

**“Answering The Call To A Great Commission Resurgence”**  
**By**  
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In June 1985 Southern Baptists gathered in Dallas, Texas for their annual Convention. It would be the largest gathering of a Protestant denomination in history. More than 45,000 messengers met as the “Battle for the Bible” reached a feverish pitch. The future of the Southern Baptist Convention was as yet undecided.

On Monday night prior to the Convention’s two day meeting, Dr. W.A. Criswell, in his 58<sup>th</sup> year in the ministry, closed out the two day Pastors Conference. The date was June 10, 1985. The title of his address: “Whether We Live Or Die.” His message was historic. Dr. Criswell well understood the urgency of the hour and what was at stake. He knew our denomination was at a crossroads and that the decisions we would make in the coming years would chart our course and impact the health of our Convention. He was convinced that we had before us two options: one road would lead to life and usefulness for the Kingdom of God. The other would lead to decline and eventually death. Much was on the line.

I believe Southern Baptists may be facing a similar scenario a little more than 20 years later. The context is different, but once again we are confronted with important issues that cannot be ignored or papered over. And, they must not be caricatured or misrepresented. We must face them squarely, honestly and most of all biblically and theologically. Only then will we discover if we can truly walk together.

The dawn of a new century confronts the Church of Jesus Christ with significant new challenges. This is true nationally and on a global scale. Southern Baptists, in

particular, have entered a zone of generational transition that is exciting, but also uncertain. The previous generation had leaders who were loved and respected, trusted and followed. Today there is a tremendous void if not a vacuum. There is something of a leadership crisis. The death of Adrian Rogers is, in my judgment, the symbolic moment that signaled a new day in terms of leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention. It may be that God will not raise up a single individual whose larger than life personality captures our devotion. That may be best. What is clear, however, is that we need godly men who can help us move forward in concert for the glory of God, the building of the Church, and the evangelization of the nations. We need men of character and substance, vision and wisdom, humility and conviction. We desperately need leaders who can guide us and challenge us. Such leaders will not demand leadership, for true leadership is not demanded. It is given. It is given by those who believe and trust men they believe can lead them to do greater things for the glory of God.

I am convinced we need men with a vision for what can be called “A Great Commission Resurgence.” Early this year several of us began talking about such a movement. Building on the “Conservative Resurgence” that was initiated in 1979, we believe the time has come for us to focus on the great task the Lord Jesus left us as He ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:8). Fulfilling the task will in no way leave behind or neglect an equal commitment to a faithful biblical theology. In fact, it will naturally grow out of that kind of theology. There is no question in my mind that a true and genuine Great Commission Resurgence will of necessity be wed to a strong and healthy theology. Such a theology will have definite and non-negotiable parameters. However, it

will avoid a suffocating system that paralyzes our passion to be aggressive in our personal witness and to take the gospel around the globe.

With this preamble before us, I want to raise and attempt to answer two questions: 1) Why should we come together in a Great Commission Resurgence? 2) How can we come together in a Great Commission Resurgence? Some may question the wisdom or even the appropriateness of my raising these questions at a conference on Calvinism. If you happen to fall into that camp, you of all people, I pray, will lend your ear to my brief proposal. You see I believe this meeting is exactly the place where a Great Commission Resurgence should receive a hearty and unanimous “amen!”

### **I. Why Should We Come Together In A Great Commission Resurgence?**

I believe there are a number of compelling reasons why the overwhelming majority of us should be able to come together in a Great Commission Resurgence. I will purposefully limit my observations to 7, though the list could easily be expanded.

**1) We are in agreement as to a common Confession of Faith to guide us, The Baptist Faith and Message 2000.** This statement is not perfect nor is it exhaustive. However, it is sufficient to provide a theological consensus for our cooperation in obeying the Great Commission. Some of us may confess more than what is found in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. I certainly do. However, we will not confess less than what this document affirms. Further, in the context of Calvinism, we will not require more or less than this statement affirms, from any direction or perspective. The tent here is big enough for all of us.

### **2) We are in agreement on the inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency of the Bible.**

Though the precise terms of “inerrancy” and “infallibility” do not appear in article I on

“the Scriptures,” the affirmation that “all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy” equates to the same. This common commitment separates us from the liberal and neoorthodox theologies that have drained the spiritual life and vitality out of the mainline denominations. Some would say the battle for the Bible has been won and it is time to move on. I would sound a word of warning. The battle over the Word of God did not begin in 1979, it started in the Garden of Eden. The battle for biblical authority will never be completely and finally won until Christ returns in power and glory. Each generation of believers must reaffirm its commitment to Holy Scripture as its sole and sufficient source of authority in all matters.

