

REFORMING A LOCAL CHURCH

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Contents

Introduction	3
Necessity.....	6
Motive.....	6
Purpose	6
Subject and Procedure	6
1. The Need of Reformation Today	7
2. The Kind of Men God Uses in Reformation.....	8
Paul's Teaching Was Watered with Tears.....	12
God Is Concerned about Foundations and Future Generations.	13
The Cost of True Reformation.....	15
3. Some Practical Suggestions for the Contemporary Scene	15
Final Appeal	17
Appendices.....	18
Appendix 1 Abstract of Principles.....	18
Appendix 2 Use Books to Spread God's Truth in the Earth!	21

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REFORMING A LOCAL CHURCH

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...”—Revelation 3:2

“Thou hast a few names...which have not defiled their garments...”
—Revelation 3:4

Introduction

IN recent years God has been pleased to raise up many among Southern Baptists who have returned, and others who are seeking to return, to the historical, Biblical, and doctrinal roots that our first seminary was founded upon. These doctrines are expressed in the Abstract of Principles found in the Fundamental Law of the seminary written into its charter April 30, 1858: “9. Every Professor of the Institution shall be a member of a regular Baptist Church; and all persons accepting Professorships in this Seminary, shall be considered by such acceptance, as engaging to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the *Abstract of Principles* hereinafter laid down” (Mueller: *History of Southern Seminary*; Broadman Press p.238). A more comprehensive expression can be found in Dr. James P. Boyce’s “*Systematic Theology*” (1888). This doctrinal position can also be found in the writings of Dr. John L. Dagg (1884), the first writing Southern Baptist theologian. I want to point out that if these founding fathers had true Biblical doctrine then it is still true because God has not changed and the Bible has not changed. Truth does not change!

Let me further underscore the fact that a real reformation is taking place by quoting one of the most respected Southern Baptist theologians, Dr. James Leo Garrett, who teaches at Southwestern Theological Seminary. Dr. Garrett was addressing young men who were preparing for the ministry. He introduced the session by stating his purpose:

“...to introduce some sub-types of Southern Baptist Theology. There are some movements that seem to be on the horizon. I am getting out into even more thin ice, some of you may think, but I don’t think we can ignore what happens today. It is important to know what John Smith (1631) and John Gill (1771), and Andrew Fuller (1815)

taught, but it is also important to know what is happening in 1982: that in some sense, these are minority movements, or they are sub-categories, they are movements or they are teachings that have surfaced in Southern Baptist life enough that you can see them and detect them, but you may not know where they are going from here. I don't make any predictions this afternoon. I am not trying to predict so much as I am to report. Now, it's in that sense that I want to deal with this. I hope you understand the framework of which I am going to speak this afternoon. It is very important that you get the framework. These, I think are, perhaps, identifiable trends, theologically, within the Southern Baptist life, and can in some sense be called movements or you might say sub-types, sub-categories. This means that each one of them has to be looked at on its own, and that is what I want to do in these few moments."

Dr. Garrett mentioned five movements within the convention. First he mentioned *The Charismatic Movement*; second, *Dispensationalism*; third, *The Biblical Inerrancy Movement*; fourth, *The Keswick Movement*.

The fifth movement he mentions is *The Calvinistic Movement*. He refers to it as neo-Calvinism. I feel that he would have been more accurate to refer to it as "paleo" meaning the old Calvinism.

I wish to state just how honestly and accurately Dr. Garrett stated the truth about our Calvinistic roots:

"Now, this is a movement that asserts the truth and the viability of the strong Calvinism; it is an affirmation of strong Calvinism that we can find in our Southern Baptist past and our English Baptist past. It is in a sense an effort to recapture the Calvinism that has been lost in the last three quarters of the century, or so, and to cover this involves a new emphasis on the writings of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce and of the 1644 and 1689 Particular Baptist Confessions of Faith. Now, I would like to say that there is one difference that I can see between the neo-Calvinist movement and the other four. You may want to disagree with this, and that's all right. I believe that it differs from the other four in that it can more widely claim to be endemic to the Baptist past, the Baptist heritage and teaching of the past, than can the other four. What I am saying is that, whether or not we want to be Calvinists today, any serious study of our Baptist past must acknowledge that Baptists have been Calvinists. To distort that is to distort the records, it seems to me. So what I am saying is that it seems to me that the neo-Calvinist movement is able to say, 'we are recovering part of our Baptist past' in a way that the charismatic movement cannot say, because the charismatic movement represents something that is not endemic to the Baptist past, that has not been a common practice in Baptist churches through the years, and not been a teaching that has prevailed. It's not to say, this is not to deal with the question whether tongues exist, or, is just saying it is not a part of the Baptist past the way the Calvinistic doctrine is. So I think I can draw that one distinction and be relatively fair in that assessment, and that dispensationalism as well is not endemic to the Baptist past in the same way that this new Reformed or Calvinistic theology is endemic. I don't mean to suggest by that, that therefore it is valid

and the other four not, in some kind of sweeping statement. I am simply making that observation.”

