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Upon This Rock: A Baptist Understanding of the Church

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Introduction

The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views?

Jason G. Duesing

In early 2009, *The New York Times* reported an effort among many Roman Catholic dioceses to restore some of their “fading traditions” among what they described as a “self-satisfied world.”¹ Their concern centered on a significant decrease in Catholics practicing confession. The article explains that “[t]o remain in good standing, Catholics are required to confess their sins at least once a year. But in a survey last year by a research group at Georgetown University, three-quarters of Catholics said they went to confession less often or not at all.”² As a result, the dioceses encouraged the overlooked tradition of the indulgence to correct the trend.

Although made famous during the Reformation era due to Martin Luther’s public denouncing of the practice, the indulgence, or the specific offering of the church to spare an individual from time spent in Purgatory, never disappeared from the life of the Roman Catholic Church. *The New York Times* article explains that

¹ P. Vitello, “For Catholics, A Door to Absolution Is Reopened,” *The New York Times* (February 9, 2009), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/nyregion/10indulgence.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&sq=Roman%20Catholic%20resurgence&st=cse&spc=1, accessed September 24, 2009.

² *Ibid.*

[t]he return of indulgences began with Pope John Paul II, who authorized bishops to offer them in 2000 as part of the celebration of the church's third millennium. But the offers have increased markedly under his successor, Pope Benedict, who has made plenary indulgences part of church anniversary celebrations nine times in the last three years.³

Although following the same doctrinal understanding for the indulgence as in Martin Luther's day, the contemporary dioceses are no longer selling them. Instead, the Church hopes that the recovery of the tradition will serve as an incentive for Catholics to return to confession and the practicing of their faith. The article explains, "But for Catholic leaders, most prominently the pope, the focus in recent years has been less on what Catholics have in common with other religious groups than on what sets them apart—including the half-forgotten mystery of the indulgence."⁴ Indeed, the article conveys a growing appreciation for a return to Catholic distinctives. "'In our diocese, folks are just glad for any opportunity to do something Catholic,' said Mary Woodward, director of evangelization for the Diocese of Jackson, Miss., where only 3 percent of the population is Catholic."⁵

Most Protestants and Baptists would quickly object to this Catholic revival of tradition as something, like Luther labored to proclaim, that is contrary to Scripture and distorts the saving work of Christ. However, for confessional Protestants and Baptists alike, the recent activities of the Roman Catholics should serve as a mirror of sorts to test our intentions and challenge our reasoning. Just what exactly is the basis for our denominational distinctives? The Bible alone or the Bible plus tradition? Do we see Baptist distinctives as merely a collection of "faded traditions" that we

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

need to repackage to provide incentives for those drifting from denominational ties? Or are they truly doctrinal necessities rooted in the Bible alone? Are our Baptist distinctives only the memories of days gone by when every Baptist church followed the same weekly format, sang the same songs, and practiced the same traditions? Or are they theologically rich cornerstones of faith that easily transcend time, culture, and preference?

Such questions should be asked at the start of any book claiming to focus on the “Baptist” understanding of a particular doctrine. Since the word *Baptist* cannot be found in the New Testament to describe the early gatherings of believers into local churches, the onus to provide a rationale as to why any believer should give consideration to adopting such a name is always on those who are determined to set forth a Baptist perspective. If a New Testament believer in Jesus Christ really only needs the Bible for living the Christian life or forming a local church, then why focus on a particular tradition? And why Baptist?