**3) We are in agreement on the necessity of a regenerate church.** Southern Baptist may have faltered and stumbled over this at their annual meeting in 2006 and 2007, but I believe we will soon get this right as a Convention body. Why am I optimistic on this point? First, because it is biblical. Second, because historically a regenerate church has always been a characteristic of Baptist theology. Now it is evident we have some serious work to do in this area. Some of the conversations and discussions in recent years concerning this doctrinal distinctive have been shallow and sloppy theologically. However, let us lead the way in educating our people to think more biblically about this vital doctrine. Derisive comments and condescending attitudes toward those who, as of yet, do not see the issue clearly, will be of little value. Let’s shepherd them in the right theological direction.

**4) We are in agreement on the exclusivity of the gospel.** Article IV of *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* on Salvation is clear: “There is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.” The heresies of soteriological universalism and inclusivism are not

welcomed in Southern Baptist life. They are ruled out of bounds by the witness of Jesus (John 14:6), Peter (Acts 4:12) and Paul (1 Tim. 2:5). It is our agreement on this theological tenet that should serve as a major motivation for a revived devotion to the Great Commission. People are lost, eternally lost, without Christ. He came by His own confession, “to seek and save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). How can we who call Him Lord do less? Charles Spurgeon gets in our business when he says, “Someone asked will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved? It is more a question with me whether we – who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not – can be saved.”

**5) We are in agreement on the sinfulness and lostness of humanity apart from Christ.** We are of one mind that humans are born in a sinful state. Now to be sure, some see our state as sinners to be a more severe condition than do others. Yet none of us believes that we come into this world with a neutral or positive moral inclination. No, we are sinners both by nature and by choice. All aspects of our being is infected with the disease of sin. As a result no one seeks after God apart from the initiating work of the Holy Spirit. Our sinfulness does not destroy God’s image in us, but it is certainly and clearly defaced and damaged. Some of us again may confess more than this, but none of us will confess less.

**6) We are in agreement that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Salvation is a free gift in which human works plays no part.** In our doctrine of salvation, we should start with God and not man. I believe we all can agree on this. The Bible affirms that salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9) and that by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift – not from works, so that no

one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible teaches that salvation is God's work. He is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He takes the initiative. He is the true Seeker! And yet the Bible also teaches that we must respond and that we are responsible to repent and exercise faith in Christ. There is a clear biblical balance that must be maintained.

We therefore should affirm the truth both of God's sovereignty and human freewill. *The Abstract of Principles* was the founding confession for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was penned by Basil Manly Jr. in 1859. Manly was a classic Calvinist, and yet Article IV on Providence reveals a healthy, theological balance in our Baptist forefather. Manly wrote:

“God from eternity decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be author or approver of sin nor to destroy *the freewill and responsibility* of intelligent creatures” (*emphasis mine*).

Together we can confess that the Bible teaches that God predestines and elects persons to salvation, but that He does so in such a way as to do no violence to their freewill and responsibility to repent from sin and believe the Gospel. Will we have differences among us in how we nuance this issue? No doubt! Is there a tension here? Yes. Is there divine mystery? Absolutely! Do not let this reality be a discouragement. I believe this is what Paul felt when, at the end of his magnificent treatment of this subject in Romans 9-11, he concludes with a doxology of praise and says, *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and untraceable His ways* (Romans 11:33). It is a challenge to fathom the depths of this doctrine. In humility we should gladly and readily acknowledge that, and we also should

show respect toward those who do not line up on the issue exactly as do we. Let us listen to each other. Let us learn from each other as we have in this conference.

**7) We are in agreement that the Great Commission is a divinely mandated assignment given to the Church by the Lord Jesus and that it is a task we are to give ourselves until the end of the age.**

