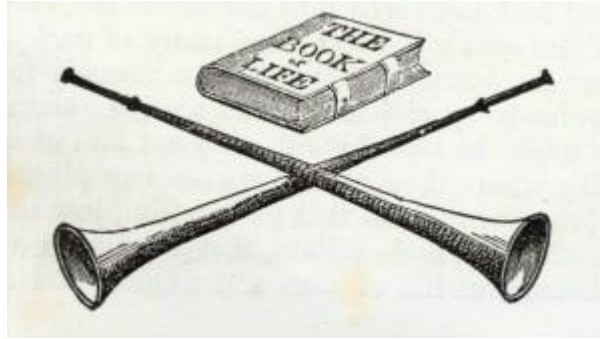


# The Reformed Baptist Trumpet



“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?”

1 Corinthians 14:8

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## In this issue:

<b>Editorial:</b> 2012 Keach Conference	p. 2
<b>Article:</b> Joel Beeke, <i>Consider Christ in Affliction</i>	pp. 3-9
<b>Article:</b> Malcolm Watts, <i>God's Everlasting Covenant</i>	pp. 10-15
<b>Book Review:</b> Greg Nichols, <i>Covenant Theology</i>	pp. 16-19
<b>Book Review:</b> <i>The Reliability of the New Testament</i>	pp. 20-24
<b>Paradosis:</b> <i>Spurgeon on Inspiration and the Down Grade</i>	pp. 24-25

## Editorial: Mark Your Calendars For The 2012 Keach Conference!



*Image: Fellowship at book tables at the 2011 Keach Conference*

The former chairman of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, was famous for declaring every Olympics as “the best ever.” We are tempted to do the same with the annual Keach Conference. Our 2011 gathering at Covenant Reformed Baptist Church in Warrenton provided stimulating and encouraging fellowship. You can now listen to [the audio messages](#) from Dr. Joel Beeke and Pastor Malcolm Watts on [sermonaudio.com](#).

Though last year’s meeting will be hard to top, but we want to invite you now to mark your calendar for the 2012 Keach Conference which will be held Friday-Saturday, September 28-29, 2012. Lord willing, the meeting will be in Charlottesville and hosted by Christ Reformed Baptist Church. The theme will once again follow the articles in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). The 2012 theme will be from chapter six: “The Fall of Man, Sin, and the Punishment Thereof.”

We will once again have two outstanding speakers to address our conference theme. One of the confirmed speakers will be Dr. Carl Trueman, Professor of Historical Theology and Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. We have also invited a well-known Reformed Baptist pastor to be one of the speakers who has given initial agreement to speak but due to some health concerns this will not be confirmed till later in the year. Look for updates in future issue of the *Trumpet*.

It has been said that the Puritans did not wish “Happy New Year” to one another but “Blessed New Year.” In that spirit we wish you a blessed New Year in 2012. Ω

# ***Consider Christ in Affliction***

*An Open Letter to True Believers*

By Joel Beeke

*Note: The following “letter” served as the basis for Dr. Joel Beeke’s address “Responding Christianly to Affliction” at the 2011 Keach Conference. Dr. Beek is President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and Pastor of Heritage Netherlands Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Dear believer,

I desire to write you about something with which you are well acquainted: *affliction*. Much has been written on affliction by our forebears. A good part of it you have known for a long time. For example, you know that all affliction is ultimately traceable to our tragic fall in Adam. You know, too, the grievousness of affliction. After all, who enjoys suffering?

Yet you also know that all affliction is sent by a wise, fatherly God. Perhaps you even know—as the whole book of Job and the Puritans never tire of teaching us—that the important thing is not the amount of affliction we receive, but how we *respond* to that affliction.

Isn’t it just here that your deepest questions about affliction and trial lie? For you want to respond to affliction in a God-glorifying manner, but you feel you often fall inexcusably short. You desire that your entire life may serve God’s praise (Isa. 43:21), but somehow when you enter the heat and heart of affliction you find yourself losing grip on your firm intention. To respond rightly to affliction *before* it comes is hard; to look back on it gratefully *after* it is over is harder; but to live Christianly *in* affliction is hardest. Hence you ask yourself again and again: *how may I live through affliction more Christianly—in a way that is more like Christ?* How may I grow in grace while—yes, *while*—suffering affliction?

You are not alone in such wrestlings. Countless times God’s children have been there, begging to be made conformable to the image of Christ through the furnace of affliction. The prayer is simple (“Lord, grant me grace to live through *this* affliction *Christianly*”); the wrestlings, often agonizing.

Through years of *encountering* affliction (including times of running from wrestling with, resolving against, and—by grace—submitting to and bowing under it), I have gleaned a few thoughts on how to live *Christianly* through affliction. These I wish to share with you. But as you allow me to provide several practical hints on this eminently practical subject, please bear in mind that we are always dependent on the sanctification of the Holy Spirit at every juncture for

real spiritual benefit under affliction. Without the Spirit's gracious influences, affliction may readily lead us away from rather than toward God.

I wish to focus my suggestions to you around one major theme that, sad to say, took me many years to learn even in small measure: The most effective means for living Christianly in affliction is to consider Christ, the fountainhead of all vital Christianity (Heb. 3:1). To live Christianly in any sphere or aspect of life necessitates Spirit-worked faith to look to Him, to feast on Him, to depend on Him—yes, to find both our life in Him (on Calvary's cross) and our death in Him (as exalted Lord, to whom we belong).

*Consider Christ*—that's the crux of the whole matter of affliction. But *how*, you ask? In what ways must I consider Him? In these seven ways:

### **The passion of Christ**

First and foremost, consider the *passion of Christ*. What greater source of strength for living *through* and profiting from affliction can be had than frequent meditation on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus? Think much on these things: If Jesus suffered so much on behalf of His people, shouldn't I be able to endure in His strength the daily afflictions I must bear? What are my afflictions compared to His? Besides, was He not the Sufferer *par excellence* while *wholly innocent*, and am I not, at best, a sufferer in His footsteps while *wholly guilty*?

Moreover (and this may be most encouraging), *is there one affliction that I must endure that He has not already endured?* Is He not the Breaker to go before His flock both in opening all our paths (Micah 2:13) and in being tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15)? *All paths, all points*. Jesus not only knows your affliction, He has identified *himself* with it. He has *borne* it. And He will *sanctify* it. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

### **The power of Christ**

Second, consider the *power of Christ*. Being infinite God-man, Jesus received power *on earth* to bear infinite sufferings on your behalf. And through the merit of these sufferings, He now receives royal power *in heaven* from His Father to rule and strengthen you in your sufferings (Matt. 28:18). Translated practically relative to affliction, His heaven-earth power reads like this: If He desires to weigh you down with affliction—yes, heavy, seemingly staggering affliction—do not be alarmed, but look to Him for strength.

