“David Dockery is the doyen of Christian higher education, having served as a mentor and role model for countless educators over the course of the past several decades. Dr. Dockery is a strong convictional leader and scholar whose strength is undergirded by wisdom and grace. Convictional Civility bears witness to this strength, wisdom, and grace, and for that reason, I highly recommend it.”

—Bruce Riley Ashford, provost and dean of faculty; associate professor of theology and culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“The title of this volume perfectly reflects the commitments of the honoree: David Dockery is a man of robust theological convictions, but no less committed to discourse characterized by civility. One inevitably recalls Paul’s exhortation to truth and love. The essays in this volume are diverse in character and scope; several assess Dockery’s contributions. But it is the theme of the book as a whole that is compelling, for it stands athwart twin monsters of our age—anemic theological sentimentality on the one hand, and bad-tempered ignorant dogmatism on the other—and cries ‘Stop!’ by showing a better way.”

—D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Reading this festschrift that honors the contributions of David Dockery to Christian higher education and to broader kingdom work, I was reminded of a book by Tom Rath titled Vital Friends: The People You Can’t Afford to Live Without. Friends and colleagues can certainly call out the best in one another, and this impressive collection of essays by friends of the Dockerys conveys the ripple effects of these faithful servant-leaders who have influenced so many lives for the better. At a time when Christian higher education and, indeed, our world need convictional civility as never before, this volume has much to offer. Heartfelt thanks, David and Lanese Dockery, for your faithfulness in showing the way!”

—Karen A. Longman, professor and program director, Doctoral Higher Education, Azusa Pacific University
“David Dockery’s careful biblical thinking, generous spirit, academic vision, wise leadership, and personal warmth shine through these snapshots of his life, theology, and service. A must read if you, like I, have been significantly impacted by this evangelical and Baptist statesman.”

—Christopher W. Morgan, dean and professor of Theology, California Baptist University

“For many of us in the business of Christian higher education, David Dockery has been a model in the way he has combined firm evangelical convictions, broad-based ecumenical charity, and unusual academic insight. Now, as he heads northwards after very productive years at Union University, this book reveals why I am delighted as a ‘Yankee evangelical’ that he has come over to help us. “

—Mark Noll, Francis A. McAnany Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

“David Dockery is an extraordinary Christian leader and gentleman. These essays are a fitting tribute because they both honor him for his own convictional civility and encourage the same faithful Christian engagement in others. I am grateful to recommend this volume.”

—Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO, LifeWay Christian Resources

“David Dockery is one of America’s most outstanding college presidents. His transformational leadership has been characterized by the rare combination of virtues that this volume celebrates and promotes: Christian charity, theological orthodoxy, and moral integrity.”

—Philip Ryken, president, Wheaton College
CONVICTIONAL CIVILITY

ENGAGING THE CULTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Essays in honor of

DAVID S..Dockery
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Foreword

Carla D. Sanderson

On the occasion of his transition from the presidency of Union University—a presidency marked by profound transformation in every indicator characteristic of excellence and quality—a handful of admirers have come together in this festschrift to honor David Samuel Dockery, the consummate academic and eminent scholar. A festschrift is a celebratory publication. But the Latin phrase for such a work is also fitting: liber amicorum, “a book of friends.” For at the heart of the matter, the friendship we share with David Dockery has inspired this book.

Let us note: this volume is not intended to signify the pinnacle of Dockery’s career, his retirement, or his culminating work as a senior statesman. It is not the placement of a period on his legacy but rather the placement of a commemorative semicolon.

Our team of contributors made up of colleagues, former students, and members of David Dockery’s leadership team have enjoyed a festival of writing reflective of his vision for contemporary engagement where witness is more important than winning and fidelity is more effective than fighting.

David Dockery was the first person I heard use the phrase “convictional civility.” Everything the man says follows from his work as a Bible scholar, and such is the case with this phrase. Convictional civility is a lifestyle of bearing witness for Christ and of contributing to the common good. From the pulpit to the public square and from the campus to the courtroom, followers
of Christ are to demonstrate Christian virtues through winsome civility and Christian values through wholehearted conviction.

This volume is divided into two parts. The first part includes essays featuring original research and informed perspective from respected and seasoned Christian leaders as well as former students who explore convictional civility through their disciplinary or vocational lenses. The second part features congratulatory tributes noting Dockery’s influence on the lives and leadership of those endeared to him, extending to him best wishes and gratitude.