The modern missionary movement was launched by a Baptist. It was also launched by a Calvinist. His name was William Carey. He represents the best and healthiest stream of the Calvinist tradition and one I can enthusiastically embrace. Carey did not receive universal support in his desire to get the gospel to the “heathen” as they were called in his day. There was another tributary of Calvinism that was resolute in its opposition to the aspirations of young William. This type of Calvinism was of no value in Carey’s day. It is of no value in our day. I believe significant headway can be made as we depart from this conference if, in heart and confession, it can be said, I am a “Carey Calvinist.” I am a “Judson Calvinist.” I am a “Spurgeon Calvinist.” I am a Calvinist who embraces with my whole being our Lord’s command to take the gospel across the street and around the world. Anything less puts a person outside the camp of Southern Baptist. It is to deny our heritage and misunderstand our identity. It is to neglect Christ’s command, disobey his last words, and miss the promised blessing that attends all who take up this holy assignment. Now less I be viewed as unfairly picking on my Calvinist brethren, let me quickly add that there are too many non-Calvinist who talk the talk but do not walk the walk. They do not put their money where their mouth is, few if any answer the call to take the gospel to the nations from their churches, and their slick worship services, cute gimmicks and selling of an unrecognizable Christianity is equally tragic and distasteful. We all have much to

repent of when it comes to, not our verbal agreement about the Great Commission, but our obeying the Great Commission. After all, I have never met a Southern Baptist who says I am a non-Great Commission Christian. They would never say this is who they are. They just live like this is who they are.

Here then are 7 major areas of confessional and ideological agreement. Here are theological and practical truths that faithful Southern Baptists can embrace, Calvinist and non-Calvinist alike. I believe the argument has been made for why we should come together. Let me now address the second question we must consider.

## **II. How Can We Come Together In A Great Commission Resurgence?**

I have had a singular and unique privilege in my Christian and Southern Baptist pilgrimage. Personally, I believe I am the better for it. On the one hand I served alongside Dr. Paige Patterson for 9 years, and studied under him for 3 years. He was my preaching professor and preached my ordination. He is my father in the ministry and a self-professed non-Calvinist. On the other hand I also served beside Dr. Al Mohler for almost 8 years at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I helped him build the wonderful faculty of our mother seminary. He is one of my closest and best friends.

During those 17 years never did I find myself in a theological quandary. I never felt any pressure to compromise personal convictions. My theology is not identical or lock step with either Dr. Patterson or Dr. Mohler. However, please hear me. Though our theology is not identical, it is wonderfully and happily compatible. On the essential, non-negotiables of orthodox Christianity and Baptist theology, we see eye-to-eye with no disagreement, not one. Now, that did not prevent many hours of

spirited discussion on numerous issues. On more than a few occasions we discussed, and sometimes debated, issues like Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Particular Redemption and Effectual Calling. We had healthy conversations about the timing of the Rapture (never its truth), plurality of elders, cessationism of spiritual gifts, the best way to interpret Genesis 1, and the pros and cons of Calvin, Luther, the Anabaptists, Wesley, Whitfield, Edwards, Owen, Gill, Mullins and, Conner. We talked about the best form of Apologetics and if I remember correctly, landed in 3 different camps.

Still, we worked together and we worked together well. At least that was my perspective. How did we do it? How can we do it as Southern Baptists? I put forward 5 propositions for our careful, even prayerful, consideration. I will state them in the form of theological and practical axioms I again would hope we all can embrace.

**1) We need a sound theology, not a soft theology or a straight-jacket theology.**

Our agreement on the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* is an asset not a weakness. It is a plus and not a minus. If I were to pen my own confession it would not look exactly like the *BF&M 2000*. But then I do not want nor do I need people exactly like me in order to work together for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the building of His church. Our Confession is a solid foundation for a sound theology that avoids the pitfalls and quicksand of a straight-jacket theology. Do we want, do we need, a theology that rules out of bounds open theism, universalism and inclusivism, faulty perspectives on the atonement, gender-role confusion, works salvation, apostasy of true believers, infant baptism and non-

congregational ecclesiologies just to name a few? Yes we do. These theological errors have never characterized who we are and they have no place in our denomination today. Inerrancy is not up for debate. The deity of Jesus and His sinless life are not up for debate. The triune nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not up for debate. The perfect atoning work of Christ as a penal substitute for sinners is not up for debate. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is not up for debate. A regenerate church should not be up for debate. Believers' baptism by immersion should not be up for debate. The glorious historical and personal return of Jesus Christ is not up for debate. The reality of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell are not up for debate. There is nothing soft about this kind of theology, and we must avoid a soft theology at all cost.

On the other hand, we must also be on guard against a straight-jacket theology that would bind us and potentially suffocate us. For clarity's sake let me illustrate. I will be pointed.

I have Calvinist friends who say they hope and pray for the day when all of our seminaries have presidents and faculties that are 5-point Calvinist. It is their dream that we would be a denomination that looks exactly like the Baptist participants in "Together for the Gospel" and John MacArthur's "Shepherds Conference." Let me quickly note that most of these men are friends of mine who have spoken at the seminaries I have served. I again intend to invite each of them to grace the campus of Southeastern in the future. Is this my vision for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention? No, it is not.

