

# A Modern Baptist Secret REVEALED



‘Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.’

**Jeremiah 6:16**

## The Objection Stated

The English dictionary defines *pretense* as: a claim made or implied, especially one not supported by fact; a false show. Multitudes in the American Southeast have accepted that the Baptist Southerner of today is the Baptist Southerner that has been and ought always to be. We cannot accept this view.

The facts of history and of God's Word serve to make this issue more clear for the modern Baptist. In the light of those facts, we suggest that the modern notion of a Southern Baptist is a pretense.

## The Facts Are These

The words of Pastor Robert Selph fully capture the nature of the issue today among the Baptists of the South. "Through the years Baptists have been rightly called 'people of the Book' due to their unswerving conviction that the Bible is the Word of God. ... The watchword for this people is *evangelism*. ... However, there is a doctrinal heritage to the Southern Baptist Convention that many Baptists are not aware of. The central truth of this doctrinal heritage, which has been 'decentralized' over the years, is the doctrine of unconditional election."

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"This teaching was not merely a side issue which provided seminary students with some nonessential moments of trivial debate. This truth of unconditional election was the foundation, the heart, and the hub of all Bible truth. This doctrine was for Baptists the backbone of Gospel preaching and missionary endeavor. The worship, evangelism, and service of Southern Baptists for eighty years was molded and directed by this precious truth. Hymns, confessions, catechisms, and doctrinal standards signed by seminary professors all reflected the universal acknowledgement of this doctrine among Baptists."

It might be added further that this doctrine is a fundamental component of the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God which underlies it. It epitomizes all of God's behavior towards His creation and should guide all of our behavior as Christians in that creation.

Selph continues, "Today, many Southern Baptists, along with most evangelicals, consider the doctrine of election to be nonessential, detrimental to evangelism, a threat to missionary zeal, a contradiction to the love and fairness of God, and divisive to the churches. This attitude is so different from what Baptists use to embrace." \*

## Says Who

All of the names of respectable Baptist forebears who held dearly to this fundamental doctrine are too many to list here. Reaching back prior to the inception of the Southern Baptist Convention, to the very forming of this nation, they were such men as Roger Williams, Benjamin Keach, John Gill, Isaac Backus, William Carey, Luther Rice, and Adoniram Judson, to name only some. From the inception of the Southern Baptist Convention forward for at least eighty years the names did not diminish in number. They include the likes of J.L. Dagg, J.P. Boyce, John Broadus, B.H. Carroll, W.B. Johnson (the 1<sup>st</sup> president of the SBC), and J.B. Gambrell.

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The consensus of these Baptist giants of the past was that the God of the universe was a sovereign God in every way, exactly as the Scriptures teach, and that the salvation He perfectly and completely secured on the cross (Heb.10:14) was distributed to as many as He had determined to save according to His wise and eternal purpose (Eph.1:3-9).

These men together stood on the doctrine of the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, the confession of the first Southern Baptist Association in America founded in 1751, when it declared that, "Although God knows everything ... yet He has not decreed anything

because He foresaw it in the future, or because it would come to pass under certain conditions. By the decree of God ... some men and angels are predestinated or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace. Others are left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.” (Chp.3, Sec.2-3)

## Conflict or Cover-up

A frequent and primary objection to this old Baptist doctrine is that such teaching destroys the work of evangelism. Such an objection is offered both by those who have not been shown the complete compatibility of the ‘great commission’ and the doctrine of unconditional election, and so do not know any better, and by those who may know the two are compatible but find their hearts or churches incompatible with accepting such doctrine.

Perhaps the words of J.B. Gambrell (Pres. of the SBC 1917-1920) in his book *Baptist Principles Reset*, as recorded by Selph, serve to address this objection. He says, “We may invigorate our faith and renew our courage by reflecting that divine power has always attended the preaching of doctrine when done in the true spirit of

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preaching. Great revivals have accompanied the heroic preaching of the doctrines of grace – predestination, election, and that whole lofty mountain range of doctrines upon which Jehovah sits enthroned, sovereign in grace, as in all things else. God honors the preaching that honors Him. There is entirely too much milk-sop preaching nowadays – trying to cajole sinners to enter upon a truce with their Maker – ‘Quit sinning and join the church’.”