Nor should you be ashamed. When I worked for my father in early youth, I was advised to carry only half-bundles of shingles up the ladder to the roof, but I anticipated the day of greater maturity and strength when my shoulders could bear full, unsplit bundles as my older brothers could. Similarly, afflicted believer, Jesus Christ tailors your afflictions to you. He has promised to fit your afflictions to your shoulders (1 Cor. 10:13). Neither be proud of slender shoulders nor ask for more affliction, but beg for broader shoulders exercised in the weight-room of Jesus' providential leadings.

As you and I realize by grace that the bearing of heavy burdens Christianly is testimony of spiritual maturity and honors the Christ whom we love, our groaning under affliction's "heaviness" will be happily bruised. Isn't this the encouragement that Puritan George Downname intended to convey when he aptly penned: "The Lord does not measure out our afflictions according to our faults, but according to our strength, and looks not at what we have deserved, but at what we are able to bear"?

Oh, how great it is when we may look to the strength of Jesus Christ in all our weakness and apprehend our strength in Him (2 Cor. 12:9)! Then the power of the humiliated and exalted Jesus enables us to sing at times (would to God more heartily and frequently!) in "inner prison" depths with Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25)—yes, to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the name and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 6 and 12).

### **The presence of Christ**

Third, consider the *presence of Christ*. He is at no time absent from you, even when your faith lacks active exercise to grasp Him. Even in your thickest hours of Egyptian darkness, He is close beside you. Only of Him can it be declared, "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee" (Ps. 139:12).

How comforting this is! In all your dark afflictions, your High Priest retains you in His high-priestly eye, preserves you in His high-priestly heart, bears you on His high-priestly shoulders, removes you not from the engravings on His high-priestly hands, and never ceases to remember you in His high-priestly intercessions. "He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

Oh, what tender love! You are never forgotten by Jesus Christ, despite your negligence toward Him. Your unbrotherliness to Christ never unbrothers this precious Elder Brother from you. From His perspective, He ever remains a friend that sticks "closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24), even when you cannot see or feel it. Even then He is whispering to you in midnight seasons, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7).

Take heart. The Jesus who never failed you in *yesterday's* afflictions (did He not rather give you extra tokens of His care!) is still present to give you *today's* strength (Matt. 6:34). Just as waves are cut down to melodious whimpers at shore's reality, so He will break down your waves of *tomorrow's* impossibilities *as* (not *before!*) they break in on the beachheads of your life. Wait on your *ever-present* Savior. He will not let you down. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

### **The patience and perseverance of Christ**

Fourth, consider the *patience and perseverance of Christ*. As you know, the form of "Chinese torture" that drips one drop of water at regular intervals on the forehead of a prisoner strapped beneath a faucet gets all its power from the duration of the trial, not from the first one or two hundred drops. Insanity is usually the end result.

And so matters might end with you, *were it not for Jesus*. I know very well that what makes affliction so severe for you is its duration. You often wonder if there will ever be an end and, if so, how you will hang on to the end.

But it is Christ who provides you the strength to bear one more drop, take one more step, live one more day, in the severest of tortures and persecutions. He has earned that provision by enduring His sufferings to their end. Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha—in each place, He confirmed: "Jesus ... having loved his own ... he loved them unto *the end*" (John 13:1). Blood drop by blood drop, for six long hours He poured out His life. And never flinched. Never answered His mockers a word. Never yielded to their taunts: "*If thou be the Christ ...*"

It's through Jesus' strength that you too have endured. Look back at the heaviest of your afflictions. How did you bear them through those long nights, months, and years? How did you retain your silence when persecuted? How did you continue on when many challenged, "*If you are a Christian ...*"?

Must you not say: *Only through the perseverance of Christ have I by grace persevered?* Oh, the depth of Paul's confession: "*By the grace of God, I am what I am*" (1 Cor. 15:10a)!

Despite your fears of perishing at the hands of "Sauls" through sixteen long years of persecutions as David did, you will not perish. Jesus has done too much, persevered too long (He is still persevering in intercession!) to let you slip through His fingers. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

Look more to Christ. Trust more in His promise. Rest more in His perseverance, for your perseverance rests in His. Seek grace to imitate His patience under affliction. Your trials may

alarm you, but they will not destroy you. Your crosses are God's way to royal crowning (Rev. 7:14).

### **The prayers of Christ**

Fifth, consider the *prayers of Christ*. How often He set time apart on earth to pray to His Father, especially in hours of need! How continually He prays in heaven for all His church! How effectual all His prayers are!

You, too, ought to make more use of prayer, especially in combating spiritual depression under afflictions. Bring all your needs steadily to your praying High Priest. Be assured He hears your every whisper.

And when you grow drowsy or sloppy in prayer, pray aloud. Or write down your prayers. Or find a quiet place to walk in the fresh air to pray. Just don't stop praying. Conversation with God through Christ is the antidote that wards off spiritual depression in the thick of affliction.

A *prayerless* affliction is like an open sore, ripe for infection; a *prayerful* affliction is like an open sore, ripe for the balm of Gilead—the healing ointment of Jesus' blood. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

### **The purposes of Christ**

Sixth, consider the *purposes of Christ*. He lived to do His Father's will, to be sanctified through suffering, to merit salvation for His own, to present His church without spot or wrinkle to His Father. In a word, His life was God-centered.

His God-centered goals are numerous for you, too, in sanctified affliction: Sanctified affliction *humbles* you (Deut. 8:2), teaches you what *sin is* (Zeph. 1:12), and causes you to *seek God* (Hos. 5:15). Affliction vacuums away the fuel that feeds your pride. Bell-like, the harder you are hit, the better you sound. You learn more under the rod that strikes you than through the staff that comforts you. You discover the truth of Robert Leighton's words: "Affliction is the diamond dust that heaven polishes its jewels with."

Sanctified affliction serves to keep you *in Christ's communion, close by His side—to conform you to Him, making you partaker of His suffering and image, righteousness and holiness* (Heb. 12:10–11). Stephen-like, the stones that hit you only knock you closer to your chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, opening heaven the wider for you. Affliction rubs the rust off your locked heart and opens your heart's gates afresh to your King's presence-chamber. Yes, the rod of affliction is God's pencil for drawing Christ's image more fully on you.

