

NEW COVENANT Theology (NCT), 12 pgs

In my essays I have been using the term Reformed to refer to pure New Testament teaching as distinct from Dispensational and Covenant theologies with their carry-overs from the OT. By such my intent has been to recognize the tremendous contributions of Reformation thinkers in reformulating central biblical doctrines from Roman Catholic distortions. Nevertheless, as significant as their work was, it was not perfect. In several areas they contradicted their own scriptural principles and beliefs by accommodating certain OT Roman Catholic concepts such as paedobaptism. [see **chap.7 of BELIEVER'S BAPTISM – Sign of the New Covenant in Christ**, 06] What I have been calling Reformed viewpoint is really more in line with older Baptist theology such as described in the 1646 London Baptist Confession of faith which differed from the Westminster Confession of Faith in certain key areas. Therefore, my reformed view (once known as *Promise/Fulfillment Theology*) is **New Covenant Theology** that is based upon the finality of Jesus Christ as the pinnacle of God's revelation [see *The revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* [http://solochristo.com/ SC/SoloChristo.htm](http://solochristo.com/SC/SoloChristo.htm)]. NCT's goal is *to elevate ... the logical priority of the NT over the Old ... of Lord Jesus over His godly predecessors, [Determining How Bible Passages May Be Used] and ... of the theology of the text over our own theologies*^a... NCT views the NT as governing all previous revelation through the logic of progressive revelation by means of the analogy of scripture [**footnote 11** my essay *Scripture & Conscience*] according to the perspicuity (clarity, plainness, intelligibility) thereof. [See **chap.2** my essay *RPCD*] NCT recognizes and seeks to prevent OT system constructs' tide of inferences from overflowing into the NT and overriding its teachings. Such constructs are often the products of logical extrapolations from theological systems and have at times been promoted by historical-political pressures rather than outright Biblical exegesis. G

^a **BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:** [http://solochristo.com/ SC/SoloChristo.htm](http://solochristo.com/SC/SoloChristo.htm) a series of 3 short books by John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds: A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism*, 1998; *Tablets of Stone and the History of Redemption*, 04; *But I Say Unto You*, 06. Reisinger's books are very helpful despite being repetitious and assertive without documentation or explanation at many points of criticism. [see *Children of Abraham & 3 Studies Theological Notes*]

New Covenant Theology: Description; Definition; Defense, 2002 by Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel. Great book - clarified and fortified my understanding of the New Testament in relation to the Old. It outlines NCT and examines the major issues pertinent to it. The book challenges one to read the Scriptures in the light of careful exegesis without being so influenced by predispositions - creeds, historic attachments, and denominational affiliations. [see review by Thomas R. Schreiner [http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/review WellsZaspel.pdf](http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/review_WellsZaspel.pdf)]

<http://moseswroteaboutme.com/>

NCT is a hermeneutic (a way of interpreting the Bible) that clearly shows how the Bible fits together because it is unencumbered by a **pre-conceived system of theology** that drives its interpretation

in any one direction. NCT is free of any system of theology that would force it to interpret Scripture as that system demands, allowing NCT to interpret Scripture free from any preconceived theological bias. **The New in NCT** does not mean that NCT is a new or recent version of Covenant Theology, but **is simply a reference to the New Covenant itself and the supremacy of Christ**. NCT is the study and application of the New Covenant and is in the best of positions to explain how the Old Testament relates to the New. **NCT is a theology of the New Covenant that elevates it to its proper place in redemptive history**, without the interpretive limitations of other theological systems such as Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

What Makes NCT Different from Covenant Theology?

Even with its strengths for which we are greatly indebted, Covenant Theology remains both theologically and confessionally restricted in its interpretation of Scripture. Its interpretation of Scripture must not contradict the historical Reformed creeds and confessions, and in many ways, is subject to them. By and large, **the Covenant theologian's interpretation of Scripture must conform to the historical Reformed confessions**, especially the Westminster Confession of Faith.

