



SBAOC Weekly Update

NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

- Mark your calendar! *Saved By Faith Youth Camp* will be June 15-19. Registration information is available at www.sbfyckansas.com.

If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please email the information to spurgeonassociation@gmail.com or call us at 785-456-8513.

FROM WESLEY TO WHITEFIELD

A Pastor's journey to Reformed Theology

By Winfield Bevins

In 2002, I had a plane ticket to fly to England to begin a PhD program in Wesleyan Studies at the University of Manchester, England. I was a Wesleyan-Arminian theologian in the making. I spoke at conferences on John Wesley and wrote several academic publications that were published in the top Wesleyan academic journals including *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* and the *Asbury Theological Journal*.¹ I even wrote a book entitled *Rediscovering John Wesley*, about the life, ministry and theology of John Wesley.² I lived, breathed, believed, wrote and preached Wesleyan-Arminian theology.

However, my Wesleyan world began to radically change in 2003, when my wife Kay and I began to feel the call of God to plant a church. After serving as a pastor and college instructor in Tennessee for several years, I knew God was preparing me to plant a church. We began to dream of planting a church that would be highly innovative, gospel-centered and culturally relevant. During that time, some close friends began telling us about the need for a contemporary church in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. After much prayer, I resigned as lead pastor of our church in Tennessee and made plans to move to North Carolina's beautiful Outer Banks. Everyone thought we were crazy because we were moving to a place that we had never been before. With only faith and a few possessions, we moved to the Outer Banks in May 2005.

Toward a Reformed Theology

As I wrestled with the call to be a church planter, the seeds of Reformed theology began to take form. The implications of planting a church actually shaped and influenced my turn to Reformed theology. I began to ask some sobering questions. Where did the call come from? Why was God calling me to a

(Continued on page 2)



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

From Wesley to Whitefield: A Pastor's Journey to Reformed Theology	2-5
Comments on Our Purpose Statement	2
Upcoming Conferences.....	3
Contact Us	6
Pulpit Supply	6
Prayer Meetings.....	6

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon

COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

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"I throw myself on the mercies of God in Christ; I resolve to venture all on this foundation; and relying on that help which is promised to them that ask it, I determine to struggle with all my corruptions, and to employ what is left to me of life, and talents, and influence, in the way which shall appear to me most pleasing to my heavenly Father. Oh with what humiliation have I to look back on the years wherein all these were so grossly wasted; and what reason have I to rejoice that I was not then snatched away!"

William Wilberforce

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specific group of people in a place I had never been before? Why was God calling me to do something so radically different from anything I had ever done before? Was it all up to me? How would I know that God would provide for my family if I moved in faith? What would happen if we failed?

I began to realize that the Lord was at the center of it all. The theological implications were nothing more than astounding. I saw that God was already at work in the Outer Banks preparing the hearts of hundreds of people to receive the gospel before I ever visited. I thought I was going there to do a work for the Lord; rather, I was actually going there to share in the work that He was already doing in the hearts and lives of the people. Many ministers wrongly say "my ministry" or "my church." In actuality, the church belongs to Christ and ministry is an extension of God's work in and through the church. It is Christ's work from beginning to end! This does not remove our responsibility; rather, it frees us to rely on Christ and His cross for ministry. This opened wonderful new possibilities!

I laid aside my Wesleyan lenses and began to see Scripture in a new light. I never really meditated on the meaning of such passages as Ephesians 1:3-14 and Romans 8:28-30. The Scriptures came alive with new meaning and depth. As an Arminian, I had always skipped over these passages and never fully read them. I began reading the works of great historical Reformed thinkers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon. Then I began to read the contemporary writings of men like John Piper, D.A. Carson, C.J. Mahaney, Wayne Grudem and Albert Mohler. I also became involved with a Reformed church planting group called the Acts 29 Network, which helped me work through the practical and cultural implications of Reformed theology as a church planter.

I began to see that God was the Sovereign Creator of all things. He upholds, directs and governs all creation from the greatest even to the least by His sovereign will and holy providence. In His foreknowledge, He also governs and directs the affairs of the nations. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign God. John Piper describes the sovereignty of God in the following way, "He is the only 'Sovereign,' and therefore He is the happy Sovereign, because there is none that can frustrate what He aims to do according to His good pleasure."³ Contrary to Open Theism, God's plans and purposes cannot be thwarted or overturned.⁴ He works all things together for good to those who love Him according to His will.