James Leo Garrett Jr. begins with a review of Dockery’s life and works, giving focus to his contributions in biblical hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture. In a beautiful treatise on friendship, Timothy George explains how the two were inspired to pursue a shared dream, taking up their responsibility for theological revival through a shared vision for unity among Baptists and for Baptist solidarity with the larger evangelical world. Millard J. Erickson offers a practical guide that models Dockery’s precision of thought and expression. He provides steps to follow—such as self-understanding, empathy, and genuine listening—toward embracing convictional civility as a model for engaging our culture. R. Albert Mohler Jr. reminds us that God has commissioned his church to be faithful truth-tellers, speaking with convictional clarity in a secularized culture that rejects the moral authority of the God of the Bible. Robert Smith Jr. presents a sermon using Paul’s ministry of proclamation and witness, exegesis and experience, as an example of the “toughness, tenderness, and tears” required in our day. Gene C. Fant Jr. demonstrates how the Union University community found a leader worth following in Dockery and learned to follow conviction born from the calling that is our own. Testimony is given to how orthodoxy yields both hopefulness and optimism, even in the hard times like the tornado crisis that hit Union during Dockery’s tenure. Hunter Baker offers commentary on our Christian civilization, demonstrating how religion and education are the sustenance of our nation. He makes a case for the role Christian higher education plays in developing the civic muscle necessary to liberty. Autumn Alcott Ridenour challenges us to think about moral action, based on an Augustinian and Barthian interpretation, imaging God through union with Christ and union with fellow believers. Finally, C. Ben Mitchell delves into Baptist history, likening our forefathers’ advocacy for religious liberty to the expression of conviction that a civil society must accommodate. He draws out the implications
for convicational civility to the growing threats to rights of conscience faced by today’s health-care providers.

In the celebratory tributes to Dockery, readers will find inspiration in the descriptions of his qualities and characteristics: patient listening and perceptive filtering; graciousness of spirit; promoting solidarity for Christian values and principles in the secular world; prioritizing family and friendship; standing by others in times of crisis; the ability to encourage, uplift, and leave one in awe; the leadership to show how the Christian worldview can influence and galvanize Christ followers. The tributes also describe the challenging contexts of Dockery’s formative years and leadership: racial tension in the South during his youth; the resurgence of biblical conservatism in his early years as a scholar; his launch of a Christian higher education movement in the midst of secularization, globalization, and pluralization during his first tenure as a college president; and his quest for renewal and revitalization for Southern Baptists specifically and for the larger church more generally. In the classroom, from the pulpit, through the written word, and out of the boardroom has come visionary and transformative leadership.

I cannot identify the single, most important way in which David Dockery has influenced my life and work. I treasure the memories of the banter before leadership team meetings on topics ranging from sports and politics to denominational polity and evangelical news. Meetings started with a focus on birthdays, anniversaries, illnesses, and deaths of great leaders and Christian thinkers, many alive today and some long dead, but also on every person known as a member of the Union University community. I cherish the praying, hymn singing, movie discussions, book studies, ping-pong matches, meals, and laughter. I am thankful for his endurance with my shortcomings and his forbearance with us as a community. I am thankful for his patience in never overestimating what we could accomplish in one year, and I am thankful for his steadfastness in never underestimating what we could accomplish in five years.

I marvel at Dockery the intellectual, his insight and vision, his unswerving commitment and constant eye on the goal. I am grasped by his mind and his example in seeing everything in life—everything—through the lens of a learned faith and a deep theological understanding of human history. I cherish *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society Through Christian Higher Education* (B&H Academic, 2007), the playbook for Union University and a guide for life.
I marvel at the hands and heart of Lanese Huckeba Dockery. Learning from her example of biblical womanhood is my life goal. She is relational like Miriam; inspirational, accessible, wise, and collaborative like Deborah; loyal, hardworking, and determined like Ruth; patient, prayerful, and devoted like Hannah; facilitative, collaborative, and courageous like Esther; industrious, assertive, and hospitable like Martha; long-suffering and steadfast like Mary Magdalene; a good steward of influence like Lydia; and one who prioritizes a love relationship with Jesus like Mary of Bethany.