THE DUTY OF BAPTISTS TO TEACH THEIR DISTINCTIVE VIEWS

In an effort to provide the reader with some perspective of the intentions of both the editors and authors, I have endeavored to answer that question at the beginning of this volume with the aid of nineteenth-century Baptist pastor and professor, John A. Broadus. Broadus (1827–95) served as one of the founding professors and later as president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s first seminary.⁶ In 1881, he was invited to address the American Baptist Publication Society at their meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana. His sermon, entitled “The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views,” stands as a forgotten, but surprisingly prescient, approach

⁶ See A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1901; repr., Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1987); D. S. Dockery and R. D. Duke, eds., *John A Broadus: A Living Legacy* (Nashville: B&H, 2008).

to the questions many ask with regard to the necessity and future of denominational, namely Baptist, identity.⁷

Internal and External Commands: Both Essential

Broadus begins with a text taken from Matt 28:20, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁸ Referencing Jesus’ commission, Broadus identifies that the commands of Christ, given to the disciples, consisted of both “the internal and the external elements of Christian piety.”⁹ The internal elements, Broadus explains, are more crucial to the Christian faith as they relate to individuals and their relationship to their Creator. However, Broadus clarifies that any primacy given to the internal elements does not mean that the external elements have little value or lack importance. Broadus reasons that if Christ and His apostles gave commands relating to external elements such as the “constitution and government” of churches, then it “cannot be healthy if they are disregarded.”¹⁰

In fact, both internal and external elements are intrinsic in the prerequisite command of Matt 28:19. First, Jesus exhorts the disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This mandate speaks of the ultimately internal act of Holy Spirit regeneration that produces a fruit-bearing disciple. As Broadus states, the internal aspect of these commands does take priority. When one of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus asked in faith, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus replied, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42–43). In this exchange Jesus’ affirmation came in response

⁷ J. A. Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881). Citations follow M. Grace’s transcription published in 2006 by the Center for Theological Research, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. See <http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/DutyBaptisttoTeachtheirViewsBroadus.pdf>.

⁸ All texts quoted in the introduction are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

⁹ Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists*, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to the outward expression of the internal work in the heart of the criminal. Due to the nature of the circumstances, discussion of Jesus' external commands related to baptism or church order were not as important as the criminal's life after death. This is not to say such commands have no importance but rather, simply, that they are less important than the internal commands which address the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25).

When Paul writes his magisterial chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he reminds believers that what he delivered to them "first" was the gospel, namely that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). Paul clearly wrote to them about many other vital items of an external nature for the local church, but the first instructions he relayed to the Corinthians were of an internal and more important nature.

The priority of the internal teachings of Christianity appear in Paul's letter to the Galatians as well. His expressed concern for believers who were deserting the faith did not revolve around their quibbling over the external teachings related to local church order. Rather, Paul intervenes as a result of the believers entertaining a "different gospel," that is a different teaching of an internal nature than the one Jesus provided (Galatians 1). For those altering the internal message, Paul renders them "accursed" (Gk. *anathema*), a term he does not employ, for example, when speaking of divisions within the church at Corinth over external matters related to church leaders and baptism (1 Cor 1:10-17). The internal commands of the New Testament that speak of the reconciliation of lost and rebellious men and women to a holy and wise God through only faith expressed in the work of God's Son bearing the punishment on behalf of humanity are clearly the first commands the churches should carry forth in obedience to Matt 28:20.

Second, in Matt 28:19, Jesus instructs the disciples to baptize the new disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Here the command to baptize marks an external

component in the commission. The external commands are not as important, as they do not directly convey the power to make one “wise for salvation” (2 Tim 3:15; cf. Rom 1:16). However, the external commands are vital for healthy Christian living, preserving the internal message for future generations, and therefore should not be discarded.

When Peter “lifted up his voice” and addressed the mocking and perplexed crowd who did not know how to make sense of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, he proclaimed, “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). In response to Peter’s wielding multiple Old Testament texts as a sharp, two-edged sword, the crowd was “cut to the heart” (Gk. *katenygēsan tēn kardian*) and asked, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter responded in 2:38 first with the primary internal command, “repent,” signaling the need for both confession of sin and faith expressed in belief. Peter’s entrance into his proclamation ministry follows the example of Jesus Himself, who began His public ministry saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Peter continues, however, and quickly articulates the external command for the hearers to “be baptized” (Acts 2:38), thus practicing the entire commission of Jesus, with both internal and externals in view. As with Matt 28:19–20, the order prescribed by Peter, first internal then external, shows the importance of one over the other, but it does not negate the essential function of both types of commands. To have eternal life, the soon-to-be disciple must repent and believe (internal). To function as an obedient disciple, professing his faith in the context of a local church community, the new disciple must be baptized (external).