Solus Christus

It followed then, that I began to understand salvation from a Reformed theological perspective. Men like Martin Luther and John Calvin fought to bring a reformation to the church that would put faith back into the hands of the people. Arising out of the period of the Protestant Reformation were five foundations which summarized in part what the Reformers were trying to do. These banners were known as the "Five Solas" (Latin for *only* or *alone*) of the Reformation: the authority of Scripture alone, salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, and to God alone be glory. These five *solas* of the faith are as important now as they were then.⁵

The Reformed view of salvation is completely Christocentric. Christianity begins and ends with Jesus Christ. The word *Christian* literally means

(Continued on page 3)

UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Midwest Founders Conference 25th Anniversary—"Union with Christ". February 25 & 26, 2020. First Baptist Church of Fenton. Speakers: Dr. Greg Gilbert, Dr. Curtis McClain, Dr. Terry Chrisope, Dr. Bob Curtis. Register online at: <http://sbfcmw.com>

Grace Bible Conference—April 24-26. Rockport Baptist Church, Arnold, MO. "Walking with Christ." The SBAOC spring meeting will be held in conjunction with this conference.

2020 Saved By Faith Youth Camp—June 15-19. Webster Conference Center, Salina, Kansas. <https://www.sbfyckansas.com/>

Check out the [SBAOC YouTube channel](#) to watch the Reformation Weekend Conference sessions.



Check out the "SBFYC Official" YouTube channel to watch the 2019 sessions.

(Continued from page 2)

"Christlike." Therefore, a proper Christology is the place to start if we are really going to talk about salvation. Reformed theology distinguishes between man-centered and God-centered views of salvation. Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is freely offered to all who repent of their sins and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. By His blood, Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for every believer. We are "saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. Salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifying them in His sight.

I began to understand that God works in various ways to bring people into full salvation in Jesus Christ. It all begins when God calls us. This is commonly referred to as the effectual call. The effectual call is when the Holy Spirit effectually calls a person by working to awaken the heart, mind and soul of a person to a personal need of salvation. Bruce Demarest helps distinguish between the general call to the unsaved that comes through the preaching of the gospel and the special call that is effected by the Holy Spirit's secret work on the heart.⁶ The universal call goes out to all through the general proclamation of the gospel. All should hear the gospel message; however, only the elect will hear the inward or special call of the Holy Spirit. We do our part in preaching the gospel and God does His part in calling the elect unto Himself by His Spirit.

The *Westminster Confession* describes the effectual call as, "God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it." This does not diminish the human responsibility in any way. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both in the Scriptures. J.I. Packer says that, "God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught us side by side in the same Bible: sometimes, indeed, in the same text."⁷

We are also justified by Christ alone, not by any works. Justification is a judicial act, in which God forgives a person's sins and declares him to be in a position of righteousness before God. It is what God does for us. It is by the merits of Christ's redemptive work on the cross that we receive justification, which is the forgiveness of sins. Paul makes it clear that this justification comes by grace through faith in God alone not of works (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8-9). Justification is the work of God's grace, not ours. For that reason, it is a foundational teaching in the Christian faith, especially in the Protestant tradition.⁸ The redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross brings justification into the life of the believer. Christ's work of reconciliation transforms our hostility toward God into fellowship with Him. Let us then never lose sight of the cross and the doctrine of justification. This is why Charles Spurgeon encourages us to, "abide hard at the cross and search the mystery of his wounds."⁹ The Father sent His Son to die for us on the cross to apply the fruit of His death to our lives in justification and salvation. D.A. Carson warns, "I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight."¹⁰

The Centrality of the Gospel

Reformed theology helped me rediscover the centrality of the gospel for the Christian life. Many Christians have a watered down, man-centered version of the gospel. The result of not having a solid grasp on the gospel is a dysfunctional and fragmented faith. C.J. Mahaney warns that three things result when we move away from the gospel: legalism, condemnation and subjectivism.¹¹ Therefore, the gospel message must always remain central. Jerry Bridges says, "The gospel is not the most important message in history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experience the joy of living their lives by it."¹²

