

(President's Address)

Southern Baptists: People of Deep Beliefs

by James T. Draper, Jr.

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"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16, NKJV).

"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Tim. 1: 12-14, NKJV).

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:1-2 NKJV).

Early in this year the Southern Baptist Convention passed the 14 million mark in membership. In addition to that, there are over 1.5 million members of churches connected with Southern Baptist foreign missions. We now serve in all 50 states and in 96 countries. Total baptisms last year in the U.S. and on foreign fields were 552,398. Without doubt, the Southern Baptist Convention has been on the cutting edge of missions and evangelism for the many years of its existence. We have led the battalions of those carrying the light of the Gospel and seeing the darkness of unbelief retreat. We have taken seriously the challenge of Sacred Scripture to reproduce New Testament Christianity in our age through the power of the Holy Spirit. Wherever we have gone we have been used of the Holy Spirit to change the face of the world for the better.

We have been that special kind of people because we are a people of DEEP BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS. We have made a firm commitment to Biblical principles . . . for which principles our forefathers even dared to die. We carry these beliefs in the spirit of Christ and in obedience to the Word of God.

Only people with such commitment can become God's change agents in a sin-cursed world. Weak convictions and shallow beliefs have never impacted the world. We have been used of God to impact the world because of our firm commitment to our beliefs. We shall continue to make an ever increasing impact as long as we hold consciously and firmly to these basic, foundational beliefs.

The basis of these beliefs is the Word of God. From every section of our Southern Baptist Convention this year we have heard affirmations in books, speeches, news releases, etc., of our commitment to the Bible as the final authority for Southern Baptists. To this conviction concerning the Word of God we must stand united. Our only hope for strength and vitality in our denomination is our renewed and continued commitment to this divinely inspired, uniquely transmitted, carefully preserved and totally reliable book. These great beliefs that have so characterized Southern Baptists are cherished Biblical truths.

I want to review with you a few of these deep beliefs that have been so characteristic of Southern Baptists over the years. This list is not exhaustive. Each truth includes many others. Time does not permit us to do more than mention these few very briefly.

I. THE FULL HUMANITY AND FULL DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

This is known as the doctrine of the hypostatic union: i.e. the union of the two natures of Christ, deity and humanity (from the Greek *hypóstasis*, "nature, essence"). Jesus Christ is undiminished deity and genuine humanity, joined in one person, forever. He is God's perfect man and man's perfect God.

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9, NKJV). Jesus is NOT "all of God that a human being can contain." He is NOT "the most God-like man who ever lived." He is NOT "the best demonstration of God that man has ever seen." HE IS GOD ALMIGHTY IN HUMAN FLESH. He is undiminished deity!

Jesus is also genuine humanity. He was NOT the heavenly phantom of Docetic Gnosticism. John refuted this charge when he said, ". . . every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4: 2-3). He was (and is) a real, genuine, flesh-and-blood human being. His is undiminished deity and humanity. Herschel Hobbs declared, "It is true that Jesus Christ was God. But even more wonderful, God became Jesus of Nazareth! . . . When God would reveal His law He did so through a man, Moses. But when He revealed His grace He became a man, Jesus Christ." ¹

This is vitally important for us. Concerning salvation: only a MAN could die for other men . . . only the GOD-MAN'S death could have infinite value. Concerning priesthood: only a MAN could be a priest (Heb. 5:1) . . . only the GOD-MAN could be an eternal high priest (Heb. 7:17-28).

W. T. Conner declared, "But to speak as if the Christ of John were a supernaturalistic prodigy without divine powers or qualities—this is wholly to misinterpret both John and the Synoptics. The Christ of both is both human and divine . . . while he is God's Eternal Son, he is genuine man. He did not cease to be divine but he did become human." ²

The belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is vital. We must believe this in order to be saved according to Romans 10: 9-10. The bodily resurrection authenticated Christ's claims, for He was ". . . declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4, NKJV). It demonstrates God's acceptance of the atonement, for He ". . . who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25, NKJV). It assures us of our own resurrection, for Jesus declared ". . . because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19). His bodily resurrection assures us of needed power, for the Apostle Paul declared ". . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection . . ." (Phil. 3:10, NKJV). Further, the bodily resurrection assures the world of the certainty of judgment. "Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31, NKJV).