The order and connection between the two commands appears also in the encounter Philip, the deacon, has with the Ethiopian court official in Acts 8. After following the instructions of an angel of the Lord to go to “the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza,” Philip discovers the Ethiopian reading Isaiah 53 aloud and

asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” From the top of his chariot, the Ethiopian responds, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” and invites Philip to sit with him. As they travel together, Philip proceeds to explain from the Scripture that Jesus is the sheep that “was led to the slaughter” in Isaiah 53, and the account in Acts relates that Philip, “beginning with this Scripture,” told the Ethiopian of the internal message regarding eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. However, Philip appears also to have communicated some of the external commands as well, for when the Ethiopian’s chariot came near a body of water, he said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” How would the Ethiopian have known of his need for baptism after he confessed his faith in Jesus if Philip had not already taught him of this external command? The baptism of the Ethiopian reinforces the notion that the external commands given in the New Testament, while not primary, are nonetheless important and should be incorporated properly into any presentation of the “good news about Jesus.”

Throughout the New Testament the local church functions as a repository not only to receive and transmit the internal message of the gospel to the current generation but also to preserve that message for future generations. As a result, the external commands given for the purposes of ordering and governing the church are essential for this task, even though they are not as important as the internal message. When Paul writes to Timothy to instruct him in “how one ought to behave in the household of God,” Paul describes the local church as the “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The idea of the local church functioning as a pillar (Gk. *stulos*) and a buttress (Gk. *hedraiōma*) creates a picture of an intentionally designed (i.e., ordered) structure that, through its strength, has been prepared both to uphold (i.e., present or proclaim) an object as well as protect (i.e., preserve) an object. Jesus’ promise in Matt 16:18 that “the gates of hell will not prevail against” the church, reinforces the idea that the local church has

been given as an indestructible fortress of strength held together by Jesus Christ himself (Col 1:17).

As a result, Jesus and His apostles have given commands of an external nature that must be taught and implemented. But for what end? The object given to the local church to uphold and protect is the “truth.” The “truth” is the message of eternal life—the substance of the internal commands of Christ (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25). The New Testament teaches that this “truth” was, and is, to be handed over or delivered from one generation to the next through the local church. Luke speaks of this at the beginning of his Gospel when writing to assure Theophilus of the certainty of the things he had been taught. Luke states that he has written an “orderly account” of the things that “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” had “delivered” (Gk. *paredosan*) to Luke and the other apostles (Luke 1:1–4). Likewise, in 2 Tim 1:14 (cf. 1 Tim 6:20) Paul instructs Timothy and the Ephesian Church to guard “the good deposit” (Gk. *tēn kalēn parathēkēn*), a reference to the entire message of the gospel he had taught and given to them. In a broad sense the purpose of all of Paul’s letters is to deliver the “truth” not only to his immediate recipients but also to all who will read his letters and implement the commands in local churches (Col 4:16).

Jude reinforces the notion that the “truth” is the object the local church exists to proclaim and protect. In Jude 3, he explains that “the faith,” or the gospel message of eternal life, “was delivered” (Gk. *paradotheisē*) to the saints. That is to say, the internal command of salvation through Jesus Christ has been handed down to Christians who live out the Christian life in local churches. Jude states that this delivering was done “once for all” (Gk. *hapax*), referencing the complete and final nature of the message rather than communicating that the message had no further need of transmission.

Therefore, the local church, the “pillar and buttress of truth” exists to “guard the good deposit” and “deliver” it to future generations. The New Testament commands that speak of the “truth”

are primary. However, the external commands that speak clearly to the order, practice, and health of the local church, while secondary, should not receive treatment as unessential. Instead, the local church also has a duty to carry forth and teach these commands in obedience to Matt 28:20.