Sanctified affliction serves to wean you from the world and to *cause you to walk by faith*. A dog bites strangers, not homeowners. Perhaps affliction bites you so deeply because you are too little at home with the Word and ways of God, and too much at home with the world. “God,” says Thomas Watson, “would have the world hang as a loose tooth which, being twitched away, does not much trouble us.” In *prosperity*, you often *talk* of living by other-worldly faith, but in *adversity*, you *live* your talk.

### **The plan of Christ**

Finally, consider the *plan of Christ*. Highly exalted, there is no name like His. At His name, every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:10). The eternal plan lying behind all His affliction was eternal glory.

Eternal glory—not only for Himself, but also for you. He returned to His Father differently than He came. He returned with His blood-bought bride, just as He planned in His eternal covenant with His Father. His church, figuratively speaking, ascended into glory with Him, accepted by the Father in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6). Oh, then think more of God’s eternal plan for you and your eternal end in glory if you would be more submissive under affliction and learn to praise God in trial!

Your trials in this life are but for “*ten days*.” Your life-to-come glory is *forever*. The “*ten days*” here are preparation time for glory to come. Affliction elevates your soul to heaven (Heb. 11:10); it paves your way for glory: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Your rainy days on earth are nearly over. Don’t overestimate them. Think more of your coming crown and your eternal communion with God Triune, saints and angels. “He that rides to be crowned,” John Trapp wrote, “will not think much of a rainy day.”

*Light after darkness;*

*Gain after loss;*

*Strength after weakness;*

*Crown after cross;*

*Sweet after bitter;*

*Hope after fears;*

*Home after wandering;*

*Praise after tears.*

*Sheaves after sowing;*

*Sun after rain;*

*Sight after mystery;*

*Peace after pain;*

*Joy after sorrow;*

*Calm after blast;*

*Rest after weariness;*

*Sweet rest at last.*

Remember, you are but renting *here*; your personal mansion is reserved *there*. Expect no heaven on earth (apart from spiritual foretastes by means of sanctified affliction!), but trust that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Be assured: *the Shepherd’s rod does have honey at the end*. Don’t despair. Your afflictions are imposed by a *fatherly* hand of *love* in the context of *grace*, not (as you are too prone to think) by a *punitive* hand of *judgment* in the context of *works*.

### **Keep your eye on Christ**

Consider Christ—His passion, power, presence, perseverance, prayers, purposes, and plan. Seek grace to live *Christianly today* through and in your afflictions, and you will soon discover with the apostle, “For me to live is *Christ*, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14).

Warmly, in the Master’s bonds,

Pastor Joel Beeke Ω

In the [Q & A time](#) at the 2011 Keach Conference, Dr. Beeke was asked to suggest books to read on the topics of providence and affliction. Here were his suggestions:

**On providence:** John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence*; treatises on providence by Obadiah Sedgewick, William Plummer, and John Collings (out of print).

**On affliction:** William Bridge, *A Lifting Up of the Downcast*; Thomas Brooks, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*; Murdock Campbell, *In All Their Affliction*; Gardiner Spring, *The Mission of Sorrow*; John Murray, *Behind a Frowning Providence*; David Murray, *Christians Get Depressed Too*.

# **God's Everlasting Covenant**

By Malcolm Watts

*Note: Malcolm Watts was one of our speakers at the 2011 Keach Conference. Watts is Pastor of Emmanuel Church in Salisbury, UK. He also teaches a course on covenant theology each year as an adjunct professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. The following article originally appeared in "The Messenger," the church magazine of Emmanuel Church, and is reprinted with permission.*

## **Introduction**

Federal or Covenant theology was, in the words of Professor John Murray, 'a distinguishing feature of the Reformed tradition'. The earliest of the Reformers rediscovered this biblical truth and began to explore its spiritual riches.

As early as 1561, Zacharias Ursinus, a professor at Heidelberg, referred to a covenant made with man before the Fall. The Tenth Question of his 'Major Catechism' (1561) was: 'What does the divine Law teach?' The answer was: 'That God made a covenant with humanity in creation'. Later, in answer to Question 36, Ursinus explained the nature of this covenant which, he observed, is now contained within the Law. He wrote: 'It requires from us perfect obedience to God, and it promises eternal life, for those who keep it, and threatens eternal punishments for those who do not fulfil it'.

Ursinus proceeded further, maintaining that the covenant of grace is published in the Gospel. This reveals 'the fulfilment in Christ of his justice, which the Law requires' and 'promises eternal life by grace because of Christ, to those who believe in him'. It was, however, Caspar Olevianus, a colleague of Ursinus', who developed this doctrine of an eternal, redemptive covenant. In his work, 'The Substance of the Covenant of Grace' (1585), Olevianus asserted that 'the Son' was 'appointed by God as Mediator of the covenant' and that, in the exercise of this office, he became the covenant's 'guarantor', able to 'satisfy for the sins of all those whom the Father has given him'.

Thereafter, this teaching spread and became standard Reformed doctrine.

## **The Covenant of Works**

According to the book of Genesis, God made a covenant or conditional promise in the Garden of Eden. While by virtue of his creation, Adam was obliged to obey God, his obedience did not give him right to any spiritual or eternal reward. It therefore pleased God to make Adam's perfect obedience the condition upon which a higher good might be secured. This involved making a contract - 'the Covenant of Works'.

A special command was given to ascertain the nature of Adam's obedience: he was not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge which grew in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:16-17). While not explicitly mentioned, the promise was certainly implied in the threatening for disobedience. 'In the day that thou eatest thereof', God said, 'thou shalt surely die (2:17 margin: 'dying thou shalt die'). From these words, we gather that obedience would have procured the opposite: that is, a continuance of natural and spiritual life, issuing at last in the full blessing of eternal life.

This was, in fact, confirmed by the appointed seal of that covenant - 'the tree of life' (Gen 2:9), and also in those later scriptures which state that 'the commandment...was ordained to life' and that 'the man which doeth those things shall live by them' (Rom 7:10; 10:5).