What is the gospel? The gospel is the declaration of the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for our sins on the cross of Cavalry. Simply put, there is no gospel without the sinless life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Tim Keller beautifully describes the gospel: "Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever."¹³

The gospel has far-reaching implications for every Christian believer beyond salvation. Not only are we saved by the gospel, but we are also called to live by the gospel. Not only should every Christian have a clear understanding of the gospel but they should also apply it to every area of the Christian life. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working and behaving.¹⁴ We must never move beyond the gospel. We should memorize the gospel, pray the gospel, sing the gospel, review how the gospel has changed our lives, and finally we should continually study the gospel.¹⁵ The gospel is for all of life. This is the reason why the gospel is the foundation for Christian life. Only a gospel-centered approach to all of life will produce healthy Christ followers. It is easy to use church growth principles to add people to your church; however, only the gospel can grow people into disciples of Jesus Christ.

Gospel-Centered Ministry

Because of my shift in thinking to a Reformed view of salvation through the gospel, my thoughts of ministry and evangelism also began to change. I began to realize the important connection between the Bible, theology and ministry. Our theology has a direct effect on our ministry. In many ways, our ministry is the fruit of our theology. As an Arminian, I thought it was all up to me to save people. Arminian theology can result in man-centered approaches to evangelism and ministry. I began to see that Christ was already at work in people's lives. I realized that ministry is only effective when the Holy Spirit is already present and at work. Ministry is sharing in the mission of God. Christians have been sent as missionaries to share the gospel in our present culture and to fulfill the Great Commission. Gospel-centered ministry is rooted in the concept of the *Missio Dei* ("Mission of God") which recognizes that there is one mission and it is God's mission. The church is not an end in itself; the church points beyond itself to fulfill the mission of God.

To understand what it means to be a part of the mission of God, one must begin by understanding that God is a missionary God. The very being of God is the basis for the missionary enterprise. God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and creation reconciled, redeemed and healed.¹⁶ God's mission can be seen throughout the pages of the Bible and history. Nowhere is the mission of God better understood than in the person and work of Jesus Christ. John 3: 16 tells us that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Being a missional Christian is simply following the way of Jesus. Jesus Christ was and is the first and greatest missionary. The Bible tells us that He came from heaven to earth to die for a lost and dying world.

Ed Stetzer says, "Being Missional means actually doing mission right where you are. Missional means adopting the posture of a missionary, learning and adapting to the culture around you while remaining biblically sound."¹⁷ As the Father sent Jesus, He also sends us into our time and culture. Mark Driscoll says, "It is imperative that Christians be like Jesus, by living freely within the culture as missionaries who are as faithful to the Father and his gospel as Jesus was in his own time and place."¹⁸ We have been chosen by God to live in this time and place in order to fulfill the mission of God. Acts 17:26-27 tells us that God has determined the exact place and time where we should live so that that men may find Him. It is truly

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(Continued from page 4)

awesome to realize that you have been chosen by God to be His representative to this world. It is both a great privilege and great responsibility. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul describes our calling in the following way, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

Conclusion: My Journey Home

I simply wrote this article to share my theological pilgrimage from Arminian theology to Reformed theology. Ironically, my journey has been the exact opposite of Clark Pinnock's theological pilgrimage in which he moved from Reformed to Arminian theology.¹⁹ I have not attempted to try to articulate anything new, but to affirm the importance and relevance of Reformed theology in the 21st century. In many ways, my journey seems to parallel a larger resurgence of interest in Reformed theology within Evangelicalism. Collin Hansen captured the resurgence in an article he wrote for *Christianity Today* called "Young, Restless, Reformed."²⁰

Reformed theologian John Franke said, "Reformed theology is always reforming according to the Word of God in order to bear witness to the eternal truth of the gospel in the context of an ever-changing world characterized by a variety of cultural settings: *theologia reformata et semper reformata*."²¹ In the spirit of the Reformation, my theology has been reformed and is being reformed. God has taken me on a theological journey from Wesley to Whitfield from Arminianism to Calvinism.