I also have friends who pray Calvinism will just go away. The first question they ask me when I mention a pastor or professor is not, “does he have a PPL,” but “is he a Calvinist?” They believe conferences like this are ill-advised and of no real value. They would mandate, if they could, that there would be no classic Calvinists in our seminaries, and they would never, under any circumstances, support a 5-point Calvinist for an office in the Southern Baptist Convention. They would even hint that one’s position on Calvinism be a litmus-test for appointment as an IMB or NAMB missionary. Is this my vision for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention? No, it is not. Either perspective is too extreme and will weaken our denomination. Either perspective also ignores a major stream in our historical identity. We are better than this. At least, I pray that we are.

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* is a well-constructed canopy under which varying perspectives on the issue of Calvinism can peacefully and helpfully co-exist. Is there a place for differing positions on the issues of election, the extent of the atonement and calling, as well as the details of how we do missions, evangelism, and give the invitation? I am convinced that the answer is yes.

Further, I believe we will be the better for it theologically and practically as we engage each other in respectful and serious conversation. As one who considers himself to be a compatibilist, affirming the majestic mystery of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, I have been challenged and strengthened in my own theological understanding by those less reformed than I as well as those more reformed than I happen to be. Because of our passionate commitments to the glory of God, the Lordship of Christ, biblical authority, salvation by grace through faith, and

the Great Commission, we should be able work in wonderful harmony with each other.

**2) We need to let a biblical theology drive and determine our systematic theology.**

**theology.** Any theological system runs a danger in that it can become a master rather than a servant to the biblical revelation. It runs the risk of squeezing the biblical text to fit its necessary parameters and thus making the Bible say what it actually does not say. This is true of any system of theology, whether it is Calvinism or Arminianism; Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology; Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy or even some forms of Evangelicalism.

I believe the safeguard that will keep us from falling into this theological trap is to let a biblical theology drive, determine and dictate our systematic theology. We must have a text-driven theological system. This will enable us to avoid those theological ghettos that may espouse a nice, neat theological system, but that do so at the expense of a wholesome, well-rounded and comprehensive theology. Will this force us to live with some tension in our system? The answer of course is yes. That, however, is a small price to pay for biblical fidelity in exegesis and theological balance in our system.

When John MacArthur was at Southern Seminary during my service there, he was asked an interesting question about predestination, election and prayer. His response was quite interesting: “I do not let my Reformed theology get in the way of my prayers for the salvation of my children and grandchildren. I pray and ask God to save each and every one of them.” I appreciate the pastoral sensitivity, personal

concern, and theological balance in his perspective. The same spirit is evident in the heart of Charles Spurgeon who is such a worthy model for all of us in this discussion.

We all know Charles Spurgeon was a five-point Calvinist. This is not debatable. Yet, he was also a passionate evangelist and soul winner. On August 1, 1858, he preached a sermon entitled, “Sovereign Grace and Man’s Responsibility.” The words of wisdom that flowed from his mouth on that day could only come from a capable pastor/theologian with a shepherd’s heart and a love for the lost. Here are words we all should embrace.

I see one place, God presiding over all in providence; and yet I see and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions to his own will, in great measure. Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there was no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to Atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free enough to be responsible, I am driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring....You ask me to reconcile the two. I answer, they do not want any reconciliation; I never tried to reconcile them to myself, because I could never see a discrepancy....Both are true; no two truths can be inconsistent with each other; and what you have to do is to believe them both.

**3) We need a revival of authentic expository preaching that will lead us to be genuine people of the book.** Our denomination has suffered, and suffered terribly, because of the absence of true and authentic biblical exposition. Seduced by the sirens of modernity, we have jettisoned the faithful and consistent proclamation of the Word of God. Many of us thought the Conservative Resurgence would provide

healing to this malady that plagues the body of Christ like a cancer. Tragically, this has not been the case.

Unfortunately we have a generation of preachers, good and godly men, who believe themselves to be expositors, when what they do in the pulpit betrays their confession. Too much of our SBC preaching sounds like the classic liberal Harry Emerson Fosdick who used the pulpit as a counseling office and a self-help seminar. Our seminaries clearly share in the responsibility of our current plight, though the speed in which so many of our preachers flee to the newest homiletical fads bespeaks an even greater spiritual and theological problem.