I am better because of Dockery’s leadership, especially the fully orbed view of incremental change that led to transformation: the framing, filtering, defining, and communicating required in change; the stewardship of vision and influence; the dependence on God; the inspiration from and reliance on Scripture; the reasoning together; the risk taking; the informed decision making; the establishing of a plan; and the dogged determination to carry it out. I am better because of the challenge placed on my role as provost. Dockery often said of us, “The Union University faculty is the best teaching faculty in the nation.” He said it, and we worked hard to live up to his expectations. His leadership over faculty development has most profoundly transformed Union over two decades of time. The most enduring application of convictional civility to me is Dockery’s deep belief in what higher education must be if we are to claim Christ as its head, combined with his gentle, tender, and compelling approach in making it happen. The leadership he modeled is *sine qua non* for the future of Christian higher education and Christian engagement in the world.

To use a few Wendell Berry phrases, I am “captured by gratitude” to have been appointed Union University provost by David Dockery. He has a profound “standing in my eyes” as a Baptist, evangelical, and Christian higher education statesman. I have experienced “God’s plenty” for having been close to his leadership, and I feel the ending of our time of service together “like an amputation.”

Thank you, DSD. You have forever transformed my alma mater and enhanced her reputation and reach into the broader evangelical world. It is a beautiful place, inside and out. Thank you for the work you have done for my denomination: you have solidified and enhanced the work of the church through theologically informed commitments made to Southern Baptists and to Tennessee Baptists in particular. Most of all, thank you for generations of Union University graduates who are convictional and committed believers,
standing in strong pulpits and seated in pews, zealous for the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our world is a better place because of them.

When I am old, I will say that the 1995–2014 years were the best years of my professional life, thanks to David S. Dockery. “I think it not in my brain only, but in my heart and in all the lengths of my bones.”

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Essays
David Samuel Dockery: Evangelical Baptist and the Doctrine of the Bible

James Leo Garrett Jr.

INTRODUCTION


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1 This chapter is a slightly updated revision of the author’s section on Dockery in his Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 704–11, and is published here by permission of Mercer University Press.
of Union University, Jackson, Tennessee, and professor of Christian studies and has presided over the expansion of this historic institution.²

Dockery has done considerable work as editor and coeditor of books. He has edited a work on the relationship of Southern Baptists to American evangelicals,³ a book of evangelical responses to postmodernism,⁴ and a festschrift for Millard J. Erickson.⁵ He has coedited two editions of a volume interpreting Baptist theologians,⁶ a festschrift for James Leo Garrett Jr.,⁷ a volume of nineteen essays on the different methods of biblical criticism and various issues for New Testament interpretation,⁸ a book consisting of divergent views of the Scriptures among Southern Baptists,⁹ a comprehensive textbook on biblical hermeneutics,¹⁰ a volume on the nature and future of Christian higher education,¹¹ and a volume concerning a Christian worldview for Christian higher education.¹² He was the general editor of Holman Bible Handbook¹³ and of Holman Concise Bible Commentary¹⁴ and the compiler of The Best of A. T. Robertson.¹⁵ He has been a consulting editor of Christianity Today since 1992.

Dockery is the author of two commentaries (Ephesians\textsuperscript{16} and Ecclesiastes\textsuperscript{17}), a volume on the Sermon on the Mount (with David Garland), and a volume on Christian higher education. He is also New Testament editor of the New American Commentary series. Co-editing a fifteen-volume series, \textit{Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition},\textsuperscript{18} while coauthoring one of its volumes,\textsuperscript{19} he has also served as founding publisher of \textit{Renewing Minds: A Journal of Christian Thought}.

\textbf{SCRIPTURE AND HERMENEUTICS}

Dockery's scholarly work on the doctrine of the Christian Scriptures included that which serves as prolegomena: the self-testimony of the Bible and its relationship to divine revelation and to Jesus Christ. “Both Testaments view the words of Scripture as God’s own words,” and Psalm 119 “exemplifies” this attitude.\textsuperscript{20} The New Testament introduces quotations from the Old Testament by formulas such as “God says,” “the Holy Spirit says,” and “it is written.”\textsuperscript{21} The Old Testament prophets had employed “the word of the Lord came to me saying” and “thus says the Lord.”\textsuperscript{22} References to the need for and fact of fulfilled Old Testament prophecy are also a part of the self-testimony of the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{23} The Bible alludes to general revelation and embodies special or particular revelation, which is progressive, personal, and propositional.\textsuperscript{24} Jesus not only taught his disciples “that His life and ministry fulfilled the [Old Testament] Scriptures” but also provided a new Christological method of interpreting the Old Testament, that is, “in light of Himself.”\textsuperscript{25} The New Testament is a body of “Spirit-directed writings that focused on the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{17} Ecclesiastes: The Pursuit (Nashville: LifeWay, 2011).
\textsuperscript{18} With Timothy George (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).
\textsuperscript{20} The Doctrine of the Bible (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 41.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 12–26.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 35. See also David S. Dockery, Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 15–35.
The Old Testament contains references to the transmission or preservation of portions of the law and the prophets, and collections of the Gospels and of the Pauline epistles existed in the second century AD.27 “The whole Bible existed in at least seven versions [languages] . . . by the sixth century AD.”28 Dockery was agreeable to recent scholarship in positing the closure of the Old Testament canon “by the time of Jesus,” if not as early as 165 BC, but he retained the traditional view that “the decisive period in the history of the New Testament canon was AD 140–200.”29

