

And Are We Yet Alive?

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

And are we yet alive,
And see each other's face?
Glory and praise to Jesus give,
For His redeeming grace.

Preserv'd by pow'r divine,
To feel salvation here;
Again in Jesus' name we join,
And in his sight appear.

What troubles have we seen,
What conflicts have we past;
Fightings without and fears within,
Since we assembled last.

But out of all, the Lord
Hath brought us by his love;
And still he does his help afford,
And hides our life above.

Then let us make our boast,
Of his redeeming pow'r;
Which saves us to the uttermost,
Till we can sin no more.

Let us take up the cross,
Till we the crown obtain;
And gladly reckon all things lost,
So we may Jesus gain.



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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Annual Fellowship

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I grew up in an association that held an annual conference. The point of that conference was supposed to be the preaching, and sometimes it was. Usually, however, the preaching was overshadowed by the politics of the organization. The real highlight of the week was the business meeting and the election of people to the association's executive body.

Last week I attended the annual fellowship of the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International. This was an organization that I did not grow up with. As the years have gone by, however, I've come to value it more and more, partly because it is a genuine fellowship.

The FBFI is not an association of churches. It is a fellowship of individuals. I became a member around twenty years ago—maybe more. But my membership doesn't qualify me to do anything. It only means that I have come to identify with the FBFI, its goals, and its perspectives.

The emphasis of the annual meetings is not on political posturing or organizational wheel-turning. It is on fellowship, and that is unusual. In many organizations, fellowship is an afterthought. In the Foundations Baptist Fellowship, it is front and center. It's even in the name.

This year's annual fellowship (notice how I keep repeating that word?) was hosted by Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina. The congregation did outstanding work in preparing for the meetings. The speakers were chosen by the host church. Each one focused our attention on recovering some aspect of local church ministry. Craig Hartman provided a reminder on the importance of reaching Jewish people with the gospel. Bruce McAllister gave a gentle appeal for pastors to shepherd their congregations. Patrick Odle preached on recovering the church's mission. Other speakers included Nathan Mestler, Caleb Phelps (the host pastor), Mark Herbster, and me. Both video and audio of all sessions can be downloaded from the church's web site.

Good though the preaching was, most of the personal interaction took place outside of the scheduled main sessions. The host church generously provided dinner on all three evenings of the conference, creating opportunities for substantial table fellowship (there's that word again). Many kindred or-

ganizations—publishers, mission agencies, educational institutions, camps, and others—set up exhibits in the church’s narthex. The opportunity to speak with representatives of these organizations was a distinct and pleasant form of fellowship.

The president of the FBFI is Kevin Schaal. He is the pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona. As one might guess, he is very much in demand, but he found ways to make himself available to people. As president of the FBFI, Pastor Schaal has continued and even improved upon positive directions established by his predecessor, John Vaughan.

The board of the FBFI approved three position statements, of which two are particularly interesting. One is on Christian Nationalism, which the FBFI explicitly repudiates—as every New Testament Christian should. The other is on the Jewish People and Israel. This long resolution provides theological backgrounds to current issues, addresses the horrid problem of anti-semitism, encourages Jewish evangelism, articulates the relationship of Christians to Jewish customs and the Mosaic Law, and offers a thoughtful and informed evaluation of the modern state of Israel. These resolutions can be found on the FBFI’s web site.

The FBFI is the oldest national organization of fundamental Baptists. It began in 1920 with a conference that met before the Northern Baptist Convention in Buffalo, New York. This meeting was repeated annually, and it was soon known as the Fundamentalist Fellowship. From the 1940s into the 1960s it was renamed the Conservative Baptist Fellowship. When the Conservative Baptist Movement fragmented, it became the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship. During those years it was under the leadership of Archer and Arno Weniger, then of Rod Bell.

In my opinion, the current iteration of the organization is the best. It has regained a measure of the distinctively Baptist flavor that had waned under Bell’s leadership. While it has not abandoned its biblical principles, it has become less concerned with cleaning up other organizations and movements while strengthening its commitment to providing tools and encouragement for pastors to strengthen their own ministries. While it is not an organization of churches, it clearly understands the importance of the local church as the center of God’s work in the world.

In a word, the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International is characterized by what I will call an institutional modesty. It knows that it is not the only faithful witness during the present age. It is aware of a larger Christian world outside itself. It wishes to play a role in strengthening both its own members and other kindred spirits for the work of faithful Christian ministry during the second quarter of the Twenty-First Century.

I am grateful for the FBFI, and particularly grateful for what it has become. I am grateful for its leadership, especially Kevin Schaal (its president) and

Don Johnson (who runs its blog, *Proclaim and Defend*). I am grateful for its board. I am grateful for its persistent testimony, its doctrinal fidelity, its methodological conservatism.

If you are interested, the next annual fellowship of the FBFI will take place at Calvary Baptist Church of Watertown, Wisconsin, in October of 2027. The following summer, Fourth Baptist Church of Plymouth, Minnesota, will host the 2028 fellowship in the month of June. I anticipate that both fellowships will be worth attending.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
