

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
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of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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The First Baptist Distinctive

Part Three: What Baptists Have Said

Over the past couple of essays I have been arguing that the first Baptist distinctive is not Biblical authority, but rather the absolute authority of the New Testament in all matters of church faith and order. So far, however, you have only my reasons and my word that Baptists have actually thought this way. Some may question whether historical evidence actually demonstrates that the affirmation of New Testament authority has been widely avowed and articulated by Baptists.

A few citations will help to evidence how widespread this belief is among different groups of Baptists. For example, J. M. Carroll may be taken as an example of the Landmark Baptist movement. In his famous booklet, *The Trail of Blood*, Carroll specifies that the church has for “[i]ts law and doctrines: the New Testament, and that only.” [Carroll, J. M. *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931), 56.]

Francis Wayland was one of the most famous Baptists in nineteenth century America. His influence was especially strong in the North. Wayland wrote, “The question is frequently asked, What is the creed, and what are the acknowledged standards of the Baptist churches in this country? To this, the general answer has ever been, ‘Our rule of faith and practice is the New Testament.’ We have no other authority to which we all profess submission.” As we shall

see later, Wayland was not disputing the value of confessions, but he was exalting the role of the New Testament as the authority for church faith and order. [Wayland, Francis. *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Company, 1857), 13.]

Another northern Baptist who clearly articulated this principle was W. H. H. Marsh. Marsh was a generation or so removed from Wayland, but he, too, recognized the importance of New Testament authority.

The constituency of the New Testament church should be determined by the New Testament itself. This accords with the facts of the case. True, the Old and New Testament together are the word of God. But the former was first given to the descendants of Abraham after the flesh. The New Testament was given to the constituencies of the churches established by the preaching of the gospel, and as an *ex post facto* interpretation of the Old. Therefore we must look into the latter, not the former, for the definition of the constituency of the New Testament Church. Here is the real controversy between Baptists and evangelical Pedobaptists. The former as tenaciously hold the Old Testament to be part of the word of God as do the latter. The latter agree with the former, as we shall see, that the New is an *ex post facto* interpretation of the Old. We submit, therefore, that while the Old Testament defines the constituency, government, and mission of the Hebrew Commonwealth, the New defines each and all of these for the visible Church of the New Testament. [Marsh, W. H. H. *The New Testament Church* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1898), 20.]

Southern Baptists have affirmed this principle with as much vigor as those in the North. One of the great Baptist theologians of the South was B. H. Carroll. Concerning the first Baptist distinctive, Carroll wrote,

All the New Testament is the Law of Christianity. The New Testament is all the Law of Christianity. The New Testament will always be the Law of Christianity. This does not deny the inspiration or profit of the Old Testament, nor that the New is a development of the Old. It affirms, however, that the Old Testament, as a typical, educational 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 Old Testament to find Christian law or Christian institutions. . . . This is not a question of what is the Bible. If it were, Baptists would not be distinguished from many Protestants in rejecting the apocryphal additions incorporated by Romanists in their Old Testament. Nor is it a stand with Chillingworth on the proposition, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, the religion of Protestants." If it were, Baptists would not be distinguished from many Protestants in rejecting the equal authority of tradition as held by the Romanists. But when Baptists say that the New Testament is the only law for Christian institutions they part company, if not theoretically at least practically, with

most of the Protestant world, as well as from the Greeks and Romanists. [Carroll, B. H. *Baptists and Their Doctrines: Sermons on Distinctive Baptist Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1913), 9-10.]

The New Testament is the law of Christianity. All the New Testament is the law of Christianity. The New Testament is all the law of Christianity. The New Testament will always be the law of Christianity. Avaunt, 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, clearer than a silver trumpet and sweeter than the chime of bells, a voice that freights and glorifies the breeze or gale that bears it. O Earth, hearken to it: *The New Testament is the law of Christianity!* [Carroll, B. H. *Baptists and Their Doctrines: Sermons on Distinctive Baptist Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1913), 13-14.]

Probably no handbook on Baptist polity has been more widely used than Edward Hiscox's *New Directory for Baptist Churches*. In fact, the original edition of this work is still in print under the title *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*. It has served as a guide for millions of Baptists in the United States. Hiscox affirmed the absolute authority of the New Testament in the following words: "The New Testament is the constitution of Christianity, the charter of the Christian Church, the only authoritative code of ecclesiastical law, and the warrant and justification of all Christian institutions." [Hiscox, Edward T. *New Directory of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1894), 11. Reprinted as *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980).]

Piling up so many quotations from old Baptist theologians may seem a bit pedantic, but it serves a purpose. These Baptists of yore represent very different branches of Baptist thought. They disagreed among themselves over several rather important issues. They all agreed, however, that the New Testament is the final and absolute authority in all matters related to church faith and order. The historical evidence attests that real Baptists have always acknowledged the sole authority of the New Testament in all matters of church faith and order, and that they have regarded this as one of their most important distinctives. ✕

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

The Psalms of David in Metre
with Notes by John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787)
Book 5, Psalms 107-150

- 1 Blessed are they that undefil'd,
and straight are in the way;
Who in the Lord's most holy law
do walk, and do not stray.
- 2 Blessed are they who to observe
his statutes are inclin'd;
And who do seek the living God
with their whole heart and mind.
- 3 Such in his ways do walk, and they
do no iniquity.
- 4 Thou hast commanded us to keep
thy precepts carefully.
- 5 O that thy statutes to observe
thou would'st my ways direct!
- 6 Then shall I not be sham'd, when I
thy precepts all respect.
- 7 Then with integrity of heart
thee will I praise and bless,
When I the judgments all have learn'd
of thy pure righteousness.
- 8 That I will keep thy statutes all
firmly resolv'd have I:
O do not then, most gracious God,
forsake me utterly. ✠

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