Broadus rightfully notes, however, that the trend throughout the history of Christianity has been not to neglect the external commands but rather to “exaggerate or pervert” what he sees as a “very simple pattern” in the New Testament for church organization, government, and ceremony.¹¹ One example Broadus provides concerns the way the early church continued to “Judaize” Christianity. Broadus states:

When men began to exaggerate the importance of externals, they would soon begin to change their character. Coming to believe that baptism brings regeneration and is indispensable to salvation, they would of course wish to baptize practicable for the sick and the dying. Beginning to fancy that the bread and the wine really became the glorified body and blood of the ascended Saviour, they not unnaturally took to withholding the cup from the laity, lest their awkward handling should spill some drops of the sacred fluid, which would have been profanation. And, in addition to these tendencies should have a stronger government.¹²

Throughout the early centuries of church history, all too often Christians succumbed to the pressure from outside groups to add more and more to the mandates given in the New Testament. In Broadus’s understanding, Baptists have had a long history of expressing opposition to this kind of distorted view of Christ’s external commands given to the local church based on “the principle of recognizing no religious authority but the Scriptures themselves,

¹¹ Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

and of strictly observing all that the Saviour has commanded.”¹³ As a result, Broadus reasons that even though “Baptists differ widely from large portions of the Christian world” on these matters, if they feel that “their own views are more scriptural, more in accordance with the Saviour’s commands,” then they are required to teach those views in accordance with Matt 28:20.¹⁴ If Baptists believe that their views are not any more Baptist than they are biblical, Broadus contends that Baptists have a duty to teach their distinctive views.¹⁵

Reasons Why Baptists Ought to Teach Their Distinctive Views

In the main portion of his sermon, Broadus provides his audience with four specific reasons why Baptists should teach their distinct views as an expansion of his thesis. These four reasons offer a helpful and healthy perspective for tasks set forth in *Upon This Rock* as well as any work that aims to provide an impetus for the practice of Baptist distinctives.

1. *It is a duty we owe to ourselves.* Broadus’s first reason argues that because adhering to Baptist distinctives requires Baptists to “stand apart” from other Christians in “separate organizations,” Baptists should ensure that the cause for the separation has “real importance.”¹⁶ If Baptists determine that the “points of difference” they have with other Christians are of “substantial value and practical importance as a part of what Christ commanded,” then Baptists owe it to themselves to teach their views as a matter of consistency.¹⁷ More than that, however, Broadus explains

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. In the next section of Broadus’s sermon, 2–3, he articulates his understanding of the “leading distinctive views of Baptist churches” as (1) holding to the authority of the Bible alone, (2) the belief that Christian churches are comprised only of believers, (3) practicing only two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in nonsacramental fashion, and (4) holding to local church independence, from one another and the state. For a brief clarification of these views see James Patterson’s chapter in Dockery and Duke, *John A. Broadus*, 250–51.

¹⁶ Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists*, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid.

that teaching Baptist distinctives also serves as “the only way of correcting excesses among ourselves.”¹⁸ Broadus speaks of some “Baptist brethren” who, in their zeal for their denomination, were often “violent” and “bitter” in their defense of Baptist distinctives. Later in the sermon, Broadus describes these preachers as those who were “constantly going out of their way to find such topics through a bred-and-born love of controversy or a mistaken judgment as to its necessity and benefits.”¹⁹

This excessiveness among a few embarrassed many and caused other Baptists to retreat, “scarcely ever making the slightest allusion to characteristic Baptist principles,” and who, “afraid of appearing sensational in their own eyes, or in those of some fastidious leaders . . . shrink from saying the bold and striking things they might say, and ought to say.”²⁰ Broadus finds no fault with the content of the violent preachers’ message but rather with the harm they cause by their sensationalism in that they drive so many other preachers to the opposite extreme.²¹ The only corrective Broadus sees for what he terms “denominational ultraism” is “a healthy denominationalism.”²²