Dockery sought to explicate “the two-sided character of the Bible as a divine-human book” so as to avoid an “ebionitic” conclusion that the Bible is only a human book and a “docetic” conclusion that it is only a divine book. Second Timothy 3:16–17 testifies to the divine inspiration of the writings, not merely the writers,30 whereas the Bible obviously “is composed of different types of literature.”31 After defining and evaluating the dictation, illumination, encounter (Karl Barth), and dynamic theories of biblical inspiration,32 Dockery clearly opted for the plenary theory as the one that “best accounts for the divine character of Scripture and the human circumstances of the Bible’s composition.”33 Such inspired Scripture has the possibility of being both normative and inerrant.34

Dockery’s greatest specialization has come in biblical hermeneutics, beginning with his doctoral dissertation.35 Commencing with Jesus’ Christological interpretation of the Old Testament and that of the apostles and Jewish hermeneutical methods, he traced the functional or worship-oriented interpretation by the apostolic fathers and the more authoritarian response to heresies by Irenaeus and Tertullian before contrasting the Alexandrian allegorical (Clement, Origen) method and the Antiochene literal-historical and typological (Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom)

27 See Dockery, The Doctrine of the Bible, 97–108.
28 Ibid., 101.
29 Ibid., 105–6. See also Dockery, Christian Scripture, 77–96.
31 Ibid., 27.
32 Ibid., 29–34.
33 Ibid., 35.
34 Ibid., 35–41. See also Dockery, The Doctrine of the Bible, 53–77, where he also refuted feminist and liberation theologies and Christian Scripture, 37–60.
methods. “Canonical and Catholic hermeneutics” was represented by Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, and Theodoret of Cyrus. Dockery traced the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture to John Cassian. Erasmus, Calvin, and Luther were seen as the major Reformation contributors to hermeneutics, and in the post-Reformation era Protestant scholasticism employed a dogmatic hermeneutic with Aristotelian influence. Pietism produced Johann Albrecht Bengel, and rationalistic tendencies paved the way for the historical-critical method. J. S. Semler’s strictly historical method was followed by F. C. Baur’s “tendency criticism” and the first “quest” for the historical Jesus. Dockery made a place for the “grammatical-historical exegesis” of the Princeton school and of Baptist exegesis in America. He wrote in depth about John A. Broadus and A. T. Robertson. Relative to contemporary hermeneutics Dockery not only surveyed the major options, namely author oriented (E. D. Hirsch), reader oriented (Hans-Georg Gadamer), and text oriented (Paul Ricoeur), but also proposed a synthesis. Accordingly, he used the text, which has “contextual keys,” to bridge the “gulf” between reader and author and resurrected *sensus plenior*, or “a fuller meaning in the text than the author intended,” to bring together “historical meaning” and “contemporary understanding.” Dockery also advocated the proper, nonabusive contemporary use of the typological method, for thereby Jesus and the apostles interpreted the Old Testament “Christologically,” and therewith the unity of the two testaments can be more clearly seen.

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NAVIGATING DIFFICULT DOCTRINES AND DENOMINATIONAL CONTROVERSY

Dockery was deeply involved in the more reflective aspects of the SBC inerrancy controversy. He began in 1985 by affirming a “critical inerrancy” view of the autographs “not only in matters of salvation, but in all matters of ethics and issues of life.” Then he defined and explained seven different views of biblical inerrancy and two of noninerrancy as espoused by various recent evangelical authors and concluded that there was something to be learned from most of the views about inerrancy. In 1988, he differentiated four groups of Southern Baptists in respect to the question of biblical inerrancy (fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals) and concluded that evangelicals and moderates were more numerous. He noted that inerrancy had been erroneously identified with the mechanical dictation theory and with a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible. He called for the recognition of “the mystery of inspiration” and the use of canonical criticism and asserted that inerrancy is “the proper implication of the result of scripture’s inspiration.” The same year he refuted Gordon James’s *Inerrancy in the Southern Baptist Convention*. Later, after the subsiding of the most heated controversy, the Union president reflected on the views of the Scriptures held by James P. Boyce, Basil Manly Jr., B. H. Carroll, E. Y. Mullins, and W. T. Conner; reviewed Southern Baptist theological development from 1952 to 1979 and the subsequent controversy; and restated biblical inerrancy with a view toward a more complete “evangelical orthodox consensus.” Recently Dockery proposed a way forward for Southern Baptists by reclaiming the Baptist heritage.