Dr. Garrett is correct—There is a real live and healthy interest in reformation of our historical doctrinal roots, which means a real interest in what one of our esteemed leaders, Dr. John A. Broadus (1895), called, “that exalted system of Pauline Theology which is technically called Calvinism.”

Neither the conservative leaders nor the moderate leaders embrace these roots. In fact, some have made some ignorant and foolish statements against Calvinism. Some confuse it with hyper-Calvinism which we should all loathe with a passion. However, whatever the conservative or moderate leaders may say, or think, they have not come to grips with the real doctrinal content of our founding fathers.

There are many who long for, and pray for, a doctrinal and Biblical reformation; there are at least four Calvinistic Southern Baptist conferences in different geographical locations in the United States. They are all seeking real Biblical, historical, and doctrinal substance that will produce Biblical worship, Biblical witness, and Biblical churches.

In any Reformation of the past there have been many, many mistakes by the Reformers, but more by those zealous followers of the Reformers who sometimes had more zeal than understanding, patience, charity, and compassion.

Many who have sought to bring about reformation in their local churches have not gone about it in the right way. Sometimes their timing was wrong. Sometimes their methods have been wrong. Sometimes they needed the wisdom from above described in the Epistle of James: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, [and] easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (Jam 3:17).

Some have made unnecessary divisions over secondary matters. Some have not understood the Biblical doctrine of accommodation. We all need more of the application of the words of our best mentor, the great Apostle Paul, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all [men], apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And [that] they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2Ti 2:24-26).

It is my sincere desire to encourage the reformation now going on, and hopefully spare some unnecessary shipwrecks in local churches. It is with this desire and motive that I wish to share some, what I hope will be, helpful thoughts on the following topics:

1. The need and necessity of reformation;
2. The means God uses in reforming a church, namely the kind of men God uses;
3. Where true reformation begins;
4. The cost of reformation.

These are real questions, and I hope to suggest some helpful answers, not as an authority on the subject, but from many years of experience in reforming situations. The years of experience also include many mistakes.

This movement is not political and we do not think every Christian must be a Calvinist, but we know it is a viable historical and Biblical position, and therefore, we plead for tolerance. The motive and purpose is best expressed in the following statement that was adopted at the first planning meeting for the Founders' Conference held on November 13, 1982 in Euless, Texas.

Necessity

God has re-ignited among Southern Baptists an interest in what has been historically denominated the Doctrines of Grace. Those so interested desire fellowship. The energy generated by this renewal should be conserved and guided.

Motive

To glorify God, honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches by providing encouragement to Southern Baptists in historical, Biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies.

Purpose

To be a balanced conference in respect to doctrine and devotion expressed in the Doctrines of Grace and their experimental application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness.

This is to be accomplished through engaging a variety of speakers to present formal papers, sermons, expositions, and devotions, and through the recommendation and distribution of literature consistent with the nature of the conferences.

Subject and Procedure

The theological foundation of the conference will be the Doctrines of Grace (election, depravity, atonement, effectual calling, and perseverance) and specifically related truths. These subjects will be presented doctrinally, expositively, homiletically, and historically. Each conference will concentrate on the experimental and pastoral application of the respective doctrines.

I long to see the doctrines taught by John Bunyan (1688), George Whitefield (1770), Jonathan Edwards (1758), Charles H. Spurgeon (1892), James P. Boyce (1888), Basil Manly (1868), John A. Broadus (1895), B. H. Carroll (1914), William Carey (1834), Adoniram Judson (1850), and Luther Rice (1836) thunder through America again.

Is Calvinism a deviant position for a Southern Baptist to hold? This is a proper question and I hope this essay will help to answer it. Over the last decade I have witnessed more slurs and misrepresentation of historical Calvinism than I have the heart or ability to count. I said, against historical Calvinism, possibly, I should have said, against a misrepresentation of Calvinism. I am thinking here only of the remarks made by men in positions of high leadership—pastors, evangelists, officers in the convention, instructors at the seminary level—respected men all across the denomination—men who bear great accountability, since they lead Christ's sheep as pastors and teachers. This breaks my heart. It is difficult enough for us to gain a hearing in the unbelieving world because of its hostility to the Lord of Glory. This pain is multiplied many times when leaders in the

Christian church are unwilling to treat good historical and Biblical opinions without careful accuracy and Christian charity. It demonstrates the lack of historical, theological and Biblical understanding and integrity.