Broadus’s observations have merit, in that, for those who understand their distinct Baptist positions as only the outworking of biblical study, to shrink or minimize what they hold as true, is inconsistent practice. If the external commands in the Bible for ordering local churches are counter to the vast majority of the practice in contemporary Christendom, and if Baptists feel as though their views align with the teachings of the Bible, then Baptists owe it to themselves to teach their views. However, such teaching should follow the directive of Paul in Ephesians 4:15 and go forth “in love” for the purpose of building up the body of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ Ibid., 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Christ, not for winning an argument or tearing down other misguided believers.

However, the errors in spirit among Baptists in Broadus's day have continued to exist among Baptists. Too often, zealous members of the Baptist faithful verge into sensational defenses of Baptist views, thereby ostracizing many who agree in principle and practice, just not in spirit and tenor. The result is a cleaving among Baptist brethren whereby the extremists continue to marginalize themselves as they run like the cattle of Pamplona through the narrow aisles of Tiffany & Co.'s fragile wares. Often precisely correct in their views, their methods, however, only overshadow their message and do damage to their cause. The world gains a distorted view of the Baptist perspective, and many otherwise capable Baptists shrink from attempting to offer a corrective.

The shrinking, though, is just as egregious of an error. These embarrassed Baptists often use their rhetorical abilities to caricature the extremists, remarking to one another of how baseless and harmful are the sensationalists. However, rarely do these Baptists respond with a defense of Baptist distinctives cloaked in humility and Christian kindness, much less a defense at all. Instead, many are pulled toward the position of minimizing the distinctives as unnecessary or nonessential to the practice of the local church. Broadus described such Baptists in his day as those who "go out of their way to avoid all disputed questions, and want nothing to do with controversy of any kind."²³ Also, his charge to these kinds of Baptists continues to speak as a needed corrective when he advises them to "study the history and recorded writings of a man named Paul. He did not shrink from controversy. Yea, and his Master and ours is polemical on every page of his recorded discourses, always striking at some error or evil practice of the people around him."²⁴

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Broadus's cure is still correct. The way to correct the practice of both extremes, sensationalism on the one hand and timidity on the other, is for some clear-thinking, courageous Baptist preachers to get out in front of both groups and lead the parade. Broadus's plea for the teaching of a healthy Baptist denominationalism will still find favor in the hearts and minds of many believers not only because it is true but also because of how it is communicated. Baptists owe it to themselves to teach their own distinctives. Near the end of his sermon, Broadus provides a response that leading Virginia Baptist Jeremiah Jeter gave regarding how he approaches teaching Baptist distinctives in the right manner. Jeter said:

I never go out of my way to avoid such topics, and never go out of my way to find them. When naturally suggested by my subject or the circumstances, I speak of them, and I try to speak without timid fear of giving offence, and without fierce vehemence, as if taking hostility for granted, but just treating these matters, so far as I can, in the same tone with which I speak of other things.²⁵

What is needed are Baptist leaders who will, like Broadus and Jeter, and even like Paul, model their views in such a way so as to say, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:9).

2. *It is a duty we owe our fellow Christians.* Broadus contends that the teaching of Baptist distinctives is a duty Baptists owe to Christians residing in Roman Catholic or Protestant traditions. Operating from the premise that "there are but two sorts of Christianity—church Christianity and Bible Christianity," Broadus argues that both Catholics and Protestants alike are all "holding some 'developed' form of Christianity" in that they have all

²⁵ Ibid.