In the days ahead we must aggressively pursue a pulpit agenda of what I would call “engaging theological exposition.” We must wed substance and style, content and delivery. We must teach the whole counsel of Scripture book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse and word by word. We must honor the text and its context recognizing that the Holy Spirit of God gave us the Scriptures as we have them. To rearrange and manipulate the text of Scripture is to correct the Holy Spirit and play the fool.

Authentic exposition will bring biblical balance to our theology and force us to engage the tough doctrines of Scripture. It will also cultivate a pastoral perspective that results in a love for the Savior’s sheep and the lost.

Authentic exposition will also help us recapture the truth of Luke 24 that all of the Bible testifies to Christ. It will pursue its holy assignment in light of the Grand Redemptive Story of Scripture. Moralistic and self-help preaching will be set aside as weak and wholly inadequate in building healthy churches and healthy doctrine.

Rather, we will preach the Bible in such a way that Jesus is always seen as the hero and Savior of sinners who cannot save themselves. We will not preach the Old Testament like a Jewish rabbi, nor will we preach any text like a sanctified Dr. Phil or Tony Robbins. We will bind our mind, heart and soul to the text of Scripture in a sacred commitment that will be characterized by a fidelity that is reflected in the covenant of marriage itself. Worship the Bible? Never? Love and honor the Bible? Always, both in what I say about it and in how I handle it.

#### **4) We need the balance of a Great Commission Theology.**

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 the apostle Paul makes a remarkable statement: “imitate me as I imitate Christ.” I would submit to all of us that is exactly what we need to do as we join in an unbreakable and permanent union the twin disciplines of theology and missions. I am convinced that the greatest missionary and theologian who ever lived was Jesus. I believe the greatest Christian missionary and theologian who ever lived was Paul. The Son of God came down from heaven on missionary assignment “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to show us the Father (John 1:18) and to reveal how all of scripture is fulfilled in Him (Luke 24). No man ever spoke or taught like our Lord. He saw no dichotomy between being a passionate evangelist and a committed theologian, and neither should we.

Paul was no different, for he sought to imitate Christ in all that he did. Therefore he could write Romans and Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians, Colossians and the Pastorals. He could also spend his energy and give his life in at least 4 missionary journeys (3 recorded in Acts) because he knew without a preacher people will not hear and without hearing people will not be saved (Romans 10).

I run the risk of caricature and stereotype, but let me take the risk anyway. Some of my semi-Arminian friends (I do not think there are any consistent, self-conscience Arminians in the SBC) need to become better and more careful theologians. They need to study theology themselves as life-long learners, and they need to teach theology to their people. We do our Lord and our people a tremendous disservice with an anemic, soundbite, dumbed-down theological diet. No wonder so many starving souls are running to the banquet tables of Piper, MacArther, Begg and others of a Reformed orientation. Quit whining about first, second and third John (Calvin, MacArthur and Piper) and raise the theological bar in your church, and teach the content and theology in the First, Second, and Third John of the Bible. Train and equip your people so that they can engage “the doctrines of grace” and other theological issues intelligently and graciously.

In contrast, some of my hyper-active Calvinist friends (I do not think there are many, if any, consistent self-conscience hyper-Calvinists in the SBC) need to get out of their study and onto the mission fields. They need to hit the streets and become hot-hearted evangelists for Jesus Christ and not John Calvin. This year I traveled to 8 countries visiting and ministering with our 2+2/2+3 missions students. I saw the lostness of the world up close and personal. This summer and fall, I have immersed myself in missionary biographies. I spent quality time with William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Bill Wallace and Lottie Moon. I discovered something very interesting. All four, including Lottie Moon and Bill Wallace as best I can tell, were Calvinists. However, none of the three wore it on their sleeves or on their chest as a badge of honor. They were too busy trusting in the providence of a sovereign God

and pursuing the souls of lost men and women to get sidetracked with those types of theological debates that lead us down a dead end street. We spend our time talking and arguing while they spent their time going and telling. Is your theology leading you to go to the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you building, where you serve, a Great Commission church? Do you pine for the salvation of the lost with the same zeal that you pine for theology? Good missionaries will be good theologians, and good theologians will be good missionaries. John Piper recently said all true Calvinists will be missionaries. I think he's right. A strong view of God's sovereignty should lead to courage and obedience in evangelism and missions.