What Makes NCT Different from Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism, while facing a different set of interpretive hurdles than Covenant Theology, is limited nonetheless by its pre-conceived system of theology and **hermeneutic of literalism**. There are many flavors of Dispensationalism today, making it unfair to attempt to categorize it as one unified theological system. However, one major interpretive weakness facing most Dispensational theologians is the belief that the New Covenant is fully realized in the future and is ultimately intended for the nation of Israel, not the Church. **This is a theological system driven interpretation of the Scriptures** that permeates the larger part of Dispensationalism which views the Church as a parenthesis in redemptive history and the nation of as the primary people of God. [see RPCD, **Chap.4**]

A Brief Explanation of "New Covenant Theology" by Fred G. Zaspel

<http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/hermeneutics/nct.htm>

NCT and the More Traditional Systems of Interpretation

Hermeneutics

It is agreed that **the New Testament is the apex of God's self-revelation**. But traditional Covenant Theology has failed to appreciate it fully. We argue this on exegetical grounds specifically, and also from the general standpoints of the newness of the New Covenant, the heavy "fulfillment" emphasis in the New Testament [See *The Theology of Fulfillment* <http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/eschatology/fulflnt1.htm>], the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Jesus' superiority to Moses, our "slavery" to Jesus Christ, the striking contrast between the Old and New Covenants found in the New Testament, and so on. Further, this necessarily brings us into a distinctive emphasis on Biblical theology with its eye to the progressive unfolding of **Christocentric redemptive history**. In short, **traditional Covenant Theology has failed to appreciate fully the significant advance that marks this age of New Testament revelation.**

Law vs. Grace

For classical Dispensationalism the principle of grace in the New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant principle of law. Within Covenant Theology there seem to be some differences, with some following Luther in seeing law and grace as parallel tracks running through history and others recognizing that the words "law" and "grace" characterize two periods in the development of God's plan of redemption. NCT also recognizes that law and grace are sometimes names for the two periods covered by the Old and New Covenants, but looks at the two words as also defining two emphases, not the replacement of law by grace. We see a greater emphasis on grace under the New Covenant and generally a more legal character to the Old Covenant. In short, we argue that law remains (contra Dispensational Theology), but with signification alteration (contra Covenant Theology).

The Decalogue

CT argues that the Decalogue is the eternal, unchanging moral law of God. It defined duty before Moses, "outside" Moses in the nations surrounding Israel, and it continues to define universal duty after Moses. It is a rule which remains unchanged and unchangeable. Further, all ten words are of a "moral" rather than a ceremonial or civil character. Other Old Testament laws -- civil and ceremonial laws -- may come or go or be altered with further revelation. But moral law remains constant, and the Decalogue is that moral law. Thus, Jesus issued no new moral demands, and when the New Testament speaks of "abolishing" Mosaic law, it has civil or ceremonial aspects of that law in view, not the Decalogue.

NCT argues that these presuppositions are exegetically unwarranted. It cannot be shown that the Decalogue is purely "moral" in character. The Sabbath has more a ceremonial character to it. Neither can it be demonstrated that this supposed three-fold division of Mosaic law -- moral, civil, ceremonial -- is a legitimate hermeneutical tool for the understanding of the "abolition" passages of the New Testament. Some of the NT passages which speak of the passing away of the Old Covenant speak specifically in reference to the Decalogue (eg. 2 Cor.3). The presuppositions of Covenant Theology on this point are just too simplistic. An answer must be found which can take in all the relevant exegetical detail. [see 3 Studies Theological Notes]