“added something, in faith or governances or ordinances, to the primitive simplicity” of what he calls Bible Christianity.²⁶ With specific regard to Roman Catholics, Broadus believes the Baptist position, because of its roots in the New Testament, has an advantage over other Protestants for leading Roman Catholics to embrace evangelical truth.²⁷ He states,

If well-meaning Roman Catholics become dissatisfied with resting everything on the authority of the church and begin to look toward the Bible as authority, they are not likely, if thoughtful and earnest, to stop at any halfway-house, but to go forward to the position of those who really build on the Bible alone.²⁸

With regard to Protestants, Broadus states one large source of the differences between Baptists and Protestants is “a widespread and very great ignorance as to Baptists” and their views.²⁹ Broadus explains that Baptists owe it to other Christians to teach their views so that they “may at least restrain them from wronging us through ignorance.”³⁰

Lest one think that Broadus has elitist motives, he clarifies, stating,

If there were any who did not care to know, who were unwilling to be deprived of a peculiar accusation against us, with them our efforts would be vain. But most of those we encounter are truly good people, however prejudiced, and do not wish to be unjust; and if they will not take the trouble to seek information about our real views, they will not be unwilling to receive it when fitly presented. Christian charity may thus be promoted by correcting ignorance. And

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

besides, we may hope that some at least will be led to investigate the matters about which we differ. Oh that our honored brethren would investigate!³¹

Indeed, Broadus affirms that there are many “noble Christians” within Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.³² Later in the sermon he advocates that teaching Baptist distinctives to other Christians will only serve to “render them better Christians.”³³ Broadus explains:

I fully agree with an eminent Presbyterian minister who recently said, “We make people better Christians by making them better Presbyterians, better Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians.” There are some very excellent people in our time who think it a merit to be entirely undenominational, and who proclaim that they “love one church as well as another.” But, where not deluded, such persons are few and quite exceptional; in general, the truest, most devoted, and most useful Christians are strong in their denominational convictions and attachments. I repeat, then, that by proper instruction in our distinctive views we shall really make our young people better Christians.³⁴

If that is the case, then is it not arrogant for Broadus to “wish them to adopt other opinions?”³⁵ Broadus explains, “It is not necessarily an arrogant and presumptuous thing in us if we strive to bring honored fellow-Christians to views which we honestly believe to be more scriptural, and therefore more wholesome.”³⁶ Just as Apollos received instruction from Aquila and Priscilla, Broadus believes

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 7.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

there is a place for Baptists to teach those of other denominations who might be willing to learn.³⁷ He concludes, “He who tries to win people from other denominations to his own distinctive views *may* be a sectarian bigot; but he may also be a humble and loving Christian.”³⁸

What served as true for Broadus in 1881 has an even greater opportunity for service in the twenty-first century. In a day when, worldwide, there are as many groups who identify themselves as Baptist as there are countries in the world, the articulation of Baptist distinctives will only help other Christian traditions to understand what a particular group of Baptists believe. As Broadus suggests, if twenty-first-century Baptists believe their views reflect scriptural truth, then there exists a place for Baptists to reach out to Catholics and Protestants, albeit with humility and graciousness. Broadus later advises:

We must learn how to distinguish between abandonment of principles and mere practical concessions in order to conciliate. . . . One of the great practical problems of the Christian life, especially in our times, is to stand squarely for truth and squarely against error, and yet to maintain hearty charity toward Christians who differ with us. This assuredly can be done. The very truest and sweetest Christian charity is actually shown by some of those who stand most firmly by their distinctive opinions.³⁹

However, this might prove difficult for Baptists who have spent energy working to minimize any semblance of their Baptist identity. By this I do not necessarily have in mind the trend to remove the word *Baptist* from a church’s name, although it could include that if the church did so out of embarrassment of showing

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

public ties to their denomination. Also, I affirm that the possibility exists for a local church to practice biblical distinctives that Baptists would identify as their own but never embrace the Baptist historical tradition either in name or in cooperative denominational effort. The possibility exists precisely because Baptists seek to derive their distinctives only from the Bible.

These groups are not who Broadus has in mind, and neither do I. My concern rests with those churches who are functionally Baptist, either in name and/or in denominational affiliation. If these churches will embrace their identity as Baptist because they are convinced they find those teachings rooted in the Bible, then churches of all kinds, both present and future, have the potential to draw closer to biblical truth. In an age of financial insecurity, real persecution, and hostile opposition to the gospel, the only churches that will survive are, ironically, the ones who are most fit according to the external commands provided in the Bible.

