims that ‘Divine predestination is the key to a proper understanding of history.’¹² If this is so, then it can also be claimed that ‘Church history cannot and must not be considered apart from the sovereign government or providence of God. It is nothing less than the continuance of God’s eternal, redemptive purpose among men from the opening of the Gospel economy in the New Testament to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.’¹³ A Biblical philosophy of history begins with the very Word of God. From this Word we learn that every aspect of history, no matter how small, is part of the unfolding of God’s eternal redemptive purpose or plan. This plan was predetermined, is being unfolded in the process of time, and is an eternal truth. Lord willing, in future articles we will explore God’s purpose among men in the realm of church history.

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¹ Downing, W. R., *Lecture Notes on Historiography and Early Church History to 313 A.D.* Morgan Hill, CA: Pacific Institute for Religious Studies, 1995, p. 3.

² IBID.

³ *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Chapter 3, Of God’s Decree, Section 1.

⁴ Boettner, L., *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932, p. 20.

⁵ IBID, p. 21.

⁶ Note the Grandville Sharp rule in Dana and Mantey’s *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1957, p. 147.

⁷ This verse reveals what some call the tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. Although Christ’s death was part of God’s plan, the men of Israel were still held responsible for the murder of our Lord.

⁸ Vine, W. E., *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966, p. 333.

⁹ Gill, John, *Exposition of the Old & New Testaments*. Vol. 8, Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1989, p. 311.

¹⁰ Smith, Justin, D. D., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. Philadelphia, PA: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1890, p. 23.

¹¹ IBID, p. 24.

¹² Downing, W. R., *Lecture Notes on Historiography and Early Church History to 313 A.D.* Morgan Hill, CA: Pacific Institute for Religious Studies, 1995, p. 5.

¹³ IBID.

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before, they re-baptized them. The latter group baptized by dipping once in the name of Christ, and though they varied from the Arians, yet they all thought Christ only a man’

The importance of the record of the Council of Nicaea, for this paper, is that it unequivocally recognizes dissenting groups (Baptists) from the state church system. The Council analyzed their doctrine as either orthodox, as in the case of the Cathari or unorthodox, as in the case of the Paulianists.

PRE-REFORMATION BAPTISTS

Sadly, there are few extant writings by our Baptist forefathers from the first century to the time of Constantine and through to the Protestant Reformation. Those years were aptly characterized as ‘the Dark Ages’ because of the nature of the horrible Romish persecution. What writings do exist are from the pens of their hated persecutors, which, manifestly are biased against the Baptists and in favor of the established State Church religion. Sadly, what has been preserved has been interpolated (spurious words or passages added) by medieval Romish scholars and translators. It must be noted for historical clarity that the Jews of the first century were also notorious in their slanderous lies, charges, and persecutions against the primitive church.

History records that pre-reformation Baptists were many in number. They were known as Heretics, Anabaptists, Waldenses, Vaudois, Albigenses, Vallenses, Cathari, Gazari, Patrini, and Paterines. The English translation of the terms Cathari, Gazari, Patrini, and Paterines means ‘vulgar’ ‘illiterate,’ or ‘low-bred.’ The terms were factual because these particularly hated Christians were from the lowest order of society. Others were known as Wincklers (those who gather in a secluded space because of persecution), Piedmonties, Donatists, Lollards, Hussites, Paulicians, Novations, Berengarians, Leonists, Bogomils, Arnoldists, The Poor Men of Lyons, Petrobrusians, Henricians, Wycliffites, Communists, Agitators, along with a plethora of other characterizations.

Among these groups there were some throughout the centuries that held to New Testament principles, and therefore, were true New Testament churches. Leonard Verduin called these groups ‘the Stepchildren of the Reformers,’ but Jack Hoad understood them more aptly as ‘The Fathers of the Reformation.’ True New Testament churches that held to New Testament principles and practices were very distinct. They were those who lived quietly, who loved their neighbor as themselves, lived in self-denial, were charitable, had a reverence for the Word of God, were humble, had stable households, and obeyed the laws of their country. They were persecuted by their enemies and, in turn, loved their enemies. These people were rarely acknowledged or written about. The enemies of the Gospel made it their life work to undermine the purity of these people, so they focused on the undisciplined and heretical sects named among the Anabaptists. It was the churches with less than blameless testimonies that were made mention of and recorded in the history books. The motive behind these slanders was to erase from history the great heritage of the true Baptists.

The churches of Jesus Christ spent their first three hundred years under unspeakable persecutions in order that they would

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declare to the world that *'though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)* Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ' (II Cor. 10:3-5).