“The situation does not call for a truce, but for a surrender. Let us bring on the heavy artillery of heaven and thunder away at the stuck-up age as Whitefield, Edwards, Spurgeon, and Paul did and there will be many slain of the Lord raised to walk in newness of life.” \*

In commenting on these words of Gambrell, Selph offers the following timely and wise thoughts that are of such value today as to beg repeating here in part.

“...Gambrell makes several points that should be considered in light of the present methods of evangelism prevalent among evangelicals today. First, he states that true evangelistic preaching consists of the preaching of doctrine, specifically the doctrines of grace. To Gambrell, there was no distinction between preaching doctrine and preaching Jesus. ... When they [preachers] preached God’s electing and sovereign grace they were, in fact, preaching the purest Jesus.”

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“Secondly, Gambrell believed greater emphasis in preaching should be given to the exalting of God. ... Gambrell knew that only the doctrine of unconditional election accomplishes such exaltation of Jehovah.”

“Thirdly, Gambrell spoke of simplistic man-centered evangelism, such as, ‘Just sell folks on a limited number of half-truths in order to get their ‘decision’ and church membership and hope they stick enough to grow in that decision’. Apparently, in Gambrell’s day the Gospel presentation had been watered down to pursuing a human decision for Jesus and an external commitment to a church. ... In our ‘decision-oriented’ meetings man has become the sovereign one who is pleaded with to give God a chance. What a difference between our converts who ‘consent’ for God to save them by ‘accepting Jesus’ and the New Testament converts who pleaded in desperation for God in Christ to have mercy upon their poor, miserable souls.”

“Fourthly, Gambrell saw the correlation between preaching election as it is seen in the whole of God’s saving truths, and the duty of repentance. The doctrine of election exalted God as God, His Word as final, and His Law as holy and binding.”

“Lastly, Gambrell spoke of how the great doctrines of election and predestination are positive encouragements – motivation and

inspiration to the work of Gospel preaching. ... [by using] the preaching of the historic doctrines of grace (election, predestination, etc.) to bring many to Himself in salvation.” \*

The greatest mission endeavors and revivals in the history of the Church have been led by men who espoused the central doctrines perpetuated by Gambrell. Larger groups of ‘decisions’ may have been produced by massive modern outreach that ignores the old doctrines. Yet, never have more true disciples and faithful churches been produced than by the efforts of those who held to these doctrines of the old Baptist paths. A simple review of the history of the Church will inform the inquirer of the simple fact that there has never been a conflict between the true doctrines of the Word and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Never have those who have held to the ‘old paths’ of sovereign grace in election and predestination felt bound or hindered by those same doctrines in the work of evangelism.

To the modern Southern Baptist church, we ask, ‘Is there really conflict between the ‘old ways’ and the requirements of God’s Word? Or, has the truth of the matter been covered up?’

## The Prophet’s Voice

Following the voice of the prophet in Jer. 6:16, we submit the following questions for the modern Baptist: ‘Will you carry on in the ‘new paths’? Will you continue to accept that a Baptist Southerner today is the Southern Baptist of yesterday? Or, will you see that the Baptists of the South today have left their heritage and fallen into error? Will you ask for the ‘old paths’ and walk therein to the glory of our great and gracious God?’

Dear reader, it is our earnest desire to see the person and Word of Christ honored in the Church. Please join with us in seeking and walking in the ‘old paths’. We will find rest for our souls therein!

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### **Recommended Readings:**

*The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, also known as the Second London Confession of Faith.

*Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election* by Robert Selph.

*Some Southern Documents of the People Called Baptists* edited by Dr. H. Rondel Rumburg.

*A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* by Dr. John Gill.

\* Note: All text by Pastor Robert Selph taken from his book entitled *Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election* and included herein by his most gracious permission.

Dear Reader,

It is our desire to see the truth of God's Word, spread across our town, our country, and our world. If this booklet has been used by God to bless your life, please let us know so that we may rejoice with you and pray for you in the days ahead.

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