The Sabbath

Covenant Theology's shift of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday is exegetically unwarranted and it further renders its "unchangeableness of the Decalogue" argument null and void. We affirm rather that the Sabbath had a prophetic function in its anticipation of the gospel rest enjoyed by all who are in Christ, both now and in eternity (eg. Heb.4). This is a point of Biblical Theology that Covenant Theologians have largely overlooked, although there is nothing about it that is inherently inconsistent with their position. However, while Covenant Theology argues the Puritan position that the Sabbath day is to be kept distinctively holy in this gospel age. NCT argues that this aspect of the Sabbath marks the Old Covenant (eg. Ex.31; Col.2:16-17) and emphasize rather the position of Luther and Calvin that the Sabbath finds its fulfillment in Christ (Col.2:17). [see Keeping the Sabbath in Christ]

Miscellany

Much of this is more a matter of differing emphases than of differing theology -- it is, after all, an "in

house" debate. And there are other (lesser) questions which the discussion generates, such as the role of law in preaching the gospel, the role of law/grace in sanctification, the role of Divine law in human government, the relation of Christ to Moses, the role of creeds, and so on. All these questions find answers of differing emphasis even within each respective theological camp.

New Covenant Theology? (Part Three) by John G. Reisinger, 9 pgs

<http://www.soundofgrace.com/jgr/>

The first and basic premise of NCT concerns the NT Scriptures being the documents upon which the life and worship of the Church is built. B.H. Carroll, president, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote an excellent book entitled **Baptists and Their Doctrines**, 1913. In the following article, Dr. Carroll has stated very clearly the historic view of the Baptists concerning the The New Testament - The Law of Christianity. ^b

... many Reformed Baptists today are little more than immersed Presbyterians. Dr. Carroll's article sets forth a biblical truth that is basic to any clear understanding of the life and worship of the ekklesia, or church, of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is strange indeed that the worst condemnation and caricature that I have received from many of my Reformed Baptist brethren has been over the very truth that Dr. Carroll sets forth, John R.

^b **Covenant** refers to a formal description of the relationship between God and his people. The OT and the NT form the contexts for their respective covenants, that is, the testaments relate the historical setting of each covenant. They are the surrounding body of literature (canons) within which the covenants are embedded. [see [New Covenant Church](#)]

From **Baptists and Their Doctrines** chap.1,

Distinctive Baptist Principles by B.H. Carroll, edited (1913), p.7-34

http://www.pbministries.org/Theology/B.%20H.%20Carroll/baptist_principles/carroll_01.htm

<http://www.theologue.org/DistinctiveBaptistPrinciples.htm>

A declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us (Lk.1:1).

It was needful for me ... to exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The distinctive principles of the Baptists are those doctrines or practices which distinguish us from other Christian denominations. For example: The Greek church and the Baptists both practice immersion, but their doctrine of baptism is widely different from ours. Authority, subject, and design all enter as much into the validity of this ordinance as the act itself. More than mere immersion is necessary to constitute NT baptism. Again, the **Congregationalists** agree with **Baptists** in the form of church government, but their doctrine of the church is widely different from ours. The statement **The Bible, and the Bible alone, the religion of Protestants**, is widely different from the Baptist principle, **The NT is the only law of Christianity**...

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT—THE LAW OF CHRISTIANITY

All the NT **encompasses** all the Law of Christianity. **This does not deny** the inspiration or profit of the OT, nor that the New is a development of the Old. It affirms however that the OT, as a typical, educa-tional, and transitory system, was fulfilled by Christ, and as a standard of law and way of life was nailed to the cross of Christ and so taken out of the way. The principle teaches that we should not go to the OT to find Christian law or institutions. **Not there do we find** the true idea of the Christian church, or its members, or its ordinances, or its government, or its officers, or its sacrifices, or its wor-ship, or its mission, or its ritual, or its priesthood. The overwhelming majority of Christendom, whether Greek, Romanist, or Protestant, borrow from the OT much of their doctrine of the church, including its members, officers, ritual ordinances, government, liturgy and mission.