It is regrettable that at a time in history when the Christian faith is commanding such little influence in the nation, the church herself should be engaged in so many issues about herself, rather than the life of the masses of the people. Questions about the priesthood of all believers, women in the ministry, and many, many more issues, yes, they are real and deserve serious consideration, but not one of them get to the foundation. A real reformation of the church would result in solving some of the lesser issues and would be the means of true Biblical, God-centered evangelism.

True reformation is a humbling process, but it also creates a new desire to please God and keep His Word (Psa 119:67), it delivers us from an inordinate desire to defend traditions for which there is no scriptural warrant, and therefore, enables us to approach church issues which have divided us in a new way, and with a new concern to be united with all those who love the truth. A common attachment to the scriptures as to what they say, what they mean and how they apply.

I submit the following thoughts to every sincere seeker after truth, and to the only One Who can efficaciously apply truth to the heart—"He will guide you into all truth" (Joh 16:13). Thank God, we still have "a few who have not soiled their garments." With this desire and prayer I submit this little pamphlet.

1. The Need of Reformation Today

Both the Bible and history record how the people of God are continually in need of self-examination and reformation. But in every *case* of reformation there first had to be a recognition of the *need* for reformation. Nehemiah had to be informed by Hanani that the walls of salvation were broken down and the gates of praise were burned with fire—a great need, and what a beautiful example of reformation. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea were all reformers. Habakkuk saw the sad condition. He asked God, "Why do you make me see wrongs and look on trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is slackened and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted." There was great need of reformation of the people of God; thus we have that wonderful little prayer for reformation in Habakkuk 3:2—"O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (NKJ). He saw the great need of reformation. This little verse shows us his fear, he was afraid, he heard an alarming voice that produced an appropriate prayer and a serious plea. This verse also has a potent argument for reformation—in wrath remember mercy. The psalmist saw the need for reformation, and many of his prayers for reformation are recorded. "Turn us [restore us], O God of our salvation" (85:4). Three times in Psalm 80 he cries, "Turn us again" O God of hosts.

We could multiply texts and examples in almost every prophet in the Old Testament. In every case there had to be a recognition of the need. Too many people in the church do not know the marks of a true church, and therefore, see no need of reformation. However, every discerning minister and Christian would not question the need. Would not every discerning Christian agree that the church is having little spiritual influence in the world? No doctrinal foundation. No fixed objective standard of righteousness because the Ten Commandments are missing in most churches. The doctrinal foundations have been removed, or buried, in powerless ritualism. When the moral and doctrinal standards are removed, it leaves the church in a sea of confusion without a compass. The Bible asks the question, What can the righteous do if the foundations be removed? There is a desperate need for reformation of the church.

When men forsake the “old paths” it is needful to enquire for what reasons they are forsaken, and whether it is that they may have left the “good way” wherein alone they can find “rest unto their souls” (Jer 6:16). The question of mere majorities in religious matters is of relatively little value or importance. It was by a majority that the death of the Lord Jesus was achieved. It was by a majority that the early Church was forced to pass through its “baptisms of blood.” It was a majority which screamed itself hoarse with the cry “the Christians to the lions.”

Our Lord’s last words to the churches that needed to be reformed are found in His messages to the seven churches in Rev.2 and 3. These final messages reflect His deep love and concern for His Church. These messages are rich in instruction, warning, and comfort. These messages contain much that is very relevant for reforming churches on the contemporary scene. Many churches are sleeping the sleep of death. Some are more sound asleep than others. Some are like Laodicea—they think they have need of nothing, but in truth they are pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. In spite of the sad condition, there are always some children of light living among the dead. When Jesus said to strengthen the things that remain, He knew that there were some that could be strengthened.

The Bible and history record many accounts of reformation. Sometimes whole communities, and in a few cases, whole nations have been affected by reformation.

How does reformation come about? First, the cause is always from above. That is the divine side. But it is just as true that there is always, always, always human instruments on earth involved. That is the human side, or the means God uses. The cause is God; the means is man.

2. The Kind of Men God Uses in Reformation

Consider the kind of men God has used in reformation. What kind of men were they? What weapons did they employ? What were their methods? We can be sure that if there is no reformation in the pulpit there will be no reformation in the pews.