In this covenant, Adam was no mere individual. He was a Head and Representative, acting for all who would be his natural descendants. Had he fulfilled the condition, his obedience would have been reckoned to all men and, in consequence, they would have been entitled to eternal life. As it happened, however, he failed to keep that law, thereby involving the whole human race in his disobedience. In him, all men 'sinned' and 'by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation' (Rom 5:12 margin, 18). The result? The penalty annexed to the violation of the covenant was inflicted upon every soul of man. All men everywhere are subject to physical, spiritual, and eternal death. As Scripture so clearly states, 'In Adam all die' (1 Cor 15:22).

Such is our condition by nature. We are viewed as guilty sinners, condemned to everlasting punishment. Is there, then, no hope at all for us? Certainly there is no hope in the covenant made with Adam and tragically broken by him. That covenant spells only death! In the midst of appalling judgment, however, God opened a door of hope to the guilty.

### **The Covenant of Grace**

As soon as Adam fell, God graciously revealed that there was another covenant. Addressing the Serpent, God said: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it (more literally, he) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel' (Gen 3:15).

This has been called 'the first gospel proclamation'. It refers to 'the seed of the woman', an expression followed by the masculine pronouns 'he' and 'his'. The promise evidently concerns an individual Man, called by way of eminence 'the seed' (Gal 3:16,19), but also called - and most significantly - 'the seed of the woman' (no man is named here). This suggests a miraculous conception and birth of a pure virgin (as later predicted, Isaiah 7:14; cf Matt 1:18-23) which would render the Person concerned free from sin's guilt and taint; and, in the New Testament, the fulfilment is described in the following terms: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman...' (Gal 4:4); '(He) is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners...' (Heb 7:26).

Now, according to this early revelation, the coming One would be at 'enmity' with 'the serpent'. This must mean that - unlike Adam - he would resist the adversary and his temptations: but a

further and somewhat more mysterious thought is expressed, namely that he would be wounded or 'bruised' (as our version has it) in the 'heel'. A literal meaning may be intended, as pierced feet would involve such bruising; but it is rather more likely that figurative language is being employed to convey the idea of suffering which proves to be only temporary, not final. Such suffering, of course, was endured by our Lord when he was 'wounded for our transgressions' and 'bruised for our iniquities', for after his death he 'rose again' and he now 'liveth by the power of God' (Isaiah 53:4,10; 1 Cor 15:3,4; 2 Cor 13:4).

As Dr. Horatius Bonar asks, 'Is not this the very truth in which we now rejoice? A Deliverer that has suffered? One whose suffering avails to avert suffering from us; nay, one whose suffering is to take the place of our suffering?'

There is yet more truth to be found in these words. God makes it clear that the Saviour, through his suffering, would overcome the devil. He would inflict upon him a deadly wound, a 'bruise' to the 'head', by which his power would be decisively and completely destroyed. This, of course, is precisely what happened. Christ, 'through death', was able to 'destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil' (Heb 2:14; cf 1 John 3:8)

It is particularly important to observe that the coming Deliverer is not called the seed of Adam. Why not? The answer is that he himself was to be another Adam, inasmuch as, like the first, he was to be a Covenant Head, sustaining a representative character. This is only One whom Scripture describes as 'the last Adam' or 'the second man': that is, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:45,47).

Now, this remarkable proclamation implied an earlier covenant, an 'everlasting covenant' (Heb 13:20), an arrangement made before the foundation of the world and in anticipation of Adam's sin. This covenant had been formally agreed among the undivided Three. There was mutual consent between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit also concurring (Zech 6:13; Gal 3:17; Heb 12:24).

Embodied in this eternal covenant was a divine purpose of grace, fulfilled - not through a mere man - but through none other than the Son of God. 'God', writes the apostle Paul, 'has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began' (2 Tim 1:9,10). In another place, he makes reference to 'the eternal purpose which he (God the Father) purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Eph 3:10,11).

This eternal contrivance is correctly called 'the covenant of grace'.

Its origin or cause was the divine grace, not anything good or worthy foreseen in man; and its ultimate end was the glorifying of that grace in a saved people, to all eternity (Eph 1:6; 2:7).

In grace, the Son of God was chosen and appointed as a covenanting Head for the elect - the spiritual seed (Prov 8:23; Is 42:1; Eph 1:4; Col 1:18). Grace also ensured that the Son would, on

behalf of his people, meet the necessary requirements, even those exacting and rigorous demands of Adam's broken covenant. He would 'fulfil all righteousness' (Matt 3:15; 5:17), assuming, in the fulness of time, a holy human nature, conforming impeccably to the Law's precepts, and (because of Adam's failure) rendering complete satisfaction for human transgression (Rom 8:3,4; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:8).

The promise, too, was wholly of grace. Once secured by Christ, it would be freely dispensed to the elect by the Holy Spirit, in measure here and in fulness hereafter. What was this promise? It was 'eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began' (Titus 1:2; cf 1 Jn 5:11).

Covenant blessings are now at Christ's disposal. When through grace we receive him, we enter a relationship with him and we are as those 'married' or 'joined unto the Lord' (Rom 7:4; 1 Cor 6:17). This union with Christ, the covenant's head, enables us to possess those invaluable blessings secured by him (Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 1:30,31). Hence, we read: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life' (Jn 3:36).

### **Application**

Thus administered, the covenant produces the church, which in every age is God's covenant community. Its members are the objects of his loving care and they are distinguished from others by high privileges: not least among them, the possession of sacred ordinances and the gracious indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is incumbent on the people of the covenant to show themselves separated from false doctrine and practice, and united in the blessed fellowship of faithful men and women. This, of course, should be true of every member of Christ's church. We should all heed the exhortation to 'walk worthy of God', who has 'called' them 'unto his kingdom and glory' (1 Thess 2:12; cf 2 Cor 6:16-18; 1 Pet 2:9).

Furthermore, since from Adam's Fall there has been a progressive revelation of the one eternal covenant, we believe this is the one, single, and consistent theme of the Holy Scriptures. True, the revelation of it before Christ came is rather dark and obscure compared to the revelation of it since he came, which explains why the former is called 'the old testament' and the latter, 'the new testament'; but - and this is the important point - both disclosures concentrate on one and the same theme, that of God's 'testament' or 'covenant' (2 Cor 3:6,14; Heb 8:7,13). So this doctrine is the key which unlocks the treasury of God's Word and the believer's delight will be to discover the riches of God's covenant within these sacred pages.

'This covenant', wrote Richard Alleine in 1665, 'is the hope of sinners, the riches of saints, the magna charta of the city of God; the forfeited lease of eternity renewed; God's deed of gift wherein he hath, on fair conditions, granted sinners their lives, and settled upon his saints an everlasting inheritance'.