When Baptists say that the **NT** is the only law for Christian institutions they part company with most of the Protestant world as well as from the Greeks and **Romanists**. The church with all that pertains to it is strictly a NT institution. We **do not deny** that there was an OT *ecclesia*, but **do deny its identity** with the NT *ecclesia*. We **do not deny** the circumcision of infants under OT law, but **do deny** their baptism under NT law. We **do not deny** that there were elders under the Mosaic economy, nor even deny the facts of uninspired history concerning the elders of the Jewish synagogue. **We simply claim** that the NT alone must define the office and functions of the elder in the Christian church. Christ himself appointed its Apostles and its first seventy elders. We **not only** stand upon the NT alone in repelling OT institutions, in repelling apocryphal additions thereto, in repelling the historic synagogue of the inter-biblical period as the model of the church, **but also** to repel the binding authority of post-apostolic history, whether embodied in the literature of the ante-Nicene fathers or in the decisions of councils, from the council at Nice, A.D 325, to the Vatican Council, A.D. 1870. **We allow not** Clement, Polycarp, Hippolytus, Ignatius, Irenus, Justin, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Jerome, Eusebius, Augustine, Chrysostom, Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Henry VII, Knox or Wesley either to determine what is NT law or to make law for us.

We shut ourselves up to the NT teaching concerning the **bishop**. The idea of catholicity must not be learned from post-apostolic fathers, but from the inspired Testament, and because it was this word, *katholikos* (universal), which led to the idea of the church as an organized general body having appellate jurisdiction over the particular congregations, and led to the union of church and state under Constantine. **We are willing enough to enter** the domain of uninspired history as a matter of research, and ready enough to concede all its fairly established facts, but we recognize the impregnable rock of the NT as the only ground of union. The NT always will be all the law of Christianity. Avaunt [Begone], ye types and shadows! Avaunt, Apocrypha! Avaunt, O Synagogue! Avaunt, Tradition, thou hoary-headed liar. Hush! Be still and listen! All through the Christian ages—from dark and noisome dungeons, from the lone wanderings of banishment and expatriation, from the roarings and sickening conflagrations of martyr fires—**there comes a voice**—shouted here, whispered there, sighed, sobbed, or gasped elsewhere—**a Baptist voice**. *The NT is the law of Christianity!* Christ himself set up his kingdom, established his church, and gave us Christian law. And the men whom he inspired furnish us the only reliable record of these institutions. They had no successors in inspiration. The record is complete. Prophecy and vision have ceased. The canon of revelation and the period of legislation are closed. Let no man dare to add to it, take from it, dilute it, or substitute for it [**see Our**

Rosetta Stone]. It is written. It is finished.

II. INDIVIDUALITY

This NT law of Christianity segregates the individual from his own family, from society with all its customs and requirements, from race and nationality, from caste, however exclusive, from all governmental control or intimidations, from all the bonds of friendship then isolates him from every external influence. It strips him of every artificial distinction arising from wealth or poverty or social status, and then shuts him up in an exclusive circle alone with God, who is no respecter of persons, and there demands of his naked and solitary personality a voluntary surrender of his will to God's will and an immediate response of obedience to all its demands. There are no sponsors, or proxies. Enforced or insincere obedience counts nothing at all. **The sole responsibility of decision and action rests directly on the individual soul** [individual soul liberty]. Each one must give account of himself to God. **This is the first principle of NT law**—to bring each naked soul face to face with God. When that first Baptist voice broke the silence of four hundred years it startled the world with its appeal to individuality: *Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.* Do thou repent. Do thou confess thy sins. Do thou be baptized. It was the first step of Christianity, and what a colossal stride! Family ties count nothing. Greek culture nothing. Roman citizenship nothing. Circum-cision nothing. O soul, thou art alone before God! The multitude shall not swallow thee up. *If thou shalt be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.* Family relationship intruded upon our Lord's busiest hour. *Behold, thy mother and thy brothers seek thee.* Once before he had said: *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* and now like a flash of lightning comes his scathing reply: *Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Whosoever doeth the will of my heavenly Father, the same is my mother, my brother, my sister.*