My theological journey has come full circle. Although I strayed off the road for a while, I have returned home to the roots of my Baptist heritage. My great great grandfather Rev. William H. Bevins was a Baptist preacher in the late eighteenth hundreds in the mountains of Southwest Virginia. He was an adherent to the New Hampshire Baptist Confession, which is a thoroughly Reformed Baptist statement of faith. My great grandfather Phillip Wheeler Bevins built the second sanctuary for First Baptist Church in Concord, Tennessee in 1928. My grandmother Loretta Bevins was the first person baptized in the church. Decades later, when I became a Christian I was also baptized at the First Baptist Church of Concord. Now, I am currently finishing a doctoral degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

Notes:

1 In fact, by the time many of these were published my theology had begun to shift to Reformed theology. "Historical Development of Wesley's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Fall 2006). "Pneumatology in John Wesley's Theological Method." *The Asbury Theological Journal*, Volume 58, Number 2 (Fall 2003).

2 Dr. Larry Wood at Asbury Seminary graciously wrote the foreword to the book. Winfield Bevins, *Rediscovering John Wesley* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2004).

3 John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 54.

4 The Openness view concludes that God does not know the future because it has not happened yet. This unbiblical view of God is a heretical doctrine that is a radical form of Arminian teaching and dangerous to the church on various levels. Classical Arminian theology affirms divine sovereignty in general, and many Arminian theologians are rightly suspicious of Openness theology.

5 Micheal Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace: Who Does What in Salvation?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994). See especially the introduction to the book.

6 Bruce Demarest and John S. Feinberg, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006) 214.

7 J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 22.

8 Demerast and Feinberg, *The Cross and Salvation*, 346.

9 Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 8.

10 Don Carson, *Cross & Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993). 26.

11 C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2002), 23.

12 Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 1994), 46.

13 Tim Keller, "The Gospel in All Its Forms" *Leadership Journal* (Spring, 2008).

14 Tim Keller, "The Centrality of the Gospel." <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/centrality.pdf> .

15 C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2006), 53-71.

16 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 2003), 18.

17 Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic Press, 2006), 19.

18 Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 40.

19 See Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology." http://www.revivaltheology.net/1_cal_arm/pilgrim.html

20 Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed." *Christianity Today* (September 2006).

21 John Franke, "Reforming Theology: Toward a Postmodern Reformed Dogmatics." *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003), 1-26.

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**SPURGEON
BAPTIST
ASSOCIATION
OF CHURCHES**

**PO Box 155
Wamego KS 66547**

Phone: (785) 456-8513

Email:
spurgeonassociation@gmail.com

Contact Us:

Administrative Council:

J.W. Glidewell

Moderator & Western Coordinator

Phone: (785) 772-1176

jwglidewell@gmail.com

Terry Coker

Vice Moderator

& Eastern Coordinator

Terry.Coker@fbcfenton.com

Tony Mattia

Corresponding Secretary

Phone: (785) 456-3796

spurgeonassociation@gmail.com

Ken Jorgenson, At Large

kjorg@hotmail.com

Robin Jackson, At Large

jacksonrobin@gmail.com

Bill Ascol, At Large

bascol@sbcglobal.net

Lyn Hansen, At Large

pastorlyn@insidenp.com

Anthony Harwell, At Large

anthonyharwell@gmail.com



WWW.SBAOC.ORG

MEN AVAILABLE FOR PULPIT SUPPLY

Kevin Berens
Colby, Kansas
Email: berens.kevin@gmail.com
Cell Phone: 785-332-7184

Nathaniel Penland
Lawrenceville, Georgia
Email: n8penland@gmail.com
Phone: 678-925-7024

Tim Lambert
Lindsborg, Kansas
Email: tlambert@smokyvalley.org
Phone: 785-614-3651

Bake Ottogy
St. Louis, Missouri
Email: bakeottogy@gmail.com
Phone: 636-467-7446

Brad Richardson
Lawrence, Kansas
Email: richbud@hotmail.com
Phone: 785-766-7268

John Grove
Ocala, FL
Email: trsjwg@gmail.com
Phone: 352-286-5494

PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.



Baptist Association of Churches