Tertullian stated, 'All of your ingenious cruelties can accomplish nothing; they are only a lure to this sect. Our number increases the more you destroy us. The blood of the Christians is their seed.' He also stated, 'We are a people of yesterday, and yet we have filled every place belonging to you—cities, islands, castles, towns, assemblies, your very camp, your tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum. We leave you your temples only. You can count your armies, our number in a single province will be greater.'

Petilian, a Bishop of the Donatists in Africa, stated in 347 A.D., 'Think you to serve God by killing us with your hand? Ye err, if ye, poor mortals, think this; God has not hangmen for priests. Christ teaches us to bear wrong, not to revenge it.'

Essential Texts continued from page 2 . . .

Christ, salvation, the church, and eschatology are all interrelated and interdependent. Together, they define Christian theism⁶ as a coherent whole.

We must not try to defend the faith by seeking to prove isolated historical facts which are separated from the system of truth presented in Scripture. Cornelius Van Til stated, *'It is impossible and useless to seek to defend Christianity as an historical religion by a discussion of facts only.'*⁷ The historical events of Christianity did not occur in a teleological vacuum, isolated from the purpose of God. Facts are not brute, and we must not separate them from the Creator who gives all facts their true meaning. It is the triune God of Scripture who pre-interpreted and foreordained all facts before they ever were facts. Thus, man can only interpret facts by thinking God's thoughts after Him. It is futile to defend the faith by attempting to prove historical facts simply by evidences. These events will surely be misinterpreted unless viewed from the perspective of the whole council of God.⁸ Are we defending isolated facts such as the resurrection of Christ, or are we defending Christianity as a coherent whole? Our defense of the faith should not be piecemeal; we are defending a Christian world-and-life view, the Christian theism of Scripture.

For example, suppose you are able to prove from evidences a miracle of Scripture such as the virgin birth of Christ, the resurrection, or the raising of Lazarus - what will it accomplish? To the scientist, he cannot and will not admit to a supernatural act such as a miracle, because he is fully committed to his naturalistic worldview. It proves nothing more than something unusual took place. To him, you have simply expanded his realm of possibility to a previously unknown phenomenon. And in due time, with the advancement of science and technology, the scientist believes we will eventually be able to explain it all by natural processes. The scientist's belief system will not allow him to view this world as under the sovereign control of God!

Ultimately, facts of history are interpreted by one's worldview or belief system. The apologist's task is to expose the fallacy

of a naturalistic worldview, and to show that rationality is only possible through Christian theism. Only the Christian can properly interpret facts of history, because he presupposes the theism of Scripture. Scripture provides the only basis for a true understanding of reality, and any defense of Christianity must be based upon the authority of Scripture. We must be careful not to compromise the authority of Scripture and the coherent system of doctrine contained in it when defending the faith.

In summary, we have identified what the Christian is to defend in the work of apologetics. In the words of Jude, it is *'the once delivered unto the saints faith'*, i.e., the doctrinal system of truth contained in Scripture. It is the coherent unity of doctrine that expresses the biblical worldview of Christian theism. We defend the faith as a package deal.⁹ Thus we have arrived at a definition of apologetics; the vindication of Christian theism.¹⁰

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- ¹ Most commentators identify the seducers as adhering to a primitive and libertine form of Gnosticism.
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- ³ Van Til, C., *Christian Apologetics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co, 2nd Edition (William Edgar editor), 2003, p.23.
- ⁴ This has reference to a principle of interpretation known as *'the analogy of faith'*, which is the principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.
- ⁵ Reymond, R., *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, p.878.
- ⁶ *Christian theism* is the belief in the triune God of the Bible as a comprehensive worldview. It presupposes the absolute authority of Scripture.
- ⁷ Van Til, C., *The Defense of the Faith*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co, 1967, p.7.
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Grammarians Facilitate continued from page 4 . . .

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- ¹ We are, of course, not saying that our Lord was unrighteous. We understand that our Lord knew that the Jews perverted the law in order to control the people and maintain their power and privileged positions. He did not disrespect the Law, only the Jewish leader's abuse of it.
- ² Goodwin, W.W. and Gulick, C.B., *Greek Grammar* (San Francisco: Ginn and Company, 1930) pg. 268. Italics are original.
- ³ Wallace, D.B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996, p. 541.
- ⁴ διὰ τοῦτο οὖν 'because of this then'

A Baptist Catechism with Commentary. Q2.

by William R. Downing

Quest. 2: What is the chief end of man?

Ans: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

1 Cor. 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Rev. 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

COMMENTARY

This universe and everything and everyone in it exist for the good pleasure and glory of God. Man is the image-bearer of God, created like him and for him (Gen. 1:26-28). Man was created originally righteous to find meaning and fulfillment in serving God and enjoying his fellowship (Eccl. 7:29). In Adam the human race fell from its original righteousness and became intellectually incapacitated, morally depraved and sinfully empirical (Rom. 5:12). Salvation in time is the redemption of the Divine image in man (Rom. 8:29). Ultimately, every Divine attribute will be glorified, either in the judgment or redemption of man and universe (2 Pet. 3:7-13).