Liberal and Neo-orthodox theologians have long denied the truth of the bodily resurrection. Paul Tillich called it, "absurdity compounded into blasphemy," ³ Rudolf Bultmann taught that the "resurrection" took place in *heilsgeschichte* ("holy history") and not in actual space and time. ⁴

Against this backdrop of heresy, Southern Baptists have firmly held to the truth of the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ which includes deep belief in His physical, bodily resurrection. W. D. Nowlin, great Southern Baptist leader early in this century wrote, "It is accepted by all true Christians that the

Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ are fundamental facts of the Christian religion.”⁵

II. THE LOSTNESS OF MANKIND

The Word of God teaches that man is DEAD in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and is totally incapable of doing anything to help himself apart from the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16: 8-11). This applies to all men (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). When Adam sinned, man fell from his state of innocence and fellowship with God. Now sin and misery are the inheritance of all mankind. Mankind is now alienated from God. We are all strangers from God (Eph. 2:12). By sin we are enslaved to Satan. He enslaves the understanding and binds us in ignorance. He enslaves the will. Man does not refuse evil—he willingly sins. Every area of man’s life is polluted. Sin takes possession of the heart and makes it desperately corrupt (Jer. 17:9). Like a cancer, sin permeates the whole being of man and man is LOST . . . destined for misery, emptiness, frustration and despair.

Mankind is LOST regarding the provision of God. LOST—every part of his nature is tainted with sin. LOST—His spirit is darkened (Eph. 4:17-18). LOST—his body is diseased and death-ridden (Rom. 7:24). LOST—under wrath and judgment (John 5:28-29), under God’s condemnation (Gal. 3:10). LOST—bound for eternal hell and separation from God (Matt. 25:41). “Eternal” in Matt. 25:46 applies to the life of the redeemed AND to the punishment of the lost. There is no evidence in Scripture that hell is anything less than eternal. Without a hell, evangelism is meaningless, but evangelism is what Christianity is all about. We are constantly admonished throughout the Bible to reach the lost.

L. R. Scarborough said, “The most gigantic undertaking God has laid out for Christian men is to lead lost souls to Jesus Christ. The salvation of the world cost God more, and requires more from man, than any other movement in human or divine history. . . . The divine obligation of soul-winning rests without exception upon every child of God . . . Regeneration demands reproduction in kind. The fruit of a Christian is another Christian. . . . Some men are divinely called to preach to a lost world; some women are called to give life and power in home and foreign fields to teach a redeeming gospel. Every Christian is called in the hour of salvation to witness for Jesus Christ. Nothing in heaven or on earth can excuse him from it. God gives no furloughs from this heaven-born obligation. Not ignorance, or poverty, or environment, or difficulties of any kind—nothing—can exempt or excuse any child of God from its pressing daily importance.”⁶

Scarborough went on to say, “A compassionless Christianity drifts into ceremonialism and formalism. Our greatest need now is for a compassionate leadership in the Christian movements of the world. Every niche of this lost world needs the ministry of a fired soul, burning and shining with the zeal and conviction of a conquering gospel. Spiritual dry rot is worse for the churches of Jesus Christ than the plagues were for Egypt and the simooms are for the Sahara. Many a minister is on a treadmill, marking time, drying up, not earning his salt, because he has no passion for souls and no power for effective service. May our God kindle holy fires of evangelism in all churches and pulpits where such is needed!”⁷

Roland Q. Leavell wrote, “Do you honestly believe that unbelievers are actually lost, tragically lost, eternally lost? The Scripture could not be plainer in declaring the frightful lostness of those who refuse Christ.”⁸

Dr. Leavell continued, “Souls! Souls! Souls! was the burden of Christ’s heart. His love for men never allowed him to lose consciousness of the fact that men by the multitudes were lost.”⁹

III. SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

This great truth simply defined is that Jesus Christ died on Calvary as an innocent sacrifice IN THE PLACE OF guilty sinners. His death actually propitiated or satisfied the holiness of God and was necessary that eternal justice might be accomplished. He was not a martyr, an example of God’s love, etc., He was our SUBSTITUTE.

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7, NKJV).

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV).

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18, NKJV).

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV).

“Surely He has borne our griefs

And carried our sorrows:

Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions,

He was bruised for our iniquities;

The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,

And by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;

We have turned, every one, to his own way;

And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

(Isa. 53:4-6, NKJV)

W. T. Conner declared, “The death of Christ was a vicarious work. It was substitutionary. He did something for us which we could not do for ourselves. The matter can be simply stated as follows: On account of our sin the sentence of death came upon us. Jesus had no sin. Yet death came to him. It came on account of our sins and on behalf of us. He took upon himself the sentence of death that was due to us. By bearing that sentence he sets us free. This is what is meant when it is said that we are redeemed with the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19). The blood stands for the life which he freely gave up for us.”¹⁰

J. L. Dagg wrote, “All propitiatory sacrifices involve the idea of substitution. The animal offered represented the offerer, and bore his sins, which were confessed, over its head. So Christ bore our sins, our iniquities being laid on him.”¹¹

This is perhaps the most hated of all the doctrines of Biblical Christianity by the liberal theologians. The late Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, President of the World Council of Churches, said, “I would rather go to hell than go to heaven on the back of another man.”

