

A CRITIQUE # 1
By
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An Examination of
Great Commission Credentials
and Other EMDA Articles

In 2007 Bryan Station Baptist Church of Lexington, KY, published a book entitled *Great Commission Credentials (GCC)* by Elder Mark Fenison [no date given—but it was written Feb. 2007, vii]. The book has 210 pages and sells for \$ 4.50. It was written in defense of Essential Mother Daughter Authority (EMDA) and to refute *Landmarkism Under Fire (LUF)*. In my estimation it fails on both counts. References in brackets will be given in full at the end.

First, I will attend to some preliminary matters.

When I learned Bro Fenison was writing on this subject I wrote him and offered to send him a copy of *LUF* free if he would send me a copy of his book when published. He agreed to do this and I sent him a copy. But I never received his book and had to order a copy.

Let me say at the outset that I have read every word of *GCC* as carefully as I can trying to understand the author's position. Had Bro Fenison read *LUF* in the same way many, many, pages of *GCC* would have been eliminated because most of what he included had already been refuted in *LUF* and was thus made redundant before he wrote his book! More on this later.

The author tells us *GCC* is to be read in conjunction with Bro Cockrell's book *Scriptural Church Organization [SCO]*:

His book should be consulted and read along with my book as he covered materials I have not. [GCC. iii].

Bro Fenison suggests that those who differed with Bro Cockrell's book *SCO* opposed him personally, [GCC. ii]. So far as I know, this is false. While great numbers of Landmark Baptists differ with Bro Cockrell on EMDA, I know of no one who opposed him personally, then or now, and this was clearly stated in *LUF*. [2]. Certainly I do not now and never did think of him as anything other than an esteemed brother in Christ! Bro. Cockrell was a good friend of mine, an able defender of the faith. But all of us are capable of being wrong and as I believe he was in error on this issue, it would have been wrong not to point this out.

It is a mistake to think those who differ with us on some subject are attacking us personally because they oppose our position. Am I to consider *GCC* as an attack on me personally? If Bro Fenison does not intend it to be so then perhaps he will be charitable enough to give others the same liberty he takes for himself. He also seems to suggest that those who differ with him are not saved or at least not sent of the Lord! [GCC. 2. par.1]. Does he really believe this?

GCC has a summary of the points which it sets out to prove. They are:

The plan of this book is to first examine Matthew 28:19-20 and discover the contextual credentials that define exactly who is being authorized by Christ by the pronoun “ye” and what they are authorized to do. Second, it is the plan of this book to demonstrate that this commission was practiced throughout the book of Acts. Third, it is the plan of this book to show that the administrative order of the Great Commission was understood by early English and American Baptists and was summarized under the phrase “regular church order” or “gospel order.” Last, it is the plan of this book to demonstrate clearly that those who were historically called “Landmark Baptists” strongly believed the Great Commission was given to the church alone and that they practiced “regular church order.” [*GCC*. iv-vii].

This summary indicates this whole book is an effort to prove English and American Baptists, including Landmark Baptists believed and taught EMDA. If this was a fact then it would seem only reasonable that the author would have given us a direct quote where some Baptists, or at least one Baptist, explicitly taught this doctrine.

Did he do this?

Not that I could find!

One will read every page in this book and when finished he will come away without a single statement of EMDA from Baptist history! The fact that Bro Fenison provides no such quote is quite an admission and shows that he could not meet the challenges of *LUF*.

The challenges I gave in *LUF* [166] may be summarized briefly as:

Find **one explicit statement of EMDA before the twentieth century.**

The author of *GCC* does not even pretend to do so! In *GCC* there are some quotes from various Baptist authors which might just possibly seem to support EMDA but there is not a single explicit statement of his doctrine from any author before 1900! This indicates that at the best he could find no such statement in the annals of Baptist history! At the worst, it indicates no such quote exists! Either way his ship has run aground!

In this summary Bro Fenison attempts to reject facts and to substitute quotes which are indirect and oblique as proof of what Baptists believed relative to church constitution. The Great Commission does not mention EMDA in any sense! *Gospel order*, is not EMDA and the author does not even pretend to define this term or any other term he uses but merely assumes any and every term which he selects means EMDA! And finally, contrary to Bro Fenison and his claims, it is light years from what *Landmark Baptists strongly believed* to EMDA! I say this because Graves and the other Landmarkers explicitly stated DA and Bro Fenison admitted this in a public letter! In spite of this and in the face of it he then attempts to prove they supported EMDA at least in *practice*! He takes such wisps of smoke and attempts to build upon them his whole structure which is about as stable as an inverted pyramid!

