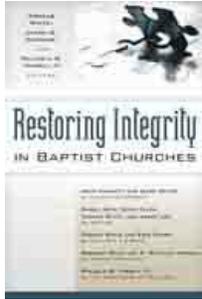


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## Restoring Ecclesiology

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A particular emphasis upon the nature and structure of the church has been central to the Baptist vision. In other words, ecclesiology is in many ways the chief contribution and distinctive of the Baptists. Sadly, you would not learn that by observing many Baptist congregations. Baptist ecclesiology has been eclipsed by pragmatism and undermined by neglect.

A helpful analysis of what must be recovered comes as *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, edited by Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell, III [Kregel]. The book contains chapters on the major issues that must be addressed if integrity in Baptist congregational life is to be recovered — including regenerate church membership, believers baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church discipline. Contributors represent a stellar group of Baptist scholars, including, among others, Mark Dever on church membership, Danny Akin on baptism, and Gregory Wills on church discipline.

From the chapter by Gregory A. Wills on church discipline:

*Southern Baptists experienced three tectonic shifts that reshaped Baptist identity and rendered church discipline implausible for both conservatives and progressives. First, they lost confidence that Christ commanded a specific ecclesiology and based church practices on pragmatic concerns, on human standards of effectiveness. Second, they adopted a new view of Baptist identity that led them to redefine ecclesiology and theology according to human experience, which among other things recast God in humanitarian terms and weakened their sense of the fear of God. Third, they took guardianship of the social order, which secularized the churches and eroded their commitment to separation from the world.*

*These commitments so altered Baptist piety that, all things considered, church discipline seemed ill suited to advance the aims of the contemporary church. It seemed ineffective for church growth and irrelevant for ministry in modern society. Southern Baptist pastors finally chose relevance over obedience and quieted their consciences over the loss.*

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