

Founders Ministries Blog

Commentary and observations from Tom Ascol, Executive Director of Founders Ministries

FRIDAY, JUNE 01, 2012

Response to "A Statement of Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation." Part 3

[\[Part 1 of this series\]](#)

[\[Part 2 of this series\]](#)

PREAMBLE (PART B)

Though I am tempted to work through the Preamble statement by statement I do not want to get bogged down in this part of the document to the neglect or deemphasis of its theological affirmations and denials. Neither do I want to miss the forest for the trees and thereby fail to understand the stated concerns that spawned the document. So I will first try to summarize overall rationale for the document and then try to offer some constructive critiques of the Preamble.

Summary of the Rationale

In essence, I believe that those who have published it are concerned by the rise of Calvinism among Southern Baptists at all levels of convention life, from local churches all the way down to various institutions and agencies. They think that Calvinism represents the views of only a small minority while their own views represent the vast majority of Southern Baptists. They are concerned to be identified positively by what they do believe rather than negatively by what they do not believe ("non-Calvinist"). They have offered this document as a testimony to their beliefs and invite other Southern Baptists to sign it to show just how many agree with their views. By doing so, they do not want to intimidate or exclude Southern Baptist Calvinists, but rather are interested in asserting what they are convinced that most Southern Baptists believe on the doctrine of salvation.

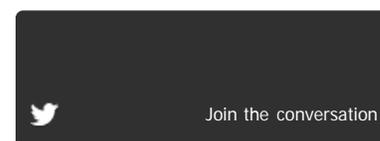
Critique of the Rationale

In no particular order I will list several points that I find problematic with the rationale for the document as stated in the Preamble.

1. **The authors authoritatively set themselves up as spokesmen for the "majority" of Southern Baptists**, stating 1) "the majority of Southern Baptists do not embrace Calvinism," 2) "the Southern Baptist majority has fellowshipped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself" and 3) "asserting that the vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life." My short response to this is, "Prove it," the impossibility of which highlights a problem that I could wish these brethren were as concerned about as they are Calvinism. No one--not even the FBI--can even *find* the "majority" of Southern Baptists, much less authoritatively declare what they believe. More substantively, however, is the danger of trying to do theology by majority--something that sends an icy chill up my Baptist spine. Further, when well over **60% of Southern Baptists don't**



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needs no such modifications. Such terms as "anti-missionism" and "hyper-Calvinism" perpetuate the easily-debunked-but-never-dying **myth** that Calvinism undermines evangelism. Any honest reading of history will show that many of the greatest evangelists and missionaries the world has ever seen have held firmly to the doctrines of grace. Calvinists do have variations with regard to reprobation vs. preterition and exactly how to articulate the accomplishment of the atonement (sufficient for all, efficient for the elect vs. sufficient only for the elect, etc.) but those are intramural theological debates-- not attempts to "modify" Calvinism. Granted, there are self-described "modified Calvinists" who reject one or more of the so-called "five points" but nowhere does this Preamble appear to have such people in mind. Furthermore, the authors seem to have forgotten the near apostasy of the SBC in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Consider the line of reasoning that the following statements reveal. "For almost a century, Southern Baptists have found that a sound, biblical soteriology can be taught, maintained, and defended without subscribing to Calvinism....Without ascribing [sic] to Calvinism, Southern Baptists have reached around the world with the Gospel message of salvation by grace alone through in Christ alone. Baptists have been well-served by a straightforward soteriology rooted in the fact that Christ is willing and able to save any and every sinner." This sounds as if the demise of Calvinism in the early part of the 20th century set the SBC's sails for smooth sailing doctrinally, evangelistically and missionally over the last 100 years. Anyone who lived as a Southern Baptist during the last two decades of the 20th century knows better. We almost reached a point of no return in our slide into neo-orthodoxy and liberalism. It should be noted that it was not on the Calvinists' watch that this happened. And to suggest that all has been well doctrinally in the SBC Zion during the last 100 years ignores that dramatic, historic era in Southern Baptist life and simply distorts the documentable record.

6. Finally, as I worked my way through the Preamble I could not help noticing what can be properly described as a paternalistic attitude.

