

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: BAPTISTS AND THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

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**N**o doctrine is more central to the Christian faith than the doctrine of salvation, and issues related to this doctrine has been debated through the years from a variety of perspectives. This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* focuses on a couple of recent books which center on soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), although they both address numerous theological issues. Authors from diverse perspectives have been sought to evaluate each of these books, both published by Broadman and Holman, from their own perspective.

***Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism: Reflections on the John 3:16 Conference***, ed. David Allen and Steve Lemke

The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, along with Jerry Vines Ministries and five other Baptist seminaries and colleges, helped sponsor the John 3:16 Conference several years ago at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia. The speakers at the conference included four former presidents of the SBC, three SBC entity heads, and the deans of three of the largest SBC seminaries. Flowing from that conference is a book entitled *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism: Reflections on the John 3:16 Conference*, co-edited by David Allen and by Baptist Center Director and John 3:16 Conference speaker, Steve Lemke. The contributors included nine different faculty members from four Baptist seminaries and colleges. Because I serve as Editor of the *Journal*, I had some reluctance to give our book this amount of attention. However, *Whosoever Will* has been something of an instant success, ranking number 1 at various times in four different categories in the amazon.com sales rankings (“Baptist,” “Systematic Theology,” “Calvinism,” and “Other Denominations”). Although more technical theological works rarely sell widely, *Whosoever Will* has ranked as high as in the top 8,000 of the hundreds of thousands of books sold on amazon.com. Furthermore, on the christianbooks.com website, *Whosoever Will* was ranked 19th out of 2,166 books in the area of “Doctrinal Theology,” and has been ranked first in the “Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom category. A copy of *Whosoever Will* has even been included in a time capsule dedicated at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Therefore, I believe it has drawn attention sufficient to validate a multiperspectival response.

The first section of *Whosoever Will* highlights the plenary speakers at the John 3:16 Conference, each of whom addressed a key component of the traditional five points of Reformed soteriology flowing from the Synod of Dort. This section is introduced by a sermon by Jerry Vines (Director of Jerry Vines Ministries, former SBC President, and former Pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL) on the soteriological implications of the John 3:16 text that was the namesake of the conference. Paige Patterson (President, Professor of Theology, and L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, former SBC President) provides a biblical and theological critique of

“Total Depravity.” In “Congruent Election: Understanding Salvation from an ‘Eternal Now’ Perspective,” Richard Land (President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) critiques “Unconditional Election” and proposes an alternative of “Congruent Election.” David L. Allen (Dean of the School of Theology, Professor of Preaching, George W. Truett Chair of Ministry, and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a carefully documented examination of the Calvinists who reject the doctrine of “Limited Atonement,” and challenges the scriptural basis for the doctrine. Steve Lemke (Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, McFarland Chair of Theology, Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, and Editor of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) questions the biblical foundation and theological adequacy of the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace. Ken Keathley (Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) affirms the security of the believer while providing a critique of the view of perseverance held by some Calvinists.

In the second section of the book, five new chapters are added on theological and ministry issues arising from Calvinism that were not addressed in the conference. In “Was Calvin a Calvinist?: Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement,” Kevin Kennedy (Assistant Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) questions whether Calvin himself held some of the views advocated by some modern Calvinists. Malcolm Yarnell (Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Theological Research, Director of the Oxford Study Program, and Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a richly documented assessment of a number of ecclesiological issues for Baptists in regard to Calvinism. R. Alan Streett (Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry, W. A. Criswell Chair of Expository Preaching, and Editor of the *Criswell Theological Review* at Criswell College) addresses the issue of the appropriateness of offering public invitations or altar calls in churches, which are rejected by some Calvinists. Jeremy Evans (Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) raises questions about whether the kind of determinism held by some Calvinists is consistent with Scripture, logic, and human experience. Finally, in “Evil and God’s Sovereignty,” Bruce Little (Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) challenges the adequacy of the answer to the problem of evil proposed by some varieties of Calvinism, especially in regard to the glory and holiness of God

This book has evoked many responses from across the theological spectrum. In this issue of the *Journal*, we have invited authors from three perspectives to critique the book – Greg Wills (Associate Dean for Theology and Tradition, Director of the Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Professor of Church History at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) will provide a response from a Calvinist perspective; Matthew Pinson (President and Professor of History, Free Will Baptist Bible College) addresses the book from a Reformed Arminian perspective, and Fred Smith (Associate Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School) evaluates the book from what might be described as a mainstream/majoritarian Southern Baptist perspective (more on this in the next paragraph).