In preaching this covenant, ministers must first declare man's misery under the curse of the violated covenant of works; and then, since there is neither relief nor hope for sinners in that covenant, they must preach Christ, in whom alone there is recovery from a fallen and wretched state. He is said to be 'given' as 'a covenant of the people' (Is 42:6; cf 49:8), which means that he is the substance of that covenant. It receives validity in him and he it is who secures its promise. In Christ, believing sinners have a better Head, a superior righteousness, a firmer standing, a greater comfort, and a surer hope. Our dear Saviour has 'restored' what he 'took not away' (Ps 69:4).

Here is the antidote for our many doubts and fears. Are some quite overwhelmed with a sense of sin? Do they feel that, at the last, their hopes may well be dashed as they themselves be denied entrance into the kingdom of heaven? The doctrine before us teaches that believers are free from the law in its covenant form. As the apostle says, we are both 'dead to the law by the body of Christ' and also 'delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held' (Rom 7:4,6). What does he mean? He means that, because of Christ's fulfillment of the law, believers no longer obey it as a means of obtaining righteousness and eternal life, neither are they subject to its terrible sentence of everlasting punishment. In this sense (not in any antinomian sense), 'ye are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom 6:14). Covenant truth, believed in the heart, delivers the Lord's people from many needless anxieties.

What then of the future? The covenant of grace was established from eternity; it was fulfilled in time; but it will be honoured throughout the ages to come, even for evermore. In his 'Sacred Contemplations' (1786), Adam Gib wrote: 'Those who die under the Covenant of Grace will be advanced to an inconceivable height of happiness in realms of absolute and endless day; to a full enjoying of all good, in God himself: without an fear of alteration or abatement in their blessedness - for EVER and EVER and EVER'.

We confidently await the full accomplishment of God's promise in the glory of his holy and heavenly kingdom. There, with untold multitudes, we shall appreciate the glories of the eternal covenant and we shall delight in solemn, rapturous praise, singing, 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb' (Rev 7:10).

Awake, my soul, and join the song,  
Which swells the choir above;  
No theme so well employs the tongue  
As Jesus' covenant love.

When o'er the wondrous scheme of grace  
In Bible truth I rove;  
I see the worst of Adam's race  
Are saved by covenant love.

My Surety's work, my Father's word,  
For ever firm shall prove;

The Spirit's graces all afford  
Sweet proofs of covenant love.

My life and strength, and joy and peace,  
My hope of bliss above;  
My union with the Prince of Peace,  
All flow from covenant love.

Here then I'll sit, and love, and die,  
Nor once from hence remove:  
Yea, when I sit with Christ on high,  
I'll sing of covenant love.

*(Joseph Irons, 1785-1852) Ω*

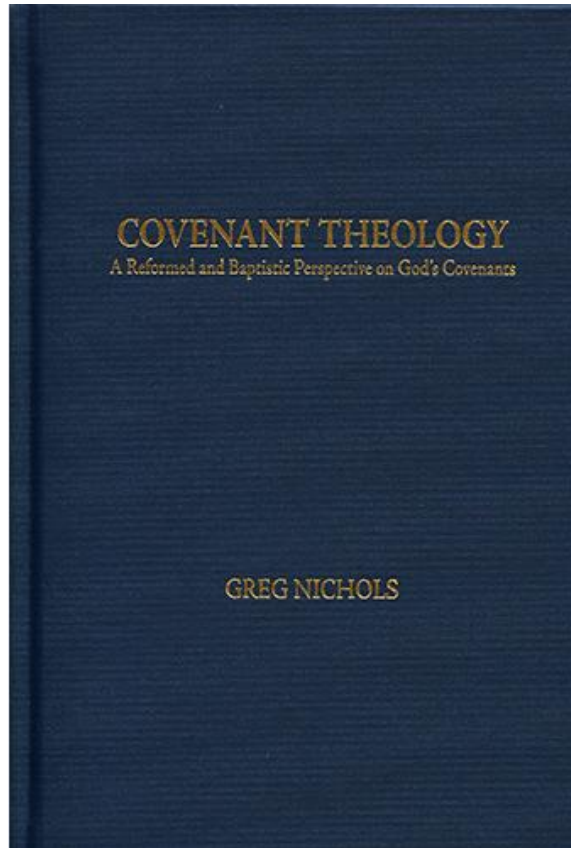
### Quick Quote

#### *J. L. Dagg on the Covenant of Works*

*As the term covenant is sometimes applied to a free promise, in which no condition is stipulated; it is proper to characterize that which was made with Adam as a covenant of works. It was a law, with a penalty affixed. "Of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). No promise was given, that Adam would continue to enjoy the divine favor if he continued obedient; but this may be understood to be clearly implied. Whether higher favor than he then enjoyed, would have been granted on condition of his persevering in obedience through prescribed term of probation, we are not informed. We have reason to conclude, that a continuance in well-doing, would have received stronger marks of divine approbation according to its progress; and, from what we know the power of habit, as tending to establish man in virtue or vice, (a tendency which it has, because God has so willed it) the conjecture is not improbable, that, had Adam preserved in his obedience, he would, after a time, have been confirmed in holiness. But, where the Scriptures are silent, we should not frame conjectures to make them articles of faith.*

*Manual of Theology* (The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857): p. 145

## ***Book Review***



**Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God's Covenants* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011): pp. 356 pp.**

Can Baptists really be “Reformed”? Can Baptists affirm “covenant theology” without also affirming infant baptism? These are questions often posed by Presbyterian and Reformed brethren to those of us who take on the title of “Reformed Baptists.” These sorts of questions are why Greg Nichols’ *Covenant Theology* book has been much anticipated.

### **Overview of Content:**

Nichols begins by noting that the book came from an adaptation of his lecture notes in teaching systematic theology. He states that he does not intend to be “polemical” but “positive and expository” (p. 2). Nevertheless, Nichols firmly asserts, “I believe that the Bible commends a covenant theology that is both Reformed and Baptist” (p. 2).

Nichols’ book consists of an introduction, fifteen chapters divided into two parts, a conclusion, and two appendices. Part One is “The Reformed Theology of God’s Covenants” (chapters 1-7). It provides a historical-theological survey of covenant theology beginning with the Westminster

and London Confessions and leading to contemporary modifications. It includes discussion of covenant theology in John Gill, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, and the Dutch Calvinists. Part Two is "A Biblical Exposition of God's Covenants" (chapters 8-15). It begins with an overview of the biblical testimony to covenant theology and proceeds to discuss seven proposed biblical covenants: Grace, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New, and Messianic. After the conclusion, there are two significant appendices. The first is what Nichols calls "The Eternal Counsel of Redemption," and the second, "The Adamic Covenant."