The framers describe themselves and their phantom "Southern Baptist majority" as having fellowshipped "happily" with Calvinists "while kindly resisting Calvinism itself." Though less sanguine in their evaluation of "most Southern Baptist Calvinists" they nevertheless acknowledge that, "to their credit" those in this group "have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard." Though this statement leaves me wondering who exactly is making such demands and what is the exact nature of such demands? Are Calvinists making threats? Or employing physical coercion? Or intimidation? The very next sentence, however, is the one that reveals a condescending attitude toward Southern Baptist Calvinists. "We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this longstanding arrangement." In other words, the authors and signers would be content ("fine") if Calvinists in the SBC would only maintain our supposedly minority status, being ever so grateful that "the majority" is willing "happily" to fellowship with us despite our theology, which that same "majority" so "kindly" resists. As long as Calvinists stay in their assigned place and don't wander beyond their boundaries, then the authors "would be fine." Unfortunately, as I suspect the originators of this document know full well, the doctrines of God's grace in salvation are spreading rapidly not only within the SBC but beyond it as well. There is a doctrinal resurgence afoot and those who would be "fine" if Calvinists stayed in their assigned corner have become alarmed by continued growth of this movement.

In the next post I will start addressing the 10 affirmations and denials.

[Continue to Part 4](#)

Posted by Tom at 6/01/2012 10:01:00 AM

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Labels: Adam Harwood, anti-Calvinism, Calvinism, David Allen, Emir Caner, Eric Hankins, Great Commission Resurgence Jerry Vines, Jimmy Draper, Malcolm Yarnell, Mark Howell,

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Ben said...



Tom,

Frankly, it doesn't matter much to me what these guys say as long as they're not hatching some scheme to block funding to the hordes of young Calvinists who are lining up to take the gospel to the furthest ends of the earth.

I do wonder if that's where we're heading. And though I have no idea whether that plan would succeed, it would certainly bring an ironic resolution to the problem of too many people wanting to go, and not enough money to send them.

10:23 AM, June 01, 2012

Nate said...



Thanks Tom!

10:27 AM, June 01, 2012

Matt Privett said...



Tom,

I couldn't have said it better myself.

10:38 AM, June 01, 2012

David W. Bailey said...



Thank you, Tom! Good words, sound reasoning, biblical tone. An example for us all.

11:13 AM, June 01, 2012

Lenwood Smith said...



This comment has been removed by the author.

11:15 AM, June 01, 2012

Lenwood Smith said...



You hit the nail on the head. I am surprised by the bullying spirit of this statement. Basically, as long as the Calvinists will shut up and sit in the corner (and give their money), then they are welcome in the big tent of the SBC. But if they start actually teaching others their views, and if local autonomous churches start embracing the doctrines of grace, this somehow means war or an unacceptable encroachment on the status quo. It's ironic that the authors charge the Calvinists of wanting to aggressively advance reformed soteriology upon the denomination when the authors of this statement are the very ones not content to operate within the parameters of the BF&M while the Calvinists are. Who's really being exclusionary here? Who are the true aggressors? Perhaps the same ones who are so utterly paranoid about what is going on in other autonomous churches...

11:20 AM, June 01, 2012

Tom Hicks said...

Brother Tom, thanks for this wise, gracious, and accurate analysis. Looking



forward to your dealings with the affirmations and denials.

11:27 AM, June 01, 2012

Steve Doyle said...



Great job

12:00 PM, June 01, 2012

Nate said...



Thank you, Tom! I was saved out of the cult (United Pentecostal Church International), and that happened by hearing John MacArthur preach the gospel. He preached the gospel offering security in the finished work of Christ; which was completely new to me. The more I listened and studied I found the doctrines of grace to be very solid Scripturally and God honoring. With all that said, I am very disturbed by this document. With all do respect, these guys sound more worried about some "conspiracy take-over", than Scriptural discussion and clarity.

12:46 PM, June 01, 2012

Michael said...



Thanks, Tom. Excellent analysis. I appreciate that you pointed out the paternalistic attitude present in the preamble. I find it frustrating that those who complain so loudly about Calvinism show such a shallow understanding of the history and textures of Reformed theology--even those who are well known theologians and historians! Thanks for bringing some clarity and light to the subject.

12:54 PM, June 01, 2012

Bill0615 said...



Great observations, Tom. As John Adams said (1770), "Facts are stubborn things." Keep the facts coming.

1:27 PM, June 01, 2012

Rick said...



Great post, Tom. This makes clear that there is a lot of fear in the SBC these days.

I think even the words used reveal the paternalistic attitude of the preamble. It pits the "traditional" vs. the "new" Calvinism (kind of makes Calvinism sound like a fad).

Keep up the good work.

2:33 PM, June 01, 2012

Steven said...



I believe that it was Dr. Stetzer who made the comment during the SBC2011 that the same people complaining that Calvinists were going to have a detrimental affect on missions at SBC 2010, were complaining during sbc 2011 that the Calvinist were getting all the money for new church plants.

