

President Frank Page's Convention Address

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*The Maginot Line
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In the 1920s, leaders of France were painfully aware that Germany's devastating victories in World War I could be repeated. Much thought was given to how to defend their country from a possible German attack. One of the generals, Marshall Pétain, approached the minister of war, André Maginot, about a massive engineering project which would defend the eastern border of France. After much discussion, the leaders were convinced as to the need, and the Maginot Line was built. It was a system of over fifty forts with hundreds of artillery emplacements and turrets connected by a vast system of tunnels. It enabled France to quickly organize a defense against a German attack. It was an absolute engineering marvel. One interesting fact is that it had a pressurized air system which would keep poison gas on the outside. Most military tacticians thought the Maginot Line would be held indefinitely. It ran from the Swiss border on the south to the Ardennes Forest in the north. Later, after Belgium terminated its alliance with France, there was an attempt to extend the line through the Belgium border, but the forts built there were nowhere near as strong or advanced as the ones on the German border.

In September of 1939, when Germany declared war on France's ally, Poland, France responded with a declaration of war against Germany. For months the German army simply sat on its side of the border, not advancing, and the French generals congratulated themselves on the Maginot Line's effectiveness. Then in early May of 1940, Germany declared war on Belgium and Holland. France, expecting Germany to attempt to flank the forts to the north, moved the bulk of its army north toward Belgium to meet the incoming Germans. However, the Germans instead marched in force through the Ardennes Forest, which General Pétain had called "impenetrable," and at his suggestion had been left unguarded and unfortified. With little resistance, the Germans easily pushed through and surrounded the main French army in Belgium while advanced units pushed on to Paris. In less than one month, the country was taken by Germany. The formidable, technologically advanced Maginot Line was simply bypassed.

To most, the Maginot Line is an arcane reminder of France's defeat in World War II. To military historians, it is a symbol of strategic stupidity.

It is my contention that we, too, have built a Maginot Line. Sensing the reality of spiritual warfare, we have tried to do something. However, I am convinced that the Maginot Line we have constructed will not enable victory in the warfare in which we are involved. We have built our Maginot Line with magnificent churches, strong entities, valuable agencies, wonderful programs, funding mechanisms, sometimes thinking our success would be ensured and defeat rendered impossible. This assiduous inculcation of false thinking has been so pervasive as to lead to a hubris or arrogance with which God is not pleased. It has led to defeat after defeat. Instead of transforming our culture for Christ, culture has often transformed our churches and Convention in its image.

We all know that we are in battle. We know Ephesians 6:10-11, yet we fight flesh and blood in an internecine conflict which allows the enemy to run amok. We have our own blind spots. We know the statistics, don't we?

God's Word, His precious, inerrant Word gives us clear insight and strategic thinking.

Turn with me to **Psalm 51:1-13**.

THE COSTS OF THIS WAR ARE HIGH. I believe that our Convention stands at an irrecoverable moment. I know that God has been immensely blessing us, despite ourselves. However, He has blessed us for a reason. It is not to make us spiritually obese and self-centered. It is to be an awesome body of believers doing His work in this world. However, as big as we are and as strong as we think we have become, we will fail in God's call if we do not experience a genuine Holy Spirit revival. I believe this passage will show us that we have much to lose.

There are things that we have lost. There are things the enemy wishes us to lose to an even greater level. Verses 2-3 point out the clear reality that **sweet fellowship is lost when unconfessed sin is present** in the life of the believer. The sad truth is that many live much of life like this. Instead of dealing with the root problem, we often live miserable, bitter, and unfulfilled lives. We have a tendency to find fault in everyone else instead of dealing honestly with ourselves. We develop a pattern of dishonesty before God.

If asked what the problems are in our Convention, very few people start talking about what they have brought to the table of ineffectiveness, defeat, or pain. I am guilty of this.

We can also lose the joy of our salvation. Look at verse 12 with me. When the sweet fellowship of the Lord is gone, so is the joy. Worship becomes hollow. Working for the Lord becomes work. We find ourselves seeking entertainment instead of instruction. We lose the wonder of life.

Satan wishes to steal our passion (v. 8). For thirty years, we have been trying raise baptism levels in nonrevived churches among nonrevived people who have lost a passion for the lost and a passion for Christ. We have become strangely passionate about our own agendas.