By a careful look at reformations in the history of God’s people we can learn the kind of men God uses, the weapons they employed, and the methods of approach. We ask, on

the human side, whence comes their success? There are always men involved. There will be no life in a church where there is no life in the pulpit.

First, *there is always a dead seriousness about God's Word and God's Work*. There must be a felt responsibility as stewards of the mysteries of God.

When we examine churches that have come alive there have always been some men who lived, labored, and preached like men who were in earnest about eternity and eternity-bound souls. Men who were grave, that is, serious. Men who had their eyes lifted to heaven. Everything they did and said was marked by earnestness. Not just religious excitement. They were genuine and earnest men who knew that necessity was laid upon them. They felt the urgency and weight of the cause of the gospel that was entrusted to them. They threw their whole soul into the conflict. There was earnestness, not indifference. Not religious politicians seeking to climb the denominational ladder.

The second thing, that always precedes, or accompanies, true reformation is, *there are always some men who are bent on success*. When a man enters Christ's Army, or the ministry, he must be bent on success. If men are not bent on success they are traitors to Christ and to His cause. I said, success, not statistics, there is a difference. There may be spiritual success with or without great statistics. If we would see our churches come alive, and stay alive, we must be warriors who have set our hearts on victory, and fight with believing anticipation of victory under the guidance of our great Captain. As shepherds we cannot sit on the mountain side in the ease of the breeze, heedless to the straying, perishing, bleating flock; but rather, there must be a watching, guiding, guarding, and feeding of the sheep committed to our care.

If we would see reformation in the church there must be some men of faith. There must be plowing and sowing of the right kind of seed (the gospel of the grace of God), plowing and sowing in hope. The word of truth must be on their lips.

There must be some going forth weeping, bearing precious seed, knowing that in due season there will be reaping if we faint not, knowing that our labour in the Lord is not in vain, knowing that we will return, bringing our sheaves with us. There must be some pleading with God for men and some pleading with men for God. Fix your eyes on God's promises and plead with the psalmist; "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Psa 119:49).

They must have confidence in the Saviour whose commission they bear. They must have confidence in the Holy Spirit's mighty power. They must have faith in His power to take the wax of this world from the ears of poor, deaf sinners—faith in His power to open the eyes that are blinded by the dust of this world—faith in the power of the Word of God, that is, in the message, the gospel, knowing it will not return void (Isa 55:11). The gospel is "...the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16). If we would see a church come alive we must be going forth with faith in the power of the gospel.

There must be men who labour. The ministry is infested with preachers who encumber the ground. There must be some bearing of the burden and the heat of the day. There must be some unwearied toil of body and soul (time, strength, substance). This is what the New Testament and church history reveals. There must be some of what the

great apostle speaks, “in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger, and thirst, in fastings often, in cold, and nakedness” (2Co 11:27). No time for levity, sloth, or pleasure. There must be a laboring for eternity. There are a lot of fruitless preachers who do not labor for eternity. These men must have their backs to the world and their eyes on the goal. They must not entangle themselves with the affairs of this world, that they may please Him who has called them to be laborers in His vineyard.

There must be much patience in the work of reforming a church. There must be a willingness to labor long without seeing all the fruit that you desire. Sow—sow—sow—day after day. Teach—teach—teach—week after week. We cannot be soon weary in well doing. We must keep that passage in mind that says, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jam 5:7-8 NKJ). Many a good plan has been aborted by impatience. Many a good day of toil has been thrown away by impatience. Men cannot force reformation, or force a church to life. Yes, there must be intense longing for success, but much patience must be joined to that intense longing.

William Carey laboured seven years before he baptized his first convert. Adoniram Judson toiled in Burma seven years before he harvested one soul. Robert Morrison (1834) sowed seven years in China before he baptized one Chinese. Robert Moffat (1883) declared he waited seven years to see the first evident moving of the Spirit in Africa. Henry Richards (1888) spent seven long years in the Congo before he saw his first convert. What were they all doing for seven years? They were laying foundations, sowing heavenly seeds thinking of future generations. They were patiently laying a foundation. We live in a church age where the foundations have been removed. God is interested in foundations and future generations.

God began by laying a foundation. The psalmist said, “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth” (Psa 102:25). God said, through the evangelical prophet, “My hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth...” (Isa 48:13).

When Solomon built the temple—where did he begin? The Bible answers that question. Solomon began where every true builder begins—laying a foundation. 1 Kings 5:17—“ And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to *lay the foundation...*” How long did it take? 1 Kings 6:37—“In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the Lord laid...” Four years! It takes patience to lay foundations!