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Dockery did not hold to a strict *sola Scriptura* position inasmuch as he emphasized the role of confessions of faith as “secondary or tertiary.”\(^\text{49}\) Furthermore he was confident Baptists needed to retain and reaffirm the patristic orthodoxy relative to the Trinity and Christology.\(^\text{50}\) On soteriology he has espoused a Calminian or Amyraldian position between Calvinism and Arminianism—which Roger E. Olson has declared impossible.\(^\text{51}\) He holds to unlimited atonement and affirms that “the convicting grace of God’s Spirit can be rejected.” “God is the sole efficient cause of salvation,” but “there are also secondary and tertiary causes.”\(^\text{52}\) Faith is both “altogether brought about by God” and “altogether the human response.”\(^\text{53}\)

Dockery’s writing on baptism has focused on the New Testament testimony rather than historic Baptist or contemporary issues.\(^\text{54}\) Yet on the Lord’s Supper he has strongly advocated going beyond a “memorial-only” view by recovering the spiritual presence of Christ as affirmed by the Second London Confession and more frequent observance following self-examination and in the context of worship.\(^\text{55}\)

Regarding eschatology, writing at the turn of the twenty-first century for Baptist church members, Dockery stressed the eschatological aspect of the kingdom of God.\(^\text{56}\) In his review of mistaken expectations of the kingdom throughout church history, he affirmed both physical and spiritual death as the penal consequence of sin, held to an intermediate state, and critiqued


\(^{56}\) But Dockery and David E. Garland held that the Sermon on the Mount is presently “obligatory on all citizens of the kingdom.” *Seeking the Kingdom: The Sermon on the Mount Made Practical for Today* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1992), 9.
reincarnation. After reviewing the various millennial views, he opted for historic premillennialism of the posttribulational type. He affirmed final judgment, hell, and heaven, refuting annihilationism and universalism in support of an exclusivism relative to the unevangelized.  

CONCLUSION

More than any other theologian Dockery has fleshed out anew the doctrine of the Bible during, after, and on behalf of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. Exploring the self-testimony of the Bible and following recent Old Testament scholarship as to the earlier closing of the Old Testament canon, he affirmed the Bible as a divine-human book whose divine inspiration is best served by the plenary theory. Analyzing numerous views of biblical inerrancy, Dockery espoused “critical inerrancy.” He traced the history of biblical hermeneutics from the early church through the late twentieth century and advocated a text-oriented approach with use of sensus plenior, typology, and canonical criticism. Not embracing a strict sola Scriptura position, the Union president held to the secondary authority of confessions of faith and to patristic orthodoxy as to the Trinity and Christology. Taking a Calminian or Amyraldian stance on the doctrine of salvation, Dockery has more recently led in seeking to prevent strife or schism among Southern Baptists over Calvinist-Arminian issues. 


58 Dockery served as chairman of the Calvinism Advisory Committee appointed by the president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee (2012–13).
Enduring friendships can begin in strange places. My friendship with David S. Dockery began in a cemetery, the famous Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville. Cave Hill is a beautiful, leafy, urban cemetery adjacent to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where, in the summer of 1987, I was about to begin my tenth year as a member of the faculty. David was a professor at the Criswell College in Dallas and had been invited by seminary president Roy L. Honeycutt to teach a summer course at Southern in fulfillment of the pledge recently made by the six SBC seminary presidents to add scholarly conservative voices to their faculties and curricula.