Another time it intruded upon him to call forth his crucial statement: *If any man hate not his, father and mother and brother and sister he cannot be my disciple.* In his dying hour, on the way to the cross, he heard its voice once more: *Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which gave thee suck,* and once more he replied. *Yea, rather blessed is she that doeth the will of God.* Superiority for the twelve over Paul was claimed because they had known the Lord in the flesh. But Paul rejoined: *Where henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.*

How often in history has the question been propounded by some wishing to shun personal responsibility! **May I not refer** this matter to the magistrates? **May I not consult** the customs of my country? **May I not seek** the guidance of my priest and put on him the responsibility of interpreting this book? Nay, verily. Do thou interpret. It is God's letter to thy soul. **Thy right of private judgment is the crown jewel of thy humanity.** Not even thy church can absolve thee from individual duty. Churches are time organizations and are punished in time. They do not stand before the great white throne of judgment. But thy soul shall appear before the judge. Well did our Lord know that there could be no evangelization of the world if ancestors, families, customs, government, commerce, and priests could stand between the individual soul and God. Thy relation to God is paramount. His law takes precedence of all and swallows up all. **In giving emphasis to this doctrine of individuality our Baptist fathers have**

suffered martyrdom at the hands of the heathen, the Romanist, the Greek, and the Protestant alike.

III. FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE [individual soul liberty]

This follows from individual responsibility. If one be responsible for himself, there must be no restraint or constraint of his conscience. Neither parent, nor government, nor church may usurp the prerogative of God as Lord of the conscience. God himself does not coerce the will. His people are volunteers, not conscripts. As has been stated, the prevalent theory in the days of the Reformation was: Whose is the government—his is the religion. **Louis XIV.** revoked the Edict of Nantes, signed by his grandfather, the great Henry of Navarre. **Calvin** burned **Servetus** at the stake. **Luther** loosed all the hounds of persecution upon the Baptists in his day. Holland, the little republic that tore her lowlands from the ocean flood, and for eighty years, by pike and dike, repelled the Spaniard with his Inquisition, did herself destroy her greatest statesman, **John of Barneveldt**, and banish her great historian **Grotius** for conscience' sake. **Henry VIII.**, in England, and his successors, delighted to persecute for conscience' sake. John Knox, of Scotland, so tarnished his great name. **The Congregationalists** of New England and **the Episcopalians** of Virginia alike denied freedom of conscience to their fellow-men. There was not a government in the world that allowed full liberty of conscience to all men until a Baptist established the colony of Rhode Island.

At a great dining in England John Bright asked a Baptist statesman beside him: What special contribution have your people made to the world? Civil and religious liberty, replied the statesman. A great contribution, replied **John Bright. Bancroft**, in his history of America, declares: Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists. On Nov. 5, 1658, these Baptists thus instructed their agent in England: Plead our case in such sort as we may not be compelled to exercise any civil power over men's consciences; we do judge it no less than a point of absolute cruelty. **In their petition to Charles II.** they thus urged: It is much in our hearts to hold forth a lively experiment, that a most flourishing civil state may stand, and best be maintained, with a full liberty of religious concernments. And so when their charter came it provided: *No person* within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any difference in opinion in matters of religion; *every person* may at all times freely and fully enjoy his own judgment and conscience in matters of religious concernment. And the charter of their great school, now **Brown University**, has a clause of equal import, a thing unknown at that time in the chartered schools of the whole world.

Freedom of conscience in our day, especially in this country, is a familiar thing. It was not so in earlier days. Pagan, Papist and Protestant ground liberty of conscience into powder under the iron heel of their despotisms.

IV. SALVATION IS ESSENTIAL TO BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP °

Here Baptists stand absolutely alone. Blood before water—the altar before the laver. This principle eliminates not only all infant baptism and membership, but locates the adult's remission of sins in the fountain of blood instead of the fountain of water. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews declares: *It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins*, he bases the impossibility on the lack of intrinsic merit. Following the precise idea Baptists declare: It is not pos-

sible that the water of baptism should take away sins. There is no intrinsic merit in the water. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, alone can cleanse us from sin. True, the water of baptism and the wine of the Lord's Supper may symbolically take away sins, but not in fact. Arise and he baptized and wash away thy sins. *This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.* Both declarations are beautiful and impressive figures of antecedent fact.