Our Southern Baptist heritage is firmly committed to the Substitutionary Atonement of Jesus Christ. W. D. Nowlin declared emphatically, “The price is the Blood of Jesus Christ.”¹²

E. Y. Mullins writes of the fact of substitution. “The New Testament teaching does not leave the matter doubtful. . . . The idea of substitution is inseparable from the facts, and various passages of Scripture declare it. . . . What he did for us we could not do for ourselves. We could not, as sinful, die an atoning death for the sinful. As victims of the sin-death principle reigning in humanity, we could not become its conqueror. We could not break the power of death and annul the law of sin and death. But Christ did both these things for us. This is substitution.”¹³

J. L. Dagg writes, “In being made under the law, Christ became our substitute; and his obedience and sufferings are placed to our account, as if we had personally obeyed and suffered, to the full satisfaction of the law. . . . Our sins were imputed to Christ when he died for them; and his righteousness is imputed to us when we receive eternal life through him. He was treated as if he had personally committed the sins which were laid on him; and all who believe in him are treated as if they had personally rendered that satisfaction to the law which was rendered by his obedience and sufferings.”¹⁴

IV. JUSTIFICATION BY GOD’S GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Justification is that act of God whereby He declares a guilty sinner to be righteous, not on the basis of any intrinsic quality in the sinner, nor on the basis of anything which the sinner may produce in the way of conduct, but solely on the basis of the sinner’s trust in Jesus Christ. Paul’s great statement is, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without (literally: “apart from”) the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).

Grace means unmerited favor. God is obliged to save no one. It is of His grace that He saves anyone. Sinners have NO CLAIM on a Holy God, but God has GRACIOUSLY determined to save those who believe on Jesus Christ.

Faith, which is essentially synonymous with repentance, is the ONLY prerequisite for salvation. "Faith only" was the great rallying cry of the reformation. FAITH PLUS ANYTHING—baptism, sacraments, good works—is the Galatian heresy and falls under the ANATHEMA of Gal. 1:8-9.

Dagg says, "The doctrine that salvation is of grace, is taught in the sacred Scriptures with great clearness. . . . Salvation is entirely of grace. That salvation is entirely of divine grace, may be argued from the condition in which the Gospel finds mankind. We are justly condemned, totally depraved, and, in ourselves, perfectly helpless."¹⁵

Justification is the very foundation of Christianity. An error here destroys the whole structure of our Christian faith. Justification is mercy surging from the heart of free grace. The basis of our justification is Christ's atoning work on the cross. By faith we receive this justification. E. Y. Mullins declares, "Justification belongs to the great series of spiritual blessings which come to us in and through Christ. And faith is the condition of them all."¹⁶

V. HOLINESS OF LIFE

God has called the redeemed to holy living (1 Pet. 2:9). Paul declares that we are saved by grace, through faith, but UNTO good works (Eph. 2:10). "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19, NKJV). We are called to holy living. Peter states, "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15-16, NKJV).

Dr. Scarborough wrote, "Those who handle the vessels of the Lord must have pure hearts and clean hands. Holiness unto the Lord must be on the skirts of God's spiritual priests today. 'Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord' (Ex. 32:29) is God's command to those who would win souls to him."¹⁷

It is God's purpose to make us holy. To do that we must see sin as God sees it. He calls sin "an abomination" (Deut. 7:25). God has no mixture of sin in Him. SIN HAS NO MIXTURE OF GOOD IN IT! Sin turns good into evil. It defaces, debases and destroys all that is good. Sin is called a "cursed thing" (Deut. 7:26). It is against God . . . unlike God. If sin were to triumph, God would no longer be God. We must see the tragic nature of sin if we are to become holy. Southern Baptists have always held that it is the great design of God in this world for us to become holy people. It is holiness that sets us apart from the world and allows us to approach God in boldness.

We must be light in the darkness, salt in the earth. We must again become people of prayer and fasting with holy lives. I call upon Southern Baptists today to return to the practice of a regular time of prayer and fasting. Return to confessing sins and beseeching God for real revival. Our churches must once again become examples of holiness and commitment in our communities. Such a call to prayer and fasting need not be complicated or need it be a media event. I am speaking about simple communication among God's people which will recognize that our only hope in the world is a mighty sweeping revival of God.

VI. THE URGENCY OF MISSION

God has sent us on a mission of great urgency. This world is filled with billions of people who are dying at the rate of 5,000 every hour. The majority of them are dying without Jesus Christ. We have the GOOD NEWS of redemption and we must declare it to every person in this world. That is the goal of BOLD MISSION THRUST. But BOLD MISSION is not just a Southern Baptist slogan—it is a DIVINE MANDATE! We must witness to every individual in this world—WE MUST!