I often took my students on “field trips” to Cave Hill Cemetery. Some of the great figures in Baptist history lie buried there, including James P. Boyce, the founder of Southern Seminary, and John A. Broadus, his close friend and colleague. One of the most impressive gravesites was that of the famous New Testament scholar, A. T. Robertson, marked by a simple white stone inscribed with the words of Philippians 1:21, “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Cave Hill Cemetery had become a sacred place to me during my years in Louisville, and I wanted to introduce it to my new friend, David Dockery.
As we walked together through beautiful Cave Hill Cemetery on that warm summer afternoon in 1987, we discussed many things including the debt each of us felt to the rich theological legacy of those great theologians and church leaders above whose mortal remains we stood. Some of them, along with their predecessors and peers, were hardly remembered anymore, or if they were, they were merely names from long ago, relegated to the realm of affectionate obscurity. The story of their faith, courage, and commitment to the church of Jesus Christ—all this a distant memory. David and I determined to collect a volume of essays which we hoped would be an introduction to the life and thought of some of the most notable shapers of Baptist theology. Our book, Baptist Theologians (1990), a volume of 704 pages with thirty-five chapters, treated Baptist theologians from John Bunyan to Clark Pinnock. We dedicated Baptist Theologians to the two pastors who had ordained us to the gospel ministry, J. Ralph McIntyre (Timothy) and Darold H. Morgan (David).

Although we did not know it at the time, the summer of 1987 marked a major transition in both of our lives. One year later David would be moving to Louisville to become a full-time member of the faculty and later dean of Southern's School of Theology and vice president for academic administration. In the meantime I had received a call from President Thomas E. Corts of Samford University inviting me to consider becoming the founding dean of a new institution of theological education, soon to be named Beeson Divinity School. So David and I passed like ships in the night that year, he moving from Dallas to Louisville and I from Louisville to Birmingham.

Birmingham was the hometown of both David and his wife Lanese, and their parents were still living there at the time. David and I had many occasions to see each other in Alabama and elsewhere, often over some good Mexican food. Our personal friendship had emerged through our tentative efforts to reach out to each other across the boundaries of divergence which had placed us (without asking us) on opposite sides of the polemical divide in what was then a raging denominational quarrel. In the process a marvelous thing happened: We experienced a mutual conversion as we discovered a surprising confluence of ideas and commitments, not only between the two of us but also among a wider circle of colleagues and friends. Through correspondence and conversation, through times of prayer and fellowship, we came to see that we had far more in common than the stereotypes others had used to describe where we “belonged” in this camp or that.
While fulfilling demanding administrative responsibilities in our respective institutions, we both continued to do research, to write, and to publish in our respective fields, Reformation studies for me and biblical interpretation for David. We contributed articles to each other’s projects, read each other’s books and, when asked, offered endorsements to each other’s publishers. Beyond these specifics we also shared what might be called a common “project” driven by a “common spirit,” one that went back to our conversation and that walk through Cave Hill Cemetery in 1987. In the preface to the first edition of our first coedited book, we described this approach—or actually our dreams—in this way.

We desire to foster a forum where scholars from diverse perspectives within the Baptist family could share the results of their research and in the process experience, perhaps, the miracle of dialogue—not a raucous shouting at one another, nor a snide whispering behind each other’s backs, but a genuine listening and learning in the context of humane inquiry and disciplined thought. . . . In our search for common ground, we do not declare theological neutrality. We rejoice in the renewed commitment to biblical faith within our own denomination, as well as in reports of evangelical awakening among Baptists throughout the world. However, such movings of the Spirit, if they are not to degenerate into shallow piosity, must also be accompanied by theological revival. The Christian faith is deeper and wider than the spiritual experience of any one believer: it is the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, and the living out of that confession by the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people of God. Theology is not an ivory-tower exercise for stuffy academics: it is the serious responsibility of every Christian and every church that seeks to be faithful to its Lord. By seeing how others before us have articulated the faith, we will be better able to formulate a proper theology for our own turbulent times.

During the 1990s and continuing into the new millennium, these aspirations found expression primarily in two major arenas: the Baptist tradition we both loved and belonged to, and the wider evangelical community we understood ourselves to be a part of. In a time of widening denominational conflict in the SBC, both David and I believed it was important for those who held different views and who found themselves in different denominational camps to speak directly with one another face-to-face, to pray together as brothers.
and sisters in Christ, and to explore serious theological differences in an attitude of charity and humility.

While many factors, including politics and personalities, had fueled the SBC controversy, the nature of the Bible and its authority were at the heart of the dispute. In 1991, David was asked to write the doctrine study book for the Southern Baptist Convention on *The Doctrine of the Bible*. David approached the hot-wire issue of biblical inerrancy with thoughtful analysis, careful definition, and interpretive savvy. Later this book was expanded into a major publication called *Christian Scripture* (1995). This is only one of many books David has devoted to the theme of the Bible over the course of his career. James Leo Garrett, one of David’s mentors, has noted that “David S. Dockery has written more about the nature and interpretation of the Bible than any other Southern Baptist theologian in history.”