A brother of another denomination once objected: *You Baptists have no method of induction into Christ. My people baptize a man into Christ.* The reply was two-fold: (1) It is not enough to get a man into Christ; (2) you must also get Christ into him, as he says, *I in you and you in me.* If you insist that baptism really, and not figuratively, puts a man into Christ, how will you meet the Romanist on the other half of it, Eating the wafer of the Supper really puts Christ into the man. He eats the flesh of the real presence? The words are stronger for his induction than yours.

Baptists have a method of double induction: *We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand. Faith puts us into Christ. It pleased God to reveal his Son in me. Christ in you the hope of glory. Ye are manifestly declared to be an epistle of Christ ... written with the Spirit of the living God ... in fleshly tables, of the heart. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Thus the Holy Spirit puts Christ in us. We get into him by faith. He gets into us by the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling his words: *I in you and you in me.*

This great, vital, and fundamental Baptist principle, ***Salvation must precede ordinances***, does, at one blow, smite and blast those two great enemies of religion, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. If ritualism saves, priests are a necessity. If my salvation is conditioned on the performance of a rite, then also it is conditioned on the act and will of a third party who administers the saving rite. The doctrine of salvation by rites is the hope of the priest who alone can administer the rite. This gives both importance and revenue to his office. He multiplies the sacraments. Two are too few. Let us have seven. The more, the better for us, and thus we will control our subjects not only from the cradle to the grave, but from conception in the womb to eternity.

Not only does our great principle destroy both sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, but it alone draws a line of cleavage between the church and the world. To perpetuate the baptism of the unsaved, whether infant or adult, tends to blot out from the earth the believer's baptism which Christ appointed. It is a question of discipleship. John the Baptist made disciples before he baptized them. Jesus made disciples before he baptized them. (**Jn.4:1**) John made disciples by leading them to repentance and commanded Jesus made disciples by repentance and faith: *Go ye therefore and disciple all nations, baptizing them (the disciplined).* Draw a perpendicular line. On the right of it write the words, Believers in Christ, Lovers of Christ. On the left of it write the words, Unbelievers in Christ, Haters of Christ. Now, from which side of that line will you take your candidates for baptism? Will you baptize the hating and the unbelieving? You dare not. If from the other side you take them, then already are they God's children, for what saith the Scriptures: *Whosoever believeth has been born of God. Whosoever loveth is born of God.*

Baptists do not bury the living sinner to kill him to sin. But they bury those already dead to sin. For

devotion to this principle you may trace our people back by their track of blood, illumined by their fires of martyrdom.

c We disclaim as Baptist *distinctives* the following two doctrines: (1) **Immersion is Baptism** For the first thirteen hundred years all Christendom held this belief. Even today other Christian denominations believe and practice it as the only [means of] baptism. (2) **Baptism is Essential to Salvation** This is not now and never has been a Baptist doctrine. More than all other people do they repudiate it. Indeed on the contrary, the Baptists are the only people in the world who hold its exact opposite: **Salvation is essential to baptism**.

V. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The church is not the expression of one idea, but of many. Only the most salient and distinctive ideas are here cited:

(1) **The church is a spiritual body.** None but the regenerate should belong to it. It is not a savior, but the home of the saved. [1st biblical norm, p.63, The Church at the End of the 20th Century, Francis Schaeffer]

(2) **Separation of church and state:** The state, a secular body for secular ends, can never be united to the church, a spiritual body for spiritual ends, without irreparable injury to both. United with the state, the church can never obey Christ. *Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers, What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Come out from among them and be ye separate.* There cannot be union of church and state without persecution for conscience' sake. There cannot be a pure and converted ministry when politicians appoint the preachers. There cannot be free speech by the church against national sins when the state holds the purse, See the awful consequences of Luther's mistake on this point in Germany. There the owner of all licensed sins, gambling houses, race tracks, saloons, houses of prostitution, must exhibit certificate of church membership.