It was also a costly foundation. “And the foundation was of costly stones, even great stones...” (1Ki 7:10). Notice, it says costly, and even a cursory glance at any reformation you will see that it costs to lay a foundation. Most churches do not have enough doctrinal foundation for sound Biblical evangelism. We live and labour in what I call pre-evangelistic days. True worship and true witness will be a certain and sure result of reformation. But laying a foundation is very, very costly.

And concerning the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian captivity, Ezra shows it was costly in that it was through much tribulation and suffering that the foun-

dation was laid and temple built, to the glory of the Lord. Yet they were enabled to sing and praise God for it! “And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation...was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy” (Ezr 3:11-12).

We live in a day of cheap, quick, slick and frothy foundations, and our churches are reaping the sad, pitiful, painful, pathetic results. Carnal men do not want to be in the foundation business. They are not concerned for future generations. The only men who are interested in a true foundation are those who have their eyes fixed on eternity. It is costly. It is painful. It is laborious. It is not showy. Who wants to see concrete poured in a footing? Hard, dirty work. I know, I was in construction for over twenty-five years.

The great apostle was a master-builder of churches. Where did he begin? “...as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation...” (1Co 3:10). A foundation on truth. And if you want to know how he did it—read the Book of Acts. It has the answer: Prayer—preaching—teaching—tears. Missing in our generation are prayer and tears.

Let us look at just one example as to how the great apostle did it. “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews...Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with *tears*” (Act 20:19, 31) If there were more tears there would be less splits and more souls won.

Paul wrote with tears. “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with *many tears*; not that ye should be grieved but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2Co 2:4).

Hear him writing to the church at Philippi. “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even *weeping*, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi 3:18).

We have so many facilities. We have comfort, equipment, literature, and church machinery; communications for promoting the gospel is at an all time high. The church has never been better, as far as machinery and mechanics. But where are the Bible tears shed in laying foundations. Where are the Christ-like tears? Where are the tears of St. Paul? Where are men who are laying foundations with tears?

Oh, may God deliver us from being like the church at Laodicea that said of herself: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev 3:17). But Jesus said of her, that she was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. No substance. No foundation, just frothy, carnal superstructure.

Joel, the Old Testament prophet, who prophesied of the Holy Spirit’s out-pouring at Pentecost, in the same chapter said, ““Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And

rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Joe 2:12-13).

Let us try tears. What am I talking about? Something that is produced in the soul rather than from physical pain. Tears that indicate distress of spirit, agony of a broken heart. I am talking about a disposition of heart, not necessarily drops of water rolling down your cheeks.

The first time the word tears is found in the English Bible is 2 Kings 20:5. It is the occasion of God telling Hezekiah that he would die very soon. This drove him to prayer and tears. The king became so desperate that the attention of God was turned not only to his prayers but to his tears. 2 Kings 20:5—“I have seen thy tears.”

If the law of first mention means anything here it may indicate that God does not come to our rescue until He sees our tears. That distress of spirit—that agony of a broken heart.

Paul’s Teaching Was Watered with Tears.

Jeremiah knew something about tears. “A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God” (Jer 3:21-22). “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9:1). “And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters” (Jer 9:18). “But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD’S flock is carried away captive” (Jer 13:17).

Jesus wept over a lost city. He knew something of what I am saying. In Luke 19:41-42 we see the Redeemer’s tears. “And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it. Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.” What do we see in this passage? We see the Redeemer’s deep interest in the state of man. We see the Saviour’s compassion to the chief of sinners.

To reform a church you must be willing to lay some foundations, and do some demolition work. And you do that by prayer and preaching—teaching and tears. Put these four things together and you will soon see some reformation. You will also see some dust from the exodus. It is painful to see people leave the church, but some will leave. In genuine reformation of a church three things will always happen; some will leave, some will want to get rid of the preacher, and thank God, some will get right with God. There will be results—not always saving results. In John 6 Jesus preached the crowd away—there were results!

Study Paul’s epistles and you will find he laid a doctrinal foundation. I believe we are in a reformation period of history where many will be called upon by God to lay some

foundations. In many cases the foundations have been removed. Churches—large churches with no doctrinal foundation.

If a church is to be reformed and come alive there must be a doctrinal foundation. This principle is easily discerned in Paul's letters to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians.