David Dockery has spent a great deal of time building bridges, or trying to build bridges, over chasms seemingly too wide to span. One such project in which David and I were both involved from 1989 until 1992 was called “Beyond the Impasse.” We were joined by six other Baptist scholars who met on several occasions for a series of discussions related to the implosion of our denominational fellowship at the time. In addition to David and me, the other members of the team included Walter Harrelson, John P. Newport, R. Albert Mohler, Robison B. James, Paige Patterson, and Molly Truman Marshall. The eight of us were a diverse lot, representing a wide span of differences among Southern Baptists at the time. Several moderate Baptist groupings, including the Alliance of Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, had already taken initial steps to form their own organizations separate from the Southern Baptist Convention. Our dialogue project was in a sense the last-ditch attempt to stay the centrifugal forces pulling the denomination apart. Our discussions were marked by candor, civility, and some drama, for we all knew how high the stakes were. On one occasion I recall one member of our team breaking down in tears at the prospect of our denominational divorce. This experiment in reconciliation was a worthy effort, and I am glad we tried, but at the end of the day we failed. When the papers from this project were finally published, we found it necessary to add a question mark to the title, *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life* (1992).

More than anyone I can think of in recent decades, David Dockery has fulfilled the role of denominational statesman among Southern Baptists. The departure of many Baptist moderates from SBC denominational life during
the 1990s has not resulted in placid waters or stormless seas among the Baptist majority that remained intact. Several years ago David and I wrote a little book, *Building Bridges*, which called for the renewal of consensus and cooperation for Southern Baptists in the twenty-first century. This book was published by the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and distributed to every registered messenger at the annual SBC meeting in 2007. More recently I was pleased to serve with David and other leaders on the SBC Calvinism Advisory Committee. This was an effort initiated by Dr. Frank Page, president of the SBC executive committee, to come to greater mutual understanding and to find a way forward over the increasingly contentious issue of Calvinism. Our group issued a report titled “Truth, Trust and Testimony in a Time of Tension: A Statement from the Calvinism Advisory Committee,” which was accepted and affirmed by the SBC at its annual meeting in Houston in 2013. David was the quiet leader of our group, and Frank Page was wise to ask him to help coordinate our work.

Having observed David at work over the years in a number of mediating efforts such as this one, I think I know why he is so effective. First, he listens superbly well. Beneath his low-key, apparently shy demeanor, deep thoughts are always churning, and a possible strategy for moving forward is emerging. But David never rushes in with “ten ideas I must get on the table before anyone else speaks.” He takes his time, slowly, deliberately, patiently listening to everyone’s ideas and learning from what they say. Then when he does speak, we listen.

Second, David weds together conciliation and conviction. It would be a big mistake to confuse David’s natural modesty and soft-spokenness with timidity or wishy-washiness. David is a person of deep Christian conviction, hard-won beliefs forged on the anvil of God’s unshakeable Word and tested in the crucible of conflict and temptation. But he knows that the Master’s preferred way of entering the human heart is to beckon, not bludgeon (cf. Rev 3:20). The way of conciliation is the way of Christ, and, coincidentally, it is almost always the way of getting better results.

And, finally, David has the remarkable ability of saying just enough but not too much. Once when someone had written me a letter demanding that I respond to a controversial issue in the news, I asked David’s advice, and he reminded me that I had no obligation to respond to every question I was asked. David Dockery has learned well the lesson of Proverbs 25:11, “A word spoken at the right time is like gold apples on a silver tray.”
Are Southern Baptists evangelicals? What hath Nashville to do with Wheaton? These questions formed an important subtext during the SBC controversy. In 1983, noted scholars James Leo Garrett and E. Glenn Hinson engaged in a thoughtful exchange on this issue, which resulted in the book, *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?* (1982). Garrett’s answer was basically affirmative, while Hinson’s was definitely negative. During this time Foy Valentine, an SBC agency head, expressed his own views on the subject in words that have often been quoted. In a fit of Baptist braggadocio, he said: “We are not evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word. They want to claim us because we are big and successful and growing every year. But we have our own traditions, our own hymns and more students in our seminaries than they have in all of theirs put together.”