"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand" (Eze. 33: 7-8, NKJV).

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14, NKJV).

Jesus declared, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (1 John 9:4, NKJV).

My wife and I awakened a neighbor some years ago and led the family to safety from a burning house. The need was urgent. Death was imminent. We had to act. Such is the case in this world. Lost mankind is dying without the Saviour and we must preach the Gospel to every person. "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24: 46-48, NKJV).

In discussing Acts 1:7-8, W. O. Carver said, "Our whole, sole duty is to witness for Jesus and our first concern must be to receive power to do this effectively."¹⁸ The urgency of mission has no boundaries. That which we cannot do directly, we may do through others. That is why we cooperate together—to make possible the preaching of the Gospel everywhere in the world.

W. T. Conner states, "Our mission is to bear witness to Christ from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth. Any form of Christianity that does not have throbbing through it a mighty missionary and evangelistic impulse is a degenerate form."¹⁹

Any theology or supposed belief that does not thrust us into all the world to witness and preach is heresy! It is not possible to please God with intellectual assent only. We must "do the truth" (1 John 1:6). Conner continues, "Missions and evangelism, therefore are not incidental or secondary in the Christian life; they are of the very essence of Christianity. And any form of so-called Christianity that does not practice the spread of the gospel among men thereby proves itself false in its claim."²⁰

James Franklin Love said, "The minister who does not covet souls courts guilt. He cannot be innocent before God and indifferent to a lost humanity."²¹

****CONCLUSION****

What kind of people will such beliefs produce? If we honestly and conscientiously believe these truths we will reflect in our lives their reality. We will be absolutely loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ. We will recognize that by His shed blood we have been reconciled to God. We will live in the awareness that this reconciliation came by His grace and through no merit of our own. Our supreme loyalty will be to Him as our Lord and Saviour. Such loyalty will cause us to love the Bible—know the Bible—obey the Bible. We who declare our strong commitment to God's Word must become people who read it, memorize it, study it, appropriate it and live it.

Southern Baptists are people of deep beliefs. Those beliefs must be expressed in all we do through every church, every agency and institution, every organization of Southern Baptist life—indeed in each of us individually if we are to continue to be torch-bearers in a sin-darkened world. We have been and will continue to be light-bearing, evangelistic, mission-minded people of God in this great day of opportunity. To these truths I reaffirm my commitment today and challenge each Southern Baptist to join me in that commitment.

Let us press on in our task. Satan will oppose. Skeptics will accuse. The apathetic will yawn indifferently. The emotional will express themselves dramatically. The intellectual will lose himself in rhetoric. The activist will grind on relentlessly. The liturgical will carry on precisely. The organizational man will keep oiling the machinery.

But in the midst of it all, committed Southern Baptists will march on—together—hand in hand—heart in heart—to the beat of the heavenly drummer, declaring to this lost world, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (11 Cor. 5:19-20, NKJV).

We are on a BOLD MISSION FOR OUR Lord and we will succeed for His glory . . . in His power . . . by His spirit.

FOOTNOTES

¹THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE by Herschel Hobbs, p. 41
²THE FAITH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT by W. T. Conner, p. 391

³SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, Vol. II By Paul Tillich, p. 180

⁴KERYGMA AND MYTH, Rudolf Bultmann, pp. 39-41

⁵FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH By W. D. Nowlin, p. 197

⁶WITH CHRIST AFTER THE LOST by L. R. Scarborough, pp. 2;3

⁷ibid, p. 31

⁸EVANGELISM, CHRIST’S IMPERATIVE COMMISSION by Roland Q. Leavell, p. 17

⁹ibid, p. 17

¹⁰CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE by W. T. Conner, pp. 175-176

¹¹MANUAL OF THEOLOGY by J. L. Dagg, p. 211

¹²FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH by W. D. Nowlin, p. 223

¹³THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN ITS DOCTRINAL EXPRESSION by E. Y. Mullins, p. 325

¹⁴MANUAL OF THEOLOGY by J. L. Dagg, p. 269

¹⁵ibid, p. 259

¹⁶THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN ITS DOCTRINAL EXPRESSION by E. Y. Mullins, p. 393

¹⁷WITH CHRIST AFTER THE LOST by L. R. Scarborough, pp. 12-13

¹⁸THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES by W. O. Carver, p. 14

¹⁹THE GOSPEL OF REDEMPTION by W. T. Conner, pp. 220-221

²⁰ibid, p. 221

²¹THE UNIQUE MESSAGE AND THE UNIVERSAL MISSION OF CHRISTIANITY by J. F. Love, p. 240