One of the interesting aspects of the reactions to *Whosoever Will*, at least to those of us associated with the book, is that our reviewers have tended to label us as being either of

two extremes: Arminians or Calvinists. One book from an Arminian perspective described the perspective in *Whosoever Will* as “moderate Calvinist.”<sup>1</sup> Another Arminian labeled the contributors to *Whosoever Will* as “anti-Calvinist, and that “all the authors are Arminian in the classical sense,” while at the same time questioning why the authors were at “so much distance from Arminianism” and objecting to their criticism of Arminianism.<sup>2</sup> However, in an issue of the *Founders Journal* dedicated to critiquing *Whosoever Will* from a Calvinist perspective, one article sought to answer the “Arminian objections” presented in the book,<sup>3</sup> while another opined that the authors should “accept the judgment that they defend a classically Arminian, or openness, position.”<sup>4</sup> That is quite a range – from moderate Calvinist to anti-Calvinist, from critics of Arminianism to rank openness of God Arminians!

In response to this tendency toward extremist labeling in some of the early reviewers, some of the contributors to *Whosoever Will* issued a joint statement called, “Neither Calvinist Nor Arminian, But Baptist.” Our position is neither fully Arminian nor Calvinist, but intentionally maintains the tension between divine sovereignty and human freewill which we see affirmed in Scripture. It is frustrating to us that others would try to force us into either of the more extreme positions (i.e., *reducio ad Arminian* or *reducio ad Calvinian*). Indeed, we would prefer expressing our soteriological beliefs directly from Scripture rather than through a filter relevant to Reformed theology, but this five-point grid is where soteriological positions tend to be compared. We understand our “Calminian” perspective to be a strong majority within the Southern Baptist Convention. Indeed, LifeWay Research statistics indicate that five-point Calvinism is a small minority (roughly 10 percent) among Southern Baptists as a whole.<sup>5</sup> *It is surprising, then, that some recent multiviews books addressing issues* such as election include Calvinist perspectives and Arminian/Openness of God perspectives, but ignore the majority view of America’s largest Protestant denomination, not to mention other Baptist traditions. This response, “Neither Calvinist Nor Arminian, But Baptist” is included to reiterate claims made repeatedly in *Whosoever Will* itself, as a clarification of the mainstream/majoritarian position we defend in the book.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Matthew Pinson, “Introduction,” *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, by Leroy Forlines (Nashville: Randall House, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Olson, review of *Whosoever Will*, on the Baptist Theology website at <http://www.baptisttheology.org/WhosoeverWill.cfm>. See also Olson’s additional review, “A Good, New, Non-Arminian, Arminian Book,” available on the Roger Olson website at <http://rogereolson.com/2010/09/02/a-good-new-non-arminian-arminian-book>.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Barrett, “Is Irresistible Grace Unbiblical? A Response to Steve Lemke’s Arminian Objections,” *Founders Journal* 82, rep. ed. (Fall 2010), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Nettles, review of *Whosoever Will*, in *Founders Journal* 82, reprint issue (Fall 2010), 4.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Lovelace, “10 Percent of SBC Pastors Call Themselves 5-Point Calvinists,” *Baptist Press*, September 18, 2006, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23993>.

***Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach***, by Ken Keathley

*The second book addressed in this issue of the Journal is Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, by Ken Keathley, who serves as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This volume has an interesting history, having been begun in response to the encouragement of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Chuck Kelley. It was initially a coauthored project with Baptist Center founder and NOBTS Theology Professor Stan Norman when Keathley was also a faculty member at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, but circumstances led to Keathley completing the book alone. Keathley was the only person to make a presentation at both the Building Bridges Conference and the John 3:16 Conference, and traces of these presentations can be found both books relating to these conferences, as well as to *Salvation and Sovereignty*. Echoes of Keathley's presentation at the Building Bridges conference, "A Molinist View of Election: How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian"<sup>6</sup> are seen in *Salvation and Sovereignty*, and Keathley's chapter on perseverance is foundationally the same in both *Whosoever Will* and in *Salvation and Sovereignty*.