3. *It is a duty we owe to the unbelieving world.* Broadus posits that Baptists owe the unbelieving world the duty of teaching their distinctive views as his third reason. Explaining that his motive, along with all Christians, is for “unbelievers to accept Christianity,” Broadus argues, “They are more likely to accept it when presented in its primitive simplicity.”⁴⁰ The Baptist reliance on the Bible alone for the composition of their distinctives allays any skeptic’s questioning of any corruption that took place in the history of Christianity. Broadus states:

We can say to the skeptical inquirer, “Come and bring all the really ascertained light that has been derived from studying the material world, the history of man, or the highest philosophy, and we will gladly use it in helping to interpret this which we believe to be God’s word;” and we can change our views of its meaning if

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

real light from any other sources requires us to do so. There is, surely, in this freedom no small advantage for attracting the truly rational inquirer.⁴¹

By this Broadus asserts that Baptists have no need to fear any examination of the truth of the Bible. If Baptists believe the Bible is true and authoritative, then this recognition fosters “an instinctive feeling that they must stand or fall with the real truth and the real authority of the Bible.”⁴² Broadus argues that trust in the Bible produces a feeling of freedom that is “most healthy and hopeful,” and this hope is made available to unbelievers, in part, through Baptists teaching their distinctive views.⁴³

Broadus’s thoughts here are helpful and provide a compelling reason for why Baptists should labor to ensure their distinctives are constructed from only the Bible. When Baptists have grown enamored with their own extrabiblical traditions or even errors, the unbelieving world takes note. One need think only of the Baptist defense and continued practice of slavery in the southern United States only a century ago to realize that distorted views of biblical teaching in one area affect one’s ability to proclaim effectively the central message of the Bible to the world that needs to hear the message.

The same holds true for the petty squabbles of local Baptist churches over truly nonessential items that are not part and parcel to biblical Baptist distinctives. Churches caught up in major controversy over such items as reserved seating for church patriarchs, meeting location or service time differences, have led many astray. The lost world needs Baptists who “do all things without grumbling or questioning” that they “may be blameless

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* Broadus also affirms the role of statements of faith in this section. He explains, “Confessions of faith we have, some older and some more recent, which we respect and find useful; but save through some exceptional and voluntary agreement we are not bound by them.”

and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,” among whom they “shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14–15). If Baptists truly are building their distinctives on the foundation of the truth of the Bible, then they do have a duty to teach those to an unbelieving world.

4. *It is a duty we owe to Christ.* Broadus describes his final reason as “one full of solemn sweetness.”⁴⁴ When Jesus gave the commission to his disciples recorded in Matthew 28, he did so “under the most solemn circumstances. . . . He met the eleven disciples by appointment on a mountain in Galilee . . . and uttered the express injunction.”⁴⁵ Broadus concludes that Baptists have a duty to teach their distinctive views as “a matter of simple loyalty” to Christ.⁴⁶ He explains,

The things of which we have been speaking are not, we freely grant, the most important of religious truths and duties, but they are a part of the all things which Jesus commanded; what shall hinder us, what could excuse us, from observing them ourselves and teaching them to others?⁴⁷

For Broadus, teaching and obeying Jesus’ commands of an external nature are akin to a Roman soldier who takes an oath of complete allegiance to the empire. He does not then proceed to obey selectively only the commands of his superior officer that he prefers. Rather, he obeys all the commands.⁴⁸ Broadus then reminds his audience that he had yet to quote the final portion of Jesus’ commission. The end of Matt 28:20 reads, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” As a parting word, Broadus asks, “Shall we neglect to teach as he required, and then claim the promise of his presence and help and blessing?”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Broadus concludes his sermon, 6–11, by offering six “means and methods”