### **Evaluation:**

We begin by noting that there are some interesting choices made by Nichols in the general approach and layout of his argument in this book. For example, he does not begin with providing a definition of covenant but reserves discussion of this important matter until the conclusion of part one (see pp. 95-100). Thus, the discussion of covenant theology begins without an initial effort to define this important term. For another, he chooses to begin with the historical-theological construal of covenant theology rather than the Biblical evidence. This implies that covenant theology is more of a dogmatic than Biblical concept.

Though there was much that I found helpful in Nichols' study of covenant theology, there were also some significant questions raised by his approach and choices in this study. Here are three particular areas of concern that might be raised:

First, questions might be raised about Nichols' decision to limit his survey of systematic theologians on covenant theology primarily to Gill, Hodge, Dabney, and the Dutch Calvinists (Bavinck, Berkhof). On the classical Reformed view of covenant theology, it seems more attention, in particular, might have been given to Calvin, Witsius, Turretin, Owen, the Puritans, etc. Among Baptists, I wished for more light to be provided on the views of the likes of Bunyan, Fuller, Dagg, Boyce, Spurgeon, etc.

Second, though Nichols notes from the start that his aim in this book is not to be polemical, the book would have been improved by more direct discussion of the doctrinal and pastoral implications of embracing Baptist covenant theology. Though Nichols does offer some interaction with paedobaptistic views, there is no direct or sustained interaction with dispensationalism.

Third, the most significant questions which emerge from Nichols' book involve his decisions to depart from the classical Reformed construal of covenant theology. Most controversial are his decisions to remove discussion of "the covenant of redemption" (which Nichols calls, "the eternal counsel of redemption") and "the covenant of works" (which Nichols calls, "the Adamic covenant") to the appendices, and, thereby, from the discussion of covenant theology proper.

It also includes his decision to add “the Messianic covenant” as a novel aspect of covenant theology.

In his first appendix, Nichols rejects outright the legitimacy of the classical construal of “the covenant of redemption.” He notes: “Reformed theologians have labored to find scriptural support for an eternal compact between Father and Son.... Yet, careful examination of this testimony shows that it does not affirm an eternal compact between the Father and the Son with mutual stipulations” (p. 304). He would prefer to speak of God’s “eternal predestination of the redeemer” (p. 304) or an “eternal decree of redemption” (p. 305). Thus Nichols replaces the traditional language of a *covenant* of redemption with a *counsel* of redemption. Nichols argues that the Biblical evidence does not “portray the Persons of the Trinity as contracting parties agreeing to a formal compact” (p. 316). In fact, he says, the traditional view of the covenant of redemption “imperils the singularity of the Supreme Being on which these redemptive relations rest” (p. 316). Nichols concludes: “Since Scripture is silent on whether an oath was sworn in eternity, flexibility is preferable to dogmatism” (p. 318).

In response, one might challenge Nichols’ rejection of the classical construal of the covenant of redemption. One wonders, for example, how Nichols might exegete passages like Luke 22:29 in which Jesus says to his apostles, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed [the verb is *diatithemai*, the root for the Greek noun for ‘covenant’] unto me.” An argument might well be made that Scripture is far from silent in its witness to the covenant of redemption. Surely, the reason that the Reformed (and Baptist) fathers of old affirmed the covenant of redemption was because they believed it rested on a Biblical foundation. Furthermore, one might ask if in his effort to protect the notion of divine unity, Nichols neglects the three personhood nature of God. In the end, I did not find Nichols’ challenge to the traditional doctrine of the covenant of redemption to be persuasive.

Nichols’ rejection of the covenant of redemption leads to his novel addition of the so-called “Messianic covenant.” Though noting that “Scripture never explicitly calls this pledge a covenant” he says he gives it this title “to distinguish it from the eternal counsel of redemption” (pp. 281-282). He stresses that this covenant is “ratified not in eternity, but in history” (p. 288). Again, if one affirms the traditional concept of the covenant of redemption, however, it makes Nichols’ novel notion of the Messianic covenant superfluous.

In the second appendix, Nichols offers a discussion of “the covenant of works” which he prefers to call “the Adamic covenant.” Though Nichols is unwilling completely to reject this classical category (as he does with the covenant of redemption), he chooses to remove it from the discussion of covenant theology proper. Nichols make much of the fact that the “Baptist fathers” made “significant and strategic” deletions of references to “the covenant of works” in the London Confession (cf. Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration) (p. 325). He even

forcefully rejects the “notion of a ‘probation period’” implied in the covenant of works as “pure speculation,” noting, “It is utterly without Biblical ground or support” (p. 350). Again, one might well question contemporary efforts to reject the traditional understanding of the covenant of works as articulated by Reformed (and Baptist) forebears. Yes, the London Confession removes some direct references to “the covenant of works,” but it also retains these references in other places. Furthermore, in the Baptist (Keach’s) catechism which followed close on the heels of the 1689 Confession included the following question and answer:

*Question 16: What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created?*

*Answer: When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of works [the Westminster Shorter Catechism here reads “a covenant of life”] with him upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death (proofs: Gen 2:16, 17; Gal 3:12; Rom 5:12).*