Although Hinson and Valentine were decidedly on the moderate side of the Baptist squabble, the question itself did not break down into a pure party-line distinction. For example, Garrett was a member of the moderate/liberal Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth (whose history he later wrote) and can in no sense be counted as a partisan within the conservative turnaround/takeover movement. Likewise, some ultraconservative Baptists resented any notion of an SBC-evangelical coziness as much as Foy Valentine seemed to. The fact is that from the 1920s through the 1980s, the Mason-Dixon invisible wall between North and South had grown stronger, not weaker. It served to reinforce a sense of Baptist identity that assumed self-sufficiency, denominational autonomy, and the need to construct and protect the Southern Baptist Zion from contamination.

This neo-isolationist spirit prevailed at both ends of the SBC spectrum. On the part of those few moderates who showed any interest in Christian unity, it was largely a one-way-to-the-left ecumenism they pursued. For example, Southern Seminary hosted a consultation of the World Council of Churches on its campus in 1979 while refusing to invite to campus noted evangelical scholars such as Carl F. H. Henry, J. I. Packer, and Kenneth Kantzer. On the other side of the fence, the “we’re just fine; we don’t need anybody else”

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1 Foy Valentine, quoted by Kenneth L. Woodard in “Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals,” *Newsweek* 88 (October 25, 1976): 76. The issue of whether Southern Baptists were evangelicals was classically discussed in two books a decade apart as the SBC moved through the conservative resurgence: James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, eds., *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals’?* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), and David Dockery, ed. (including contributions by Garrett and Hinson), *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: B&H, 1993).
attitude was a natural fit for those Southern Baptists still shaped by, and hark- ing back to, the Landmarkist impulse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One of the things that drew David and me together in the early days of our friendship was a clear sense that this dichotomy was unhealthy, unnecessary, and based on a fallacious reading of Baptist history. It seemed obvious to us that, of course, Southern Baptists were evangelicals—admittedly evangelicals with their own Southern-fried distinctives, one of which was the very denominational cocooning that downplayed their affinity with other like-minded evangelical believers. Prior to the fundamentalist-modernist conflicts of the 1920s and 1930s, there had been robust two-way traffic across the Mason-Dixon Line. The great John A. Broadus frequently preached in northern pulpits, and Southern Seminary’s first academic building, New York Hall, was so called because of supporters from that state, including the Rockefeller family.

In any event, our sense of how Southern Baptists fit into the wider scheme of things was reinforced by David Bebbington’s famous evangelical quadrilateral which first appeared in his 1989 book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. There Bebbington, a Scottish Baptist, described four defining characteristics that marked evangelicals in general: a solid commitment to the Bible and its authority; a focus on Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross; teaching about the necessity of conversion, the new birth; and an activism evident in the world-encompassing missionary movement. If Bebbington had been trying to characterize Southern Baptists at the time, he could hardly have found four more applicable, well-fitting traits. With this in mind, David and I included in the first edition of *Baptist Theologians* not only great Baptist figures from the past and some contemporary Southern Baptist theologians but also a number of figures whose work and ministry was largely carried out beyond the bounds of the SBC. These included George Eldon Ladd, Millard J. Erickson, James Deotis Roberts, Edward John Carnell, Bernard Ramm, George R. Beasley-Murray, Carl F. H. Henry, and Clark H. Pinnock.

Over the past quarter century, both David and I have continued to promote, in our writings and activities, greater mutuality and intentional reciprocity between the Baptist community and the wider evangelical world. During these years David has emerged not only as a denominational statesman within the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention but also as a highly esteemed servant-leader among extra-SBC
evangelicals as well. His contributions in this arena include service on the boards of Christianity Today, Prison Fellowship Ministries (a position for which he was recommended by Chuck Colson), the Manhattan Declaration, and the American Academy of Ministry. He has also served on the board of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, including a term of service as board chair. While his transformative work as the fifteenth president of Union University has come to a close, David Dockery’s visionary leadership within the Baptist family and within the greater evangelical community will, let us pray, continue unabated for many years to come. The same is true for his prolific work as a scholar and writer, with new publications now in the press and many others yet to come.

In this brief essay I have written about my friendship with David Dockery and our partnership in various scholarly, academic, and church-related endeavors. I want to close with a personal word. Over the many years I have known David Dockery, the great respect and esteem in which I hold him have only increased. We have been fellow travelers and fellow pilgrims. We have laughed together, cried together, and dreamed together. We have sought each other’s counsel when facing important decisions in our lives. We have prayed together for each other’s families and about many other matters both great and small. His work at Union University has been remarkable and will bear good fruit for many generations to come. His unswerving commitment to Jesus Christ and to his church have encouraged me, perhaps more than he knows. At this milestone in his life, I salute my dear friend and wish him the speed of God as he gears up for the journey yet to come.