

Workshop 11

The Conservative Impulse: Why the Past Matters for Tomorrow

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The Idea of Conservatism

(1) Tensions with the Idea of Conservatism

- The label *conservative* is often used as a **qualifier of other labels**, and in such cases tends to have value only in intensifying the primary term.
- The label *conservative* is often used **in a relative sense**, and in such cases has almost no value at all.

(2) A Better Understanding of Conservatism

The idea of conservatism, as defined in this session, has substantially to do with our appeal to the Scriptures alone to *regulate* the public expression of our faith and worship according to elements that are fixed and inalterable. This idea, sometimes called the regulative principle of worship, has been a staple element of Baptist ecclesiology from its earliest days. The London Baptist Confession puts it this way: **“The acceptable way of worshiping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”**

The Elements of Our Conservatism

1 Timothy 4:13 (Mounce): Until I come, be devoted to the reading of Scripture, to the exhortation, and to the teaching.

Acts 2:42 (HCSB): And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayer.

(1) We conserve *the Reading*, or the regular, public, and substantial reading of the Scriptures.

(2) We conserve *the Exhortation*, or the regular Bible sermon.

(3) We conserve *the Teaching*, or the regular rehearsal of the Christian tradition.

(4) We conserve *the Fellowship*, or the regular contribution of the saints to the work of the ministry.

(5) We conserve *the Community*, or the regular observance of the ordinances of the Church.

(6) We conserve *the Prayer*, or the regular practice of substantial, public prayers.