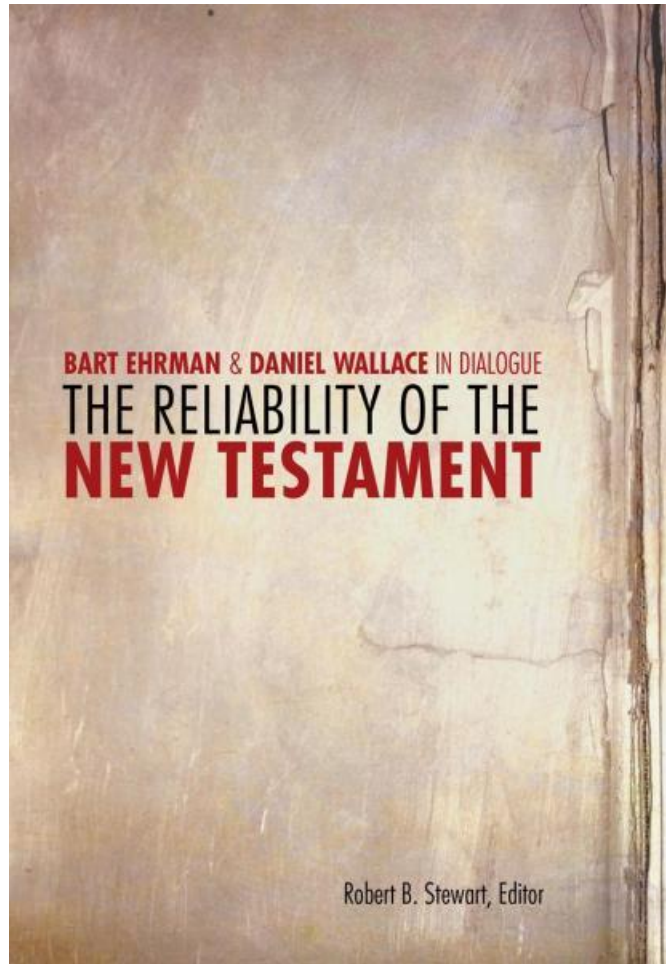
This indicates, at the least, that the Particular Baptist might have been more affirming of the covenant of works than Nichols would allow.

### **Conclusion:**

Greg Nichols has provided a much anticipated examination of covenant theology from a Reformed and Baptist perspective. Indeed, one can affirm covenant theology without embracing infant baptism. Baptists can be Reformed. Serious questions, however, might be raised about Nichols’ approach, especially his decision to reject traditional Reformed teaching on the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works. Reformed Baptists still await a work on this topic that affirms Baptist distinctives without abandoning the traditional Reformed categories. Ω

*Jeffrey T. Riddle, Pastor, Christ Reformed Baptist Church, Charlottesville, VA*

## ***Book Review***



**Robert B. Stewart, Ed., *Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 2011): 220 pp.**

On October 1, 2011 Bart Ehrman and Dan Wallace held a “debate” on the campus of Southern Methodist University sponsored by Wallace’s Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts on the topic, “Can We Trust the Text of the New Testament?” This was not the first public meeting between these two scholars. In fact, the two previously met at the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in Faith and Culture held on April 4, 2008 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The Greer-Heard Forum’s purpose is to present a dialogue between an evangelical Christian and a non-evangelical or non-Christian. The book under review came from this 2008 Forum.

## **Overview of Content:**

After an introduction by the editor, the book includes a transcript of the interaction between Wallace of Dallas Seminary, representing the evangelical perspective, and Ehrman of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, representing the non-evangelical position. It also includes four papers that were presented on the topic as part of the Greer-Heard Forum (including ones authored by leading Biblical text critics Michael Holmes and David Parker). Finally, it includes three additional essays that were not part of the original forum.

## **Ehrman-Wallace Dialogue:**

Ehrman is clearly the academic “rock star” in this dialogue. He is a self-described former evangelical who claims that his faith ran aground when he discovered the uneven history of the textual transmission of the New Testament as a graduate student under Bruce Metzger at Princeton. Ehrman went on to write the groundbreaking scholarly work *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford University Press, 1993), which argued that orthodox scribes altered the transmission of the text of Scripture to suit their polemical purposes. He has since written a series of popular works on text criticism and Christianity that have attacked the authority and reliability of Scripture (e. g., *Misquoting Jesus*). Wallace is much less well known outside evangelical circles, but he is considered the foremost evangelical New Testament text critic of our day. As evidence of this, Wallace was asked to present one of only two plenary addresses to the 2008 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society when the annual theme was on textual criticism.

From his opening remarks, it is clear that Wallace greatly respects Ehrman’s professional accomplishments. At times he almost seems to fawn over Ehrman (cf., e. g., his opening lines: “Bart, as I expected, your presentation was energetic, informative, and entertaining. It was vintage Bart Ehrman” [p. 27]). In the audience Q & A session, Wallace actually states, “I think that what Bart has done for the Christian community is a great service” (p. 47). His point was that he admires Ehrman for exposing not just the general population, but also Christians, in particular, to disputed textual issues in the New Testament. From an orthodox position, however, it strikes one as strange that Wallace would so enthusiastically praise a man who has so brazenly attacked and attempted to undermine the authority and reliability of Christian Scripture. Certainly civility should be the rule for such interactions, but Wallace goes beyond good manners and essentially capitulates to Ehrman. One of the more bizarre moments recorded in the dialogue also came from the Q & A when an audience member asked Wallace about the propriety of preaching from John 7:53-8:11. Wallace responded, “Those are great and very practical questions that Bart can answer far better than I, so I’ll turn over to him” (p. 57). Ehrman then gave the deadpan reply, “No. I would not preach on that.” The transcriber adds: “Audience roars with laughter” (p. 58). It is hard to figure what Wallace was

thinking in deferring to Ehrman, a hardened apostate and agnostic, a question about preaching. Was he trying to be coy, humorous, cute? Though the audience may have laughed, it was hardly amusing. After Ehrman's non-answer, Wallace did finally address the question, concluding, "...should we preach this? I would personally say no" (p. 58).

In the end, the transcript of the dialogue between Ehrman and Wallace comes off rather flat. Few sparks fly. There is little heat or passion expressed in disagreement. The key reason for this is that Ehrman and Wallace actually have very little to disagree about when it comes to the conclusions they reach regarding textual criticism of specific passages in the New Testament. Both, in fact, are confirmed "reasoned eclectics" (as are all the other authors in the book) who embrace the modern critical text criticism of the New Testament as descended from liberal Protestant scholarship of the nineteenth century forward (as represented by scholars like Westcott and Hort, Nestle, Aland, and Metzger). No doubt, a much more stimulating exchange would have resulted if either men would have entered into dialogue (debate?) with a proponent of the Majority Text or of the Textus Receptus or even a King James Version Only-ist.

Both Ehrman and Wallace agree, for example, that disputed passages in the traditional text like the *pericope adulterae* (John 7:53-8:11) and the so-called longer ending of Mark (Mark 16:9-20) were not part of the authentic, original text of the New Testament. So, Ehrman says John 7:53-8:11 "was not originally in the Bible" (p. 24) and that Mark 16:9-20 was added by later scribes (p. 25). Wallace, likewise, says that the woman caught in adultery is his "favorite passage that's not in the Bible," and he agrees with Ehrman that the traditional ending of Mark "is not part of the original text of the Bible" (p. 29).