The blackest pages of American history are those which record the evils of the union of church and state in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia. And in everyone of them Baptists were persecuted unto blood, stripes, imprisonment and confisca-tion of property. **Massachusetts** whipped Obadiah Holmes, imprisoned Clark and banished Roger Williams. **At Ashfield, in Connecticut**, our Baptist fathers had the choicest parts of their farms and gardens sold under the sheriff's hammer to raise a fund for building a house of worship for another denomination and for the support of its preacher, who had virtually no congregation in that community. **In Virginia**, Craig, Lunsford, Waller and others were imprisoned. The products of Baptist farms were seized to support a cock-fighting, horse-racing, hard-drinking **Episcopal ministry**.

In England and on the continent of Europe time would fail to tell the story of their wrongs, scourgings, cruel mockings, imprisonment, and bloody death at the hands of the state church. In every age of the world they have testified for a free church in a free state. From its spiritual nature the church cannot rightfully become a political factor. Its members, indeed, as individuals and citizens merely, may align themselves at will with political parties according to each several judgment. On this very account the politician does not court the Baptist church. But any general organization called the church that

becomes a mighty political factor, controlling the vote of its members through its clergy, they will court.

(3) The church is a particular congregation and not an organized denomination. This idea of the church is fundamental and vital and yet least of all understood. With Greeks, Romanists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and many others the church is an organized denomination having appellate jurisdiction over its particular congregations. **In history, the church as an organized general body, or denomination, has assumed the following forms:**

(a) Papistical or autocratic

It starts with the idea of an earthly head. This autocrat must be the successor of some apostle, himself a primate. Inspiration must rest upon him. **All Christendom must be under him.** Commencing with the union of church and state under Constantine, the idea reached its final development in the Vatican Council, A. D. 1870, which declared the Pope infallible.

(b) Practical or episcopal

That is, the church is a general body, governed by the bishops, **"bishop" now having lost its NT meaning.**

(c) Presbyterian

That is, the church is a general body or organized denomination, governed by its presbyters, through synods and general assemblies.

In all of these the particular congregation is under the appellate jurisdiction of the higher power, the General Assembly for the Presbyterians, the General Conference for the Methodists, the Bishops for the Church of England, the Pope for the Romanists. It follows that **all these general organizations must have a graded series of courts**, ending with a supreme court whose decisions bind all the denomination. And of course these higher courts provide for regular trials, with all necessary forms of law. The sessions of these high courts must last quite a long time in order to attend to all these trials. With all of them the church is an organized denomination having appellate and final jurisdiction over all particular congregations.

Now, in opposition to all these, the **Baptists hold that the NT church is a particular congregation and not an organized denomination.** According to the NT: *In Christ, each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into holy temple in the Lord.* **Each congregation is complete temple in itself**, and has final jurisdiction over all its affairs. This is the church, to which grievances must be told, and whose decision is final. **(Mt.18:15-18)** **The most forceful and popular objection urged against this idea of the church** is that it will be powerless to secure unity of faith, uniformity of discipline, and co-operation in general work among the churches. This objection comes from the viewpoint of human reason. And we frankly admit that whatever theory of the church fails necessarily and generally to secure these great ends discounts itself in probability as scriptural in favor of any other theory which does secure these great ends, simply because we cannot conceive of God's wisdom failing.

(d) A federation, like the United States

In this the representative system prevails. Each state selects its representatives, delegates powers to

them, projects its sovereignty into the general body, and there merges it into a supreme government for national affairs. A Baptist church cannot project or merge its sovereignty into a general body of any kind, nor delegate its powers. There is not and cannot be a Baptist federal body.