The enemy wishes for us to lose our humility (vv. 4-5). Verses 4-5 show a true humility on the part of the servant, David. He is painfully aware of his inadequacies. He has come to a clear understanding of his weaknesses. I heard it said once that preachers are unique human beings in that they can strut while sitting down. Humility has been replaced with an arrogance that does not please the Lord.

In other places in the Word of God, we find that we can lose much more. **Satan wishes to steal from us the unity that God requires.** Some of us live like unity is a nicety that is somehow secondary or tertiary in God's plan. However, according to John 17:21, it is a prayer request of Jesus, and it is directly tied to whether or not the world will believe that Jesus is who He said He is. Jesus prays that we will be one as He and the Father are one. This implies unity of nature, purpose, and essence.

Satan wishes to steal from us a godly balance. One of the things for which I believe we must repent is our tendency to ignore a God-required balance in our relationships. Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak the truth in love. I believe that speaking the truth without love leads to a cold-hearted legalism which drives people away from the gospel. Speaking love without the truth leads to a cold-hearted liberalism which leaves people loved, but bereft of the truth.

Satan has taken this godly balance from us too often. Whether or not our conversation and communication is expressed through blogging, e-mail, telephone, hallway conversations, or two tin cans on a string, God is going to hold us accountable for what is written, said, and related. Are we speaking the truth in love? Satan has stolen this balance too long and too often.

Satan wishes for us to lose much. He has won too many battles.

THE DIVINE STRATEGY IS CLEAR. There are key steps which cannot be ignored. For weeks, in various press releases, I have been talking about 2 Chronicles 7:14. We shall look at that in a moment. However, in our primary text, we see that first **we must confess before our Lord.** Look at verses 3 and 4. Recognize that while sin WILL affect our lives, ultimately our sin is against the Lord. It is His heart which is broken by our rebellion.

We must plead for forgiveness and cleansing and a new heart. Look at verses 1-2, 7-9, and 10. Recognize that Jesus has enabled your forgiveness through His shed blood. Pray that God would give you a new heart. Only God can do what needs to be done. He alone brings life, light, and love. He alone can provide the spiritual heart transplant that we so desperately need. We must confess that our Maginot Line is as ineffective as it was for France. The enemy has flanked us, has bypassed our defenses, and has struck at the heart of who we are. Let us confess, let us plead, let us beg God for a new heart.

Yes, there are things which can be lost, but praise God, He is ready to restore. The irrecoverable moment is before us. God stands ready to give another opportunity. He requires a response from us. He wants us to have revival, but will not force it upon us.

VICTORY IS ASSURED. The only hope for our Convention is a Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit revival. We have lost the closeness of the Lord. We have lost the joy of our salvation. We have lost our unity. We have lost too much! What victory does God wish to bring? Second Chronicles 7:14 says, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

The specific victory is stated in Psalm 51:13, which says, “Then I will teach the rebellious Your ways, and sinners will return to You.”

The victory that God wishes to bring is a Holy Spirit revival which results in the winning of the lost to Jesus Christ. There is a tremendous missions opportunity before us. God’s heart yearns for a restored relationship, which empowers a real relevancy which reaches our culture.

Will the Southern Baptist Convention one day be remembered as a denominational Maginot Line? Will it be recalled as a symbol of strategic stupidity where the opportunity was lost so often that it became an irretrievable loss? When we are right with God, we have impact on a lost world. When we have lost the sharp edge of being right with the Lord, we lose our ability to be salt and light. We justify our ungodly behavior by stating, “we are only human.” While our world goes to hell, we are too busy excusing our behavior rather than sharing God’s message. We have lost our influence, our relevancy at school, at work, and in our neighborhoods.

Our Convention is accused by many as being an uncaring, bloated bureaucracy which has lost its ability to impact our world today. We are accused of being a denominational Maginot Line. We all agree that our churches have lost influence. One writer said that the early church had little influence but great power. Churches today have much influence but little power. I believe that it is true.

Many of us have thanked God for the victorious battle regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. However, if we do not apply the same fervency to the issue of relevancy and revival that we have regarding the issue of inerrancy, then it will all be a moot point. Our churches will be right, but empty. Our entities and ministries will be fighting for scraps from a declining and dying constituency. We can lose our influence if we do not realize that the issue of spiritual warfare is intense and ongoing. There are many fronts to the battle. May God bring the victory of influence and soul winning and relevancy to our lives, our churches, and our Convention!