The real issue is very simple:

1. Is EMDA taught in Scripture?
2. Was EMDA taught by Baptists, Landmark or otherwise?

I shall attempt to demonstrate in these articles that the correct answer to both questions is a strong negative. If the second question receives a negative, then the first must also be negative. That the correct answer to number two is a negative is proved by the fact that none of these EMDA men in their books or articles have been able to find any direct statement of it in Baptist history!

I have insisted on **explicit statements** as to church constitution simply because it is possible to take general statements and claim they support something which the author never believed. For example. One might quote John Wesley in an attempt to prove he was a Calvinist! Almost all Arminians say they believe in the sovereignty of God but no honest man would attempt to prove from such a statement that they believed the doctrines of grace. Anyone who attempts such a thing advertises that he is not a competent judge in such matters because he rests his case on a mere allusion, a façade, a semblance or a pretence! Yet, on this subject of church constitution this kind of thing is constantly attempted by our EMDA brethren and here Bro Fenison excels!

As we have seen none of the EMDA brethren have been able to supply one explicit statement of EMDA! We have Bre Cockrell [*SCO*; *SCO* 2nd ed.]; Newell [*BBB*]; Caudill [*Voice C.*] Stang [*Voice S.*]; and Fenison [*GCC*] but not one of them was able to bring home the bacon! **They could not find a single document where any Baptist author expressly taught EMDA before 1900!** Do these men have Allusions? Stacks! Do they have assertions? Tons! Implications? Mile after mile! Inferences? They have them galore! Claims? Everywhere you look! Long drawn out illogical scenarios? Scads of them! But proof? Not a shred!

Before I begin the examination of *GCC* proper I will set before the reader a few statements from Baptist history. I do this to demonstrate the kind of proof I have asked EMDA men to produce for their position, but which they have utterly failed to produce! They, like the magicians of Egypt could not bring forth! [Ex. 8:18]. Is this not the finger of God! [Ex. 8:19]. In contrast, I give explicit statements of DA from Baptist history which no one will be able to refute. While neither Bro Fenison nor anyone of these other EMDA authors have been able to produce any Baptist who taught their doctrine, we have supplied them with a considerable number who taught DA! [LUF.]. These relentless facts roll over their theory like a steam roller!

Let it be clearly understood that history does not establish Baptist doctrine.

We make no such claim. We never thought it did.

But history does record what Baptists believed and practiced on any given issue. I mention this because some EMDA brethren have accused me of trying to prove DA from

history! Of course this is just another effort to offset what I produced in LUF! Remember also these EMDA brethren appeal to history (as *SCO*, *GCC* and others) and then it is perfectly legitimate! The legs of the lame are not equal!

It is one of the most absurd arguments ever conceived by a Baptist to claim Baptists taught something for 2000 years and yet never mentioned it, which is the position EMDA men are forced to take! Nor can I think of a single doctrine of Baptists which is not abundantly manifested in their literature.

In fact the author of *SCO* records this:

I want to deal with it [church organization—JC] historically first. No person understands any subject until he first of all understands it historically. [9].

What I do now is to prove by explicit references that Baptists believed and practiced the position I set forth in *LUF*—**that the authority to constitute a new church comes directly from the Lord Jesus Christ!**

Crowell's Church Manual on Church Constitution

Crowell's *The Church Member's Manual* was first published in 1847. It was revised and republished in 1857 and at other times thereafter. Crowell was born in 1806 and died 1871. His book is quoted by J.R. Graves [GIW. 554; NGIW. 137; OL. 41]; T.G. Jones. 41. See footnote] ; Hiscox.[368]; Jarrel. [CP. 4] and others. These references indicate this book was recognized as a standard Baptist Manual by Baptists and that Landmark Baptists used it.

First we note Crowell's definition of a church:

A church is a company of baptized believers, voluntarily associated in a sacred covenant, or agreement, expressed or implied. [Crowell. 114].

Crowell then tells us believers in gospel order have the right to constitute a church:

From this view of the subject, it is evident that a suitable number of