Four thinkers were asked to evaluate this significant contribution of *Salvation and Sovereignty*, which proposes Molinism as a compromise approach to resolve the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, particularly with regard to soteriology. First, Dr. Keathley offers a brief introduction to the book. Then Deidre Richardson, a student of Keathley's at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, evaluates the book from an Arminian perspective. Steve Lemke (Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, and McFarland Chair of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) and Steve Ladd (Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) provide a response to in *Salvation and Sovereignty* from the mainstream/majoritarian Baptist perspective. A Calvinist critique was sought from another author, but unfortunately because of other pressing writing assignments he was not able to complete his review essay in time for publication in this issue. We hope to publish his article in a later issue. However, our prayer is that this issue of the *Journal* will be of help to Baptists in assessing these two recent Broadman and Holman books and the profoundly important issues they address.

***Future Issues of the Journal***

The editorial staff of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* apologize that the Spring 2010 issue has been so delayed. We had to delay to provide our busy contributors time to complete their assignments, or in some cases to take up assignments on fairly short notice that others simply did not have time to complete. However, we hope to catch up over the next six months with an issue on Christian Ethics and another issue on theological issues. We also intend to produce a *feestschrift* in honor of longtime NOBTS Church History professor Dan Holcomb. We invite contributors to submit articles on these themes, as well as book reviews in any area of theology and ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Keathley, "A Molinist View of Election: How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. Brad Waggoner and Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 195-215.

### *Upcoming Baptist Center Events and Resources*

We look forward to two events co-sponsored by the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry in the next few months. We will be hosting a **Baptist Center conference** in association with the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum on the New Orleans campus on Friday afternoon, February 25<sup>th</sup>. Matthew Pinson, President and Professor of History at Free Will Baptist Bible College, is presenting a paper entitled “*Thomas Grantham’s Theology of Atonement and Justification*,” in which Pinson contrasts the Reformed or Classical Arminian soteriology of General Baptist Thomas Grantham from the Wesleyan Arminian John Goodwin. A panel of scholars will interact with Pinson on this subject.

We are also pleased to announce that the Baptist Center is co-sponsoring the **Power in the Pulpit Conference** at Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, on March 3-4. Initiated by Jerry Vines Ministries, the conference features four of the best-known expository preachers in the SBC: Jerry Vines, Jim Shaddix, David Platt, and David Allen. Vines, Shaddix, and Platt are all graduates of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, with Shaddix and Platt having served as professors of Preaching and as Dean of the Chapel at NOBTS. Vines and Shaddix published the excellent text on expository preaching from which the conference draws its name, *Power in the Pulpit*. David Allen is Dean of the School of Theology and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allen is also a co-editor and contributor to *Whosoever Will*.

Steve Lemke and David Allen are also co-editing another book flowing from the Acts 1:11 Conference, sponsored by Jerry Vines Ministries the year after the John 3:16 Conference. Entitled ***The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective***, the book will feature the presentations made at the conference by former SBC President Jerry Vines, Liberty Seminary professor Ergun Caner, Southeastern Seminary President Danny Akin, Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson, Southwestern Seminary Dean David Allen, ERLC President Richard Land, and evangelist Junior Hill, as well as new chapters by Stan Norman (Provost at Oklahoma Baptist University and former Director of the NOBTS Baptist Center), Craig Blasing (Provost and New Testament professor at Southwestern Seminary), Lamar Cooper (Provost and Old Testament professor at Criswell College), Steven Cox (Research Professor of New Testament and Greek at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary), and Michael Vlach (Professor of Theology at the Master’s Seminary and Director of the Theological Studies website). We anticipate the book will be released in summer 2011.

The Baptist Center also hopes to announce our partnership with a well-known **Baptist blog** in the near future. Our desire is that this blog could be a vehicle for Baptists communication with other Baptists about issues of interest and importance. We hope to be able to announce this partnership within the next few weeks. Thanks for your interest in and support for the work of the Baptist Center!

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Editor of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*