Read again **Francis Wayland's great book**, originally published in 1857, *Notes on the Principles, and Practices of the Baptist Churches*, 252 pgs, and there see how the unscriptural idea perished before the wisdom of the brethren. As the good doctor says, *we now wonder that anybody ever supposed that there could be a representative Baptist general body*. In like manner, in the South, all attempts to reduce our Southern Baptist Convention or state bodies to this basis have failed for similar good reasons. Our general bodies are purely voluntary, and composed of individuals, not churches. They are solely for counsel and cooperation. They cannot have trials, seeing they possess no ecclesiastical powers. Their sessions have no time for trials, lasting only three or four days. In considering the one question of eligibility for membership in the body they must necessarily act in a summary way on account of time.

The supreme question then arises, can we with our ideas of the church secure unity of the faith, guard against hurtful schisms, bring about substantial uniformity of discipline, and, above all, secure cooperation in the great departments of work beyond the ability of a single church, namely, missions, education, religious literature, and philanthropy?

Baptists come nearer to uniformity of faith and discipline and have fewer hurtful schisms than the denominations which seek to secure these results by their iron general organizations.

(4) The church is a pure democracy. Indeed, it is the only one in the world. There is no disbarment of franchise on account of race, education, wealth, age, or sex. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, bond or free, man or woman or child. *All its members are equal fellow-citizens*, and the majority decides. It is of his people, for the people, by the people. This democracy receives and dismisses its members, chooses or deposes its own officers, and manages its own affairs.

(5) It is the supreme court in Christ's kingdom. All cases of discipline come before it, and its decisions are final and irreversible by any human power apart from itself. Of course, it is under law to Christ. It possesses judicial and executive but no legislative powers. *Christ is the only lawmaker and the NT is his law*. Its judicial powers cover all cases of grievances and fellowship. It is Christ's court. Our Lord foresaw the inadequacy of secular courts to adjudicate religious differences. The very atmosphere of secular courts is adverse to the religious spirit. **Our Lord himself was a victim before the courts of Pilate and Herod.** He warned his people that, in every age, they would be dragged before these courts, and clearly foretold what they must expect at the bar of these tribunals. *One of his most impressive lessons of the NT* is the recital of the trials of his ministers before them. Nearly every one of his apostles was put to a violent death by their decisions. Who has not thrilled at the story of **Paul before the magistrates at Philippi**, before Gallio, Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Nero? Our Lord carefully provided for the settlement of religious differences before his own court. Hear the indignant protest of his apostle against the violators of his law in this respect:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before his saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by

you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life! If then ye have judgment of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are at least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

(6) The officers of the church are bishops [pastors & elders] and deacons, the first charged with spiritualities and the second with temporalities. The idea of a metropolitan bishop, having charge of all the churches of a great city, or of a diocesan bishop, having charge of a province, or state, is of post-apostolic origin and subversive of the scriptural idea of the bishop.

(7) The ordinances of the church are but two, baptism and the Lord's Supper, **neither as a means of grace, but both purely figurative and commemorative**. The elements of validity in baptism are: (a) it must be by proper authority; (b) its subject is a penitent believer or saved person; (c) the act is immersion; (d) the design is a declaration or confession of faith, symbolizing the cleansing from sin and commemorative of the resurrection. The Supper is a festival observed by the church as a body, and commemorates the atoning death of our Lord and anticipates his second advent.

In summary,

the church must be separated from the state; it is a particular congregation and not an organized denomination, whether Papistical, Episcopal, Presbyterian, or federal; it is a pure democracy; it is Christ's executive and judiciary on earth; its officers are bishops and deacons; its ordinances are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

[see chap.4, Form & Freedom in the Church; chap.5, The Practice of Community & Freedom - The Church at the End of the 20th Century & Chap 3, Practicing Purity in the Visible Church; THE APPENDIX, Some Absolute Limits - The Church Before the Watching World by Francis Schaeffer, 1994]