Broadus's appeal to one's loyalty to Christ and His commands, whether primary and internal or secondary and external, strikes a chord not often heard in the present day. Yet the simplicity of his argument serves as its greatest strength. If the New Testament speaks clearly to any aspect of local church governance, operation, structure, health, or practice, then followers of Christ, of whatever denominational persuasion, have to come to terms with whether they will obey His commands. Of first importance are the commands to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). However, the secondary commands, such as, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:24–25), are also important. If Baptists agree with Broadus that their distinctives are true, then they owe it to Christ to teach them. Indeed, in agreement with Broadus, this volume, subtitled *The Baptist Understanding of the Church*, functions more as an honest attempt of the authors and editors to teach a "biblical understanding of the church" than anything else.

UPON THIS ROCK: THE BAPTIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH

A September 2008 conference at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, served as the initial setting for the presentation of the majority of the content in this volume. The conference speakers addressed topics following the discourse set forth in the article on "The Church" in the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, which reads:

for the performance of teaching Baptist distinctives. They include: (1) Teaching others through instruction of our own people. (2) Teaching by everything that builds up our churches. (3) Teaching by understanding those whom we propose to reach. (4) Studying the wise treatment of controverted topics. (5) Cooperating with others as far as we can. (6) Cultivating unity among ourselves.

ARTICLE VI. THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Matthew 16:15–19; 18:15–20; Acts 2:41–42,47; 5:11–14; 6:3–6; 13:1–3; 14:23,27; 15:1–30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4–5; 7:17; 9:13–14; 12; Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 3:8–11,21; 5:22–32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9–14; 3:1–15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39–40; 1 Peter 5:1–4; Revelation 2–3; 21:2–3.

Therefore, as with the presentations given at the conference, the chapters in *Upon This Rock* each examine a section of the article on “The Church.” All of the presentations have been revised and edited for publication. What follows is a brief introduction to each chapter and the specific topic addressed.

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

Chapter 1 functions intentionally as the bedrock upon which the other chapters are built. Malcolm B. Yarnell III labors to provide

a comprehensive exposition of the focal text, Matt 16:13–20, with specific regard to understanding the meaning of Jesus’ statement, “And upon this rock, I will build my church.”

... is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers,

In chapter 2, David Allen presents a historical survey of the Baptist understanding of local church autonomy through their confessions of faith. Allen then examines the concept biblically and comments on the relationship between autonomy and the twin Baptist doctrine of religious liberty.

... associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel;

In chapter 3, Emir Caner discusses the necessary correlation between church covenants and confessions of faith. Using historical and contemporary examples, Caner offers three lessons for local churches and their use of covenants. He concludes with an explanation of the role baptism and discipleship provide in a church’s covenant relationship.

... observing the two ordinances of Christ,

In chapter 4, Paige Patterson seeks to reexamine the purpose of the local church’s two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He argues that they are more than “mere symbols” but are not sacramental. Rather, the two are to work together to enforce the biblical concept of sanctification in the lives of believers and the local church.

... governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.

In chapter 5, James Leo Garrett Jr. draws upon his scholarship and expertise and presents a case for the practice of congregational polity as the biblical norm for local churches. Chapter 6 follows

with Bart Barber addressing the timely topic of whether there is value or biblical support for local churches cooperating together in denominations.

. . . Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

In chapter 7, Byron McWilliams adds a candid reflection and articulation of the relationship of the officers in local churches. His tested experience as a pastor provides a welcomed personal perspective to the volume.

. . . While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

In chapter 8, Thomas White along with his wife, Joy White, seek to answer the questions of whether women can serve as pastors or deacons in the local church. A biblical and theological analysis, this chapter speaks with clarity to a controversial and often misunderstood topic in twenty-first-century Christianity.

. . . The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

In chapter 9, Thomas White ventures forth into another area where contemporary Baptists often fear to tread. Bringing clarity and understanding to the terms “local” and “universal,” White provides the reader with a ready resource for local church life and practice.