We are all rejoicing that the conservative cause is looking up, but that in itself will not do the job. It is fundamental, but it has not dealt with the doctrinal foundation—Bible doctrine—Baptist doctrine—the doctrines of our Southern Baptist fathers. These doctrines were true in the days of J.P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, Basil Manly, W.B. Johnson (the first president of the Convention), R.B.C. Howell (second president), Richard Fuller (third president), John L. Dagg (the first Southern Baptist writing theologian), B.H. Carroll. These men stood on a doctrinal foundation. The Bible has not changed. The God of the Bible has not changed. Therefore if their doctrine was true in their day it is still true today because neither God nor the Bible has changed. Again, we rejoice in the conservative victories but I want to assure you that even if conservatives had a complete takeover—if we do not get on the Biblical, doctrinal foundation of our Fathers, in 30 years we will be right back where we are today. Question!! What good is an infallible Bible if its doctrinal content is ignored, or disregarded? Yes, and often perverted. It is not just a book with a black cover—what does it say? What does it mean and how does it apply to life and death? It is the content of the Bible—what does it say about God? About His law? His Son? About man and his condition? What does it say about God's infallible, immutable plan of redemption? Read Dr. Nettles' book *By His Grace and For His Glory*, for an honest history of Baptist life and Baptist doctrine. (Someone asked me what I thought about it. I said, well I bought 2000 copies—that should answer your question.)

The superficial man will think only of the big show. He is not too concerned how it comes about. He is only concerned with the super-structure. His concern is: Does it work? Not, Is it true? And back of that, is usually not so much the concern for results as concern for the result of results, that is, the results that accrue to the man.

God Is Concerned about Foundations and Future Generations.

To underscore the importance of future generations let me direct your attention to Psalm 78:4-6—"We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generations to come might know them, even, the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children."

Psalm 145:4—"One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts."

This will be a test for many men right now. It will cost! It cost the apostles and early Christians. It cost the Reformers and Puritans. It cost some who had to separate from apostasy. It is costing some of you right now!

Another essential in reforming a church is: *there must be men with some boldness and determination*. Timidity shuts many a door of usefulness and loses many precious opportunities. It wins no friends, while it strengthens every enemy.

Perhaps there never was an age where wickedness assumed a bolder front and attitude. Therefore, Christian boldness and courage is more required in reforming a church. Men must be “strong and of good courage” Acts 4:13, 29, 31. Whitefield, when the Vicar closed the church door preached in the church yard.

Joshua 1:9—“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

They must be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1Co 15:58). This has been one of the greatest secrets of ministerial success.

Another essential I would point out in reforming a church is prayer. Many labour much—study much—but they do not pray. We often hear requests to “Pray for the work.” Oh, my friend, I am convinced *prayer is the work!*

We all agree what we need is the work of the Spirit. Well, how does that come about? Luke 11:13—“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

Luke 11 has the answer. The best prayers are pleading for the promises of God. Well, Luke 11:13 is a promise.

Where churches have been reformed there have always been some men with solemn deportment, no levity, but deep spirituality of soul. The man God uses must fight against laziness, looseness, levity, and lethargy. No frivolity, no flippancy, no gaiety. None of this must mar the work we are seeking to accomplish.

How is a church reformed—revived? How do churches come alive? Always with human instruments who are dead serious about the work of God and the Word of God. Men who are bent on success. Men who plow and sow in faith, hope, and love. Men who labour and bear the burden and the heat of the day. Men who have much patience—who wait for the precious fruit of the earth and have long patience. Men who lay solid foundations for future generations with an eye fixed on eternity. Men with some Holy Ghost boldness and determination. Men of prayer. Prayer is work—fervent prayer. Men of solemn deportment—no frivolity, no gaiety, sober-minded men.

Do you want to know what it looks like in the making? You will see a faithful minister of Christ, surrounded by a small band of praying ones, leading in the battle against the power of darkness. You will see not a lot of pomp, no display, no carnal attractions. You will see not a platform artist, a master gimmick maker, or a manipulator of crowds. These things sure make a show but they will not bring a church alive.

Oh, for some men with a deep yearning for God and for souls.

John Knox, in his old age, was helped into the pulpit by friends, but when he arose to preach, the Spirit of God’s love burned in his heart in such a fashion that an attendant said, “So mighty was he in his yearning that I thought he would break the pulpit in bits.”

One of the purposes of this pamphlet is to encourage the reformation of churches. Encourage preachers to lay Biblical foundations. To encourage them to count the cost. It is the duty of all true men to labor and pray for reformation, and the privilege to hope for and expect reformation. It has already begun. It is going on right now.

The Cost of True Reformation

If men in every reformation were abused, misunderstood, misrepresented, reviled, persecuted, ostracized, and excommunicated from organized religion, suffered mental and physical agony, and many times death, how can we expect to see reformation without cost (Luke, chapters 9 and 14)?

What will it cost young Pastors?