The nature and character of God revealed in Scripture form the basis for all truth, knowledge, hope and confidence for the believer. We trust God and rest in him by faith, not because of what he has done, does, or might do for us, but rather because of who and what he is, i.e., faith rests in God's Person, not merely in his actions. We only find meaning and fulfillment when we do so in the context of the true enjoyment and glory of God.

Gleanings on Prayer¹

by William R. Downing

Prayer and Perseverance

'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' So states the Scripture. We are to *'pray without ceasing.'* We are to make everything a matter of prayer. Some prayers may be prayed through a sense of duty and are often uttered in a rather calm manner; others, because of an impending or immersing crisis, with a gathered fervency. We are creatures of time and circumstances, liable to frailty and, because of our infirmities, not given to perseverance, especially in prayer. All spiritual exercises necessitate thought, energy and concentration. Prayer, more than any other, necessitates a solemnity demanded by a consciousness of the presence and power of God. Perseverance in prayer, however, brings new and added elements. God has ordained prayer as the means to an end, yet he does not always answer our prayers immediately. Thus, prayer often becomes a severe test of our faith. We begin to seriously consider God's will and purpose, the validity of our requests, and things in our own lives which may hinder or preclude an answer. To persevere in prayer means coming to terms with issues which we usually do not contemplate, and dealing with things in our own lives which we would not normally deal with. As God has ordained prayer, so he has ordained the time of its answer. The interval becomes a time of testing and often changing, conforming and submission to the Word of God. God may even bring us to terms with the very essence of our relationship to him.

Difficulty in Prayer

True prayer is very hard work. We must say 'true prayer,' because

often times the words may be mouthed, but the heart and mind are not adequately engaged in 'transacting serious business with heaven.' There are three issues concerning prayer which ought to cause us very serious consideration: first, prayer is the epitome of faith. It is, perhaps, the greatest act of faith in our present Christian experience, and it is to be our daily exercise! Second, our Lord Jesus experienced his greatest hour of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane while engaged in prayer. There he cried out to his Father and submitted fully to the Father's will as he prepared for the imputation of our sins. His holy, sinless soul shrank from the awfulness of that reality. What a time of agony, which drew forth the bloody sweat of the Son of God from his pores and clotted into his garments, mixed with the dirt of the ground! Yet afterward he was calm and submissive unto death. What a lesson in prayer for us, even in our finite state! Finally, we must consider that, with regard to prayer, we need and have two intercessors, the Holy Spirit within us (Rom. 8:26-27) and the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven (Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1). Such considerations should encourage us to see the reality of prayer, to pray, and to persevere in prayer.

Prayer and the Power of God

At times and in certain circumstances, prayer may become an agonizing battle between faith and unbelief. We may be driven to God in prayer by overwhelming circumstances which try our souls, break our hearts, and test us to the utmost. The temptations and trials are that such circumstances may cloud our minds to the absolute sovereignty and omnipotence of our Heavenly Father. In other words, our circumstances may overwhelm our faith. Now faith is only as strong as its object. Our faith rests in the self-revealing triune God of Scripture who has revealed himself to us as our Heavenly Father. When pressed with overwhelming circumstances, we must realize that our God is not limited as to his power, and that the issue is ever a matter of the Divine will, never of the Divine ability! When Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to purchase property during the siege of Judah because the Divine promise would be fulfilled in the face of absolutely contrary present circumstances (Jer. Chap. 32), he began his prayer with these words, *'Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee!'* May such truth under gird our faith and our prayers!

Prayer or Communion with God?

Every true Christian prays. A prayerless Christian would be a contradiction in terms. Indeed, prayer is the primary mark of grace. Satan may counterfeit some marks of grace, but he never prompts anyone to seriously seek the face of God in prayer! Such an activity as a praying heart is too dangerous for him. If we do not have the habit of prayer, the providential dealings of our Heavenly Father in loving chastisement and trial will drive us to such. But this is not necessarily communion with God. Prayer is not communion with God?! Not necessarily. Communion implies something which is held in common. In prayer, we may petition, plead and even weep, and we may praise and invoke His name, but in communion with God we enjoy His presence, find pleasure in His attributes and sweet resignation to His will. Communion with God implies that all sin has been confessed, all petitions have been uttered and all serious business with heaven has been transacted. Nothing is left but to enjoy God's presence. To be taken up with God, to find in Him fullness of heart and quietness of mind, to consciously rest ourselves in the promises of His Word--that is communion with God.

¹This article was compiled from various short articles that appeared in the weekly Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Silicon Valley church bulletin.