Wallace, in fact, promotes the replacement of the traditional text by the modern critical text with an almost missionary zeal. He notes, for example, that in his role as New Testament editor of the NET Bible he would have preferred to have relegated the *pericope adulterae* to the footnotes. In the end he had to settle for a "compromise" to "put it in brackets, to have a lengthy discussion about why we don't think it is authentic, and to reduce the font size by two points so that it could not be easily be read from the pulpit" (p. 48). Wallace also makes clear his desire to popularize the findings of modern text criticism among both evangelical ministers and laymen. He notes, "One of the deep concerns I have for the church today is that there is such a huge difference between pulpit and pew and between pulpit and professors. We need to educate our people and let them know that these are the issues that are going on" (p. 59).

In the end, the agreement between Wallace and Ehrman even seems to extend to the matter of the reliability of the New Testament. Ehrman concludes his opening remarks as follows:

Is the text of the New Testament reliable? The reality is there is no way to know. If we had the originals, we could tell you. If we had the first copies, we could tell you. If we

had copies of the copies, we could tell you. We don't have copies in many instances for hundreds of years after the originals. There are places where scholars continue to debate what the original text said, and there are places where we will probably never know (p. 27).

Wallace draws a strikingly similar conclusion:

So, is what we have now what they wrote then? Exactly? No. But in all essentials? Yes (p. 46).

Both agree that it is impossible to reconstruct the original text of Scripture with absolute certainty. Where do they differ? Ehrman suggests that we simply do not have enough evidence to know what the original text of Scripture contained, and so we must remain agnostic and skeptical. Thus, he can continue to muse about orthodox corruptions. Wallace, however, suggests that while we do not have (and never will have) absolute certainty about the original text of the New Testament we have a modern reconstruction that is close enough for Christians to trust and rely upon.

#### **A seismic shift in text criticism:**

Beyond this basic agreement, however, there is a very significant issue on which the two divide, namely, regarding the seismic shift that has taken place in contemporary academic text criticism. Mainstream academic scholars are, by and large, abandoning the effort to reconstruct the original autograph. They are less likely to speak about *the* text of Scripture than they are to speak about many valid *texts* of Scripture. Ehrman raises this point in the dialogue when he says, "I don't think that there's any hope of getting closer to an original text.... Ten or fifteen years ago my interests in textual criticism shifted away from trying to figure out what the original is to trying to figure out why the text got changed" (p. 53). He notes that one of the other presenters (David Parker) "has been quite outspoken in his writings in saying we should give up talking about the original text" (p. 53). Indeed, the "new perspective" on text criticism is placed front and center in David Parker's article in the volume, "What is the Text of the New Testament?" (pp. 95-104). Parker boldly states, "that textual criticism does not have, and never has had, the goal of recovering a text which has the supposed authority of the Author" (p. 103).

#### **Conclusion:**

This book provides intriguing insight into the challenges that exist for evangelicals who have abandoned the traditional text of Scripture and embraced modern text criticism ("reasoned eclecticism" in particular) in an effort to reconstruct a text that best reflects the so-called inerrant autographs. The Ehrman-Wallace interaction, in particular, demonstrates the degree to which mainstream evangelical text critics, like Wallace, have embraced "reasoned

eclecticism. The two men actually appear to agree more than they disagree when it comes to specific disputed New Testament texts. Their only disagreement comes over the direction in which mainstream academic text criticism has headed. Despite Wallace's protests, one wonders if evangelical text critics will also eventually follow the trend toward abandoning the reconstruction of the text of Scripture in its original form as the goal of text criticism. What impact will this shift have down the line on the way evangelical Christian scholars, who have embraced the modern critical text of reasoned eclecticism, view the reliability of Scripture, the doctrine of "inerrancy," and the authority of Scripture in general? Ω

*Jeffrey T. Riddle, Pastor, Christ Reformed Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Virginia*

### ***Paradosis***

***Paradosis*** is the Greek word for "tradition." This is a recurring feature of ***The Reformed Baptist Trumpet*** highlighting voices from the Baptist past.



*Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) has been described as "the prince of preachers." Toward the end of his ministry, Spurgeon engaged in the so-called "Down Grade Controversy," in which*

*he sounded the alarm, through a series of articles in "The Sword and Trowel" magazine, against encroaching liberalism among the Baptists and evangelicals of his day. He was eventually unjustly censured by the Baptist Union and many believe this helped to hasten his untimely death at age 58. The excerpt below is from Spurgeon's second "Down Grade" article, in which he states, "The first step astray is a want of adequate faith in the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures."*

### Spurgeon on the Inspiration of Scripture and Down Grade

In the case of every errant course there is always a first wrong step. If we can trace that wrong step we may be able to avoid it and its results. Where, then, is the point of departure from "the King's highway of truth"? What is the first step astray? Is it doubting this doctrine, or questioning that sentiment, or being skeptical as to the other article of orthodox belief? We think not. These doubts and their skepticism are the outcome of something going before.

If a mariner, having to traverse an unknown sea, does not put implicit confidence in his charts, and therefore does not consult them for guidance in steering the ship, he is, as anyone can see, every moment exposed to dangers of various kinds. Now, the Word of God—the Book written by holy men as they were moved by the Spirit of God—is the Christian's chart; and though, in a ship's company, some of the men may have little critical knowledge of navigation, the captain is supposed to be well instructed therein, and to be able, by consulting the charts, to steer the ship aright; so in reference to ministers of Christ's gospel, and pastors of Christ's church, which he hath purchased with his blood. The first step astray is a want of adequate faith in the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures. All the while a man bows to the authority of God's Word, he will not entertain any sentiment contrary to its teaching. "To the law and to the testimony," is his appeal concerning every doctrine. He esteems that holy Book, concerning all things, to be right, and therefore he hates every false way. But let a man question, or entertain low views of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and he is without chart to guide him, and without anchor to hold him.

In looking carefully over the history of the times, and the movement of the times, of which we have written briefly, this fact is apparent: that where ministers and Christian churches have held fast to the truth that the Holy Scriptures have been given by God as an authoritative and infallible rule of faith and practice, they have never wandered very seriously out of the right way. But when, on the other hand, reason has been exalted over revelation, and made the exponent of revelation, all kinds of errors and mischief have been the result.

If this be the fact—and who can disprove it?—then we live in dangerous times, and there is very great peril very near all those, whoever they may be, who call in question the inspiration—the divine inspiration—of the Word of God. "O earth, earth, earth! hear the word the Lord." Ω