1. Denominational popularity and public approval. The work of reformation is not the way to climb the denominational ladder.

2. They will, at times, be in that awful task of tearing down some false super-structure that has been built without a doctrinal foundation. This super-structure was built by cheap, shallow, man-centered evangelism.

3. They may have to suffer at the hands of a large, unregenerate church membership, and especially, from unregenerate and religiously ignorant deacons and leaders.

4. They may also have to suffer the pain of being misunderstood by the church leaders, fellow ministers, and more painful still, sometimes by their own loved ones (wives who do not understand their husband's position).

5. Sacrifice financially, especially in some cases where carnal and ignorant church leaders will use money as a threat to drive preachers from the pulpit.

But along with these and other costs there comes the joy of a conscience void of offence before God and man. What is that worth?

3. Some Practical Suggestions for the Contemporary Scene

Some who read this pamphlet are in, or will be in a reforming situation. And each situation has some different obstacles to deal with. The size of the church and the staff will make some difference in the approach as will the kind of membership, the spiritual caliber of the leadership. I wish we had some little pamphlet with ten rules to success, but it is not that simple. There are not ten rules to guarantee success. There are some principles, however, that will always be helpful and will save some ship-wrecks.

1. Don't try any reformation until you have earned some spiritual credibility with the church.

2. The first suggestion is study the Biblical principle of accommodation. There is a little pamphlet on this subject, *The Principle of Biblical Accommodation as Applied to the Invitation System*, and an excellent message on tape by Thomas K. Ascol.¹

3. Three questions should be asked, and carefully answered:

a) What is the right, Biblical thing to do?

b) How should these changes be implemented?

c) When should they be implemented? Don't try to do too much too soon. Many mistakes have been made by doing the right thing in the wrong way or at the wrong time.

4. The principle of priorities must be applied. You can't change everything at once—first things first.

5. The principle of two churches must be before us at all times.

a) The church as it should be, conceived from the scriptures, in idealism—never abandon this.

b) The church as it is—the one you look at 11:00 on Sunday morning. One must realize that the two shall never meet on earth, but you will find joy and satisfaction in narrowing the difference between them, that is, when you see the one you look at on Sunday morning make some steps toward the ideal one.

6. The principle of church membership. Don't make church membership any narrower than the New Testament.

7. The principle of restraint. Don't tackle the whole church at one time. Choose a few men who are sincere, teachable, and spiritually minded, and spend time with them in study and prayer. They will help you to reform. This principle is found in Titus 1:5: "For this cause left I thee behind in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Acts 14:23: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Acts 11:30: "Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Acts 20:17,28: "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Don't get bogged down with what you call these men until they are trained—they are called overseers—elders.

8. Don't get hung up on secondary matters.

9. Don't use theological language that is not in the Bible, in the pulpit, such as, Calvinism, reformed, doctrines of grace, particular redemption etc. Most people will not know what you are talking about.

¹ These are available through *The Christian Gospel Foundation*, 521 Wildwood Parkway, Cape Coral, FL 33904, or Pastor Thomas K. Ascol, Grace Baptist Church, 204 SW 11th Place, Cape Coral, FL 33991.

10. Use sound literature, not indiscriminately, but wisely. Little things at first, that is, pamphlets and books with some doctrinal and experimental substance.

11. Don't use the pulpit to scold people. You cannot scold people into reformation.

12. Exercise common sense.

13. Depend on the only weapons we have: prayer, preaching, and teaching.

14. Be sure that you understand the foundational doctrines and how they are related to each other and to your situation.

15. I would suggest that you check the history of your church in respect to early constitutions or declarations of faith. Often you will find, particularly, in older churches, a statement expressing the doctrines which you desire to establish. A gracious appeal to this document will help to give you credibility, at least they will know you are not coming from Mars. Hide behind these articles of faith. Hide behind our Baptist fathers, such as Bunyan, Spurgeon, Fuller, Boyce, Dagg, Broadus, Manly, W.B. Johnson, R.B.C. Howell and B.H. Carroll.

Most of these suggestions come from experience, and, she is a queer old teacher. She first gives you the test and then the lesson—unlike other teaching!

Final Appeal

The proper motives for reformation are love to God and concern for His Glory; love for man and concern for his good; love for God's Holy Law as the only perfect, objective standard of righteousness; love for Christ and His Church; love and compassion for sinners.

Since nothing in this mortal life is more important than true religion in the soul, and in the church, reformation should be diligently sought after, and carefully looked into. It is not enough to pout and complain about what is wrong in the visible church, but we must be occupied in forming and restoring what is right and Biblical. A censorious spirit will not reform the church.