**5) We need to love and respect each other as brothers and sisters in Christ even though we are not in complete agreement on every point of theology.**

One of our problems has been semi-Arminians with an attitude and Calvinists with a chip on their shoulder. The shrill rhetoric, sloppy history and theology, and unchristian words and actions on both sides of this issue have resulted in a number of unnecessary misfortunes. Misrepresentations of our brothers and sisters positions on this issue have prevented healthy and honest conversations. Hidden agendas have divided churches and fractured fellowships. False caricatures have made for cute soundbites, but they lack Christian charity and integrity. All in all the cause of Christ and the well-being of His body has been damaged.

When Dr. Adrian Rogers died in November 2005 many of us wept in sorrow at the loss of this great man to the church and especially Southern Baptists. However, not everyone felt this way. The day of his death my son Jonathan was teaching at Boyce College on the campus of Southern Seminary. He shared with his class the

homegoing of Dr. Rogers during their time of prayer. Later, after class, a student approached him and said he could see that Jonathan was grieving over Dr. Rogers death, but then he said “Don’t you think the death of Adrian Rogers is a great thing for the cause of Calvinism in the SBC?” Jonathan was speechless and so was I when he told me. Let me remind all of us at this conference that if it were not for Adrian Rogers, we would not be here today and the SBC would not be discussing Calvinism but homosexuality, universalism and feminism.

However, the pendulum does not swing only in one direction. Comparing Calvinists to Muslims, accusing them of fatalism, and stating that there is no such thing as an evangelistic Calvinist is either ignorant or dishonest or both. I am not sure which is worse. Are there non-evangelistic Calvinists? Of course the answer is yes and they should be ashamed of themselves. They fail to represent the best and healthiest stream of that tradition. But, are there non-evangelistic semi-Arminians who are derelict in sharing their faith and building a Great Commission church? Absolutely. Southern Baptists are continuing to experience a decline in baptisms. And yet there is no question that the overwhelming majority of our churches are not pastored by 5-point Calvinists. Could it be that the real problem is not Calvinism, but a lack of love for Christ, an inadequate theology that is robust, and agendas for church life that push to the back row the reaching of the lost both at home and across the globe? Could it be that our lack of demonstrable and evidential love for one another on numerous levels has compromised and wounded our witness? Dear brothers and sisters let us not forget that it is not by a perfect theology that the world will know we are Christians. It is by the way we love one another. Approximately

six months before he died I had lunch with Adrian Rogers in Memphis. We talked about the current state of the SBC, the conflict and confusion which was showing up at every turn. With his typical wisdom and insight he gave an analogy that captured perfectly where we are and why we are here. During the Conservative Resurgence Bible believing Southern Baptists stood shoulder to shoulder as we faced an enemy, theological liberalism, that would destroy us if given the chance. Minor differences in theology and methodology did not trouble us because our attention was directed towards our common enemy. Today, we do not find ourselves shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield. Now we are in the barracks looking face to face into each others eyes. Because many of us are in the habit of fighting, we are now fighting, not the real enemy, but one another. The real enemy is Satan, the world and the flesh. What we need to do is get back on the battlefield and engage once again our real opponent and adversary. Dr. Rogers was right. We need to be shoulder to shoulder, back on the battlefield, with the sword of the Spirit and the unconquerable gospel of Jesus Christ. That is where the real enemy is located. That is where the real war is going on.

### **Conclusion**

The modern missionary movement was birthed out of evangelical Calvinism both in Great Britain with William Carey and in America with Adoniram Judson. Both drank from the well named David Brainerd. He drew nourishment from Jonathan Edwards. Would it not be a remarkable providence of our sovereign God if a conference on Calvinism was the genesis and spark of a Great Commission Resurgence among Southern Baptists? Wedding a healthy, well-informed and robust

theology to a consuming passion for the evangelization of the nations, we come together, as never before, to carry out the final command given by King Jesus. I believe our Baptist Fellowship is big enough, in all the right ways, to have room for William Carey, Andrew Fuller, Luther Rice, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon, John L. Dagg, Basil Manly Sr. and Jr., Lottie Moon, and Annie Armstrong. I believe it is big enough to include Al Mohler and Paige Patterson, Voddie Bauchman and J.D. Greer, Adrian Rogers and Timothy George, Jerry Vines and Mark Dever, W.A. Criswell and Hershel Hobbs, Buddy Gray and Johnny Hunt, Andy Davis and Steve Gaines, Danny Akin and Tom Ascol. We may not agree on everything, but we agree on more than enough to work together for our Lord Jesus in fulfilling the Great Commission. So, will we live or will we die? Will we come together for life or fracture apart in death? I make my choice for life. It is my hope and my prayer that you will join me.