I appreciate Dr. Ascol's responses to this document, but think that the people behind this document are more concerned with their growing irrelevance than anything else.

2:54 PM, June 01, 2012

T.A. Ragsdale said...



Thank you Tom. Your coverage of the preamble really has me enthusiastic about your upcoming posts on the affirmations and denials.

You do lose points for misusing the phrase *begs the question* though. ;)

4:25 PM, June 01, 2012

C. said...



Tom,

A good friend introduced me to your blog after I had a Facebook meltdown about the document. Thanks for putting a response so eloquently and graciously for those of us who happen to find the doctrines of Calvinism to be biblically sound! I do fear that if this document does pass, it could have catastrophic effects within the convention, to the point of more splits like we saw in Texas when the BF&M was updated, except on a much larger scale. What disturbs me more, are the "heavy hitters" of the convention that have signed this document. It will be interesting to see what the current convention leadership does with it. Thanks again! Will be following your posts on the subject!

9:52 PM, June 01, 2012

Prophet Among Them said...



Brothers - I write with a genuine hope that what I say resonates with each of you.

My Premise - this entire issue is not about Calvinism or 'Traditionalism'. It is rather about exegesis done with integrity, grace and transparency.

The Law of non-contradiction proves that one may be correct, both incorrect but both cannot be correct when claiming that the texts yields two distinctly different messages.

It has been witnessed multiple times that those who embrace and signed the statement have not been willing to engage honest, open and irenic systematic exegesis/debate on the issues.

It matters not at all what someone says the text means. What matters above all is "What does the text say!" I pray we never lose sight of that fact.

2:56 PM, June 02, 2012

Tim said...



Thanks for doing this series. I have a thought to offer regarding the concerns that this document

- * is intended political use
- * neglects local church autonomy
- * is paternalistic
- * and suggests a vague New Calvinist conspiracy.

The thought is: these things are fruits of the signers' Arminianism. They believe in the power of the human will. Therefore, they seek to operate in terms of that power, using human politics to achieve their goals. They do not rest content with the independence of men from men, and from human authority structures, that predestination implies. They further attribute their own sort of political conspiracy to their opponents, because they cannot comprehend another kind of power.

"Do not call a conspiracy, what these people call a conspiracy."

11:47 PM, June 02, 2012

Gordon said...

 Dr. Ascol, you failed to mention the ridiculous nature of SBC ministry that has plagued the 90's among many of the non-calvinist churches. The gimmicks and 'strategies' of outreach that became so prevalent among baptist churches. Only now many of them are seeing the futile nature of these efforts. When I actually came to grips with what has been happening I am almost ashamed to be baptist. Thank God for being able to connect with calvinists across the caribbean and in the US. I wouldn't know what to do otherwise. I felt so isolated.

12:33 PM, June 04, 2012

Rob Willmann said...

 Tom,

After I was first saved, I spent almost a year wrestling with what most Baptists tended to believe vs. what the Scriptures actually taught. I came to my reformed theology slowly, and I now embrace it.

I pastored a small Baptist Church in Mobile, AL for 3.5 years, and towards the end, when they wanted to run me out of the church (because I dared to suggest that elder rule was biblical), one woman asked me, "Are you a calvinist or a southern baptist?" I tried to explain that the two were definitely not mutually exclusive, but it didn't matter. I was run off.

However, I am now an elder in a bible teaching SBC church locally, and I love it.

Thank you for taking the time to work through this document. May the Lord bless your work and the spread of His glorious Gospel.

12:53 AM, June 05, 2012

Grow Your Own - Food That Is said...

Love the "prove it" statement Tom. Not mean-spirited, but just the right amount of heat.

1:00 PM, June 05, 2012

JC Hackler said...

 Tom,

Thanks for the well thought out presentation. When I read the "Prove it" section I first laughed so hard that I almost threw up breakfast. But then the more I thought about it it became very clear that this is no laughing matter. May God forgive us for not preaching the Gospel in a way that so profoundly shakes the soul and then allows the Holy Spirit to do His perfect work that the fall out would be minimal. It appears that we have reaped a harvest of tares that is greater than the wheat. I believe that the "Majority" should be disciplined for non attendance in their churches or at least not count them if you have not seen them in the last year. However, if churches did that they would not be able to have as many messengers. Which leads to another question, "Are votes more important than integrity or bearing false witness?" If we did not count church members who never show up would that increase the "Majority's" percentage or the Calvinist? Is that a fair way to judge either side? Unfortunately Tom Convention Politics are not always built on biblical truth.

4:30 PM, June 05, 2012

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