Appendices

Appendix 1 Abstract of Principles

The following is an excerpt from the Fundamental Laws of Southern Seminary written into its charter on April 30, 1858: “9. Every Professor of the Institution shall be a member of a regular Baptist Church; and all persons accepting Professorships in this Seminary, shall be considered by such acceptance, as engaging to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the Abstract of Principles hereinafter laid down.” (Mueller: *History of Southern Seminary; Broadman Press; p.238*).

1. The Scriptures

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.

2. God

There is but one God, the Maker, Preserver and Ruler of all things, having in and of Himself, all perfections, and being infinite in them all; and to Him all creatures owe the highest love, reverence and obedience.

3. The Trinity

God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.

4. Providence

God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be the author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures.

5. Election

Election is God’s eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life—not because of foreseen merit in them, but of His mere mercy in Christ—in consequence of which choice they are called, justified and glorified.

6. The Fall of Man

God originally created man in His own image, and free from sin; but, through the temptation of Satan, he transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original holiness and righteousness; whereby his posterity inherit a nature corrupt and wholly op-

posed to God and His law, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors.

7. The Mediator

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed mediator between God and man. Having taken upon Himself human nature, yet without sin, He perfectly fulfilled the law, suffered and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended to His Father, at whose right hand He ever liveth to make intercession for His people. He is the only Mediator, the Prophet, Priest and King of the Church, and Sovereign of the Universe.

8. Regeneration

Regeneration is a change of heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit, who quickeneth the dead in trespasses and sins enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the Word of God, and renewing their whole nature, so that they love and practice holiness. It is a work of God's free and special grace alone.

9. Repentance

Repentance is an evangelical grace, wherein a person being, by the Holy Spirit, made sensible of the manifold evil of his sin, humbleth himself for it, with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrence, with a purpose and endeavor to walk before God so as to please Him in all things.

10. Faith

Saving faith is the belief, on God's authority, of whatsoever is revealed in His Word concerning Christ; accepting and resting upon Him alone for justification and eternal life. It is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and is accompanied by all other saving graces, and leads to a life of holiness.

11. Justification

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal of sinners, who believe in Christ, from all sin, through the satisfaction that Christ has made; not for anything wrought in them or done by them; but on account of the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith.

12. Sanctification

Those who have been regenerated are also sanctified, by God's Word and Spirit dwelling in them. This sanctification is progressive through the supply of Divine strength, which all saints seek to obtain, pressing after a heavenly life in cordial obedience to all Christ's commands.

13. Perseverance of the Saints

Those whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end; and though they may fall, through neglect and temptation, into sin, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the Church, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be renewed again unto repentance, and be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

14. The Church

The Lord Jesus is the Head of the Church, which is composed of all His true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to His commandments, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches He hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which He hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are Bishops, or Elders, and Deacons.

15. Baptism

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. It is prerequisite to church fellowship, and to participation in the Lord's Supper.

16. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, and to be observed by His churches till the end of the world. It is in no sense a sacrifice, but is designed to commemorate His death, to confirm the faith and other graces of Christians, and to be a bond, pledge and renewal of their communion with Him, and of their church fellowship.

17. The Lord's Day

The Lord's day is a Christian institution for regular observance, and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, resting from worldly employments and amusements, works of necessity and mercy only excepted.

18. Liberty of Conscience

God alone is Lord of the conscience; and He hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His word, or not contained in it. Civil magistrates being ordained of God, subjection in all lawful things commanded by them ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

19. The Resurrection

The bodies of men after death return to dust, but their spirits return immediately to God—the righteous to rest with Him; the wicked, to be reserved under darkness to the judgment. At the last day, the bodies of all the dead, both just and unjust, will be raised.

20. The Judgment

God hath appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when every one shall receive according to his deeds: the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment; the righteous, into everlasting life.

Appendix 2

Use Books to Spread God's Truth in the Earth!

*"The Lord gave the word; great was the company
of those that published it."—Psalm 68:11*

1. A book can preach when the author may not. In days past, men were locked up and were not allowed to preach, so many wrote.
2. A book can preach when the author cannot, that is, when he is physically unable or geographic distance prohibits it.
3. A book can preach when the author is not. Many authors, though dead, still speak today.
4. A book never flinches from the truth.
5. A book is never tempted to compromise.
6. A book never gets tired or disheartened.
7. A book never loses its temper in an argument.
8. A book gets inside the home and stays there.
9. A book always catches a man in the right mood, or he would not pick it up.
10. A book always sticks to what it has to say, that is, it cannot lead into side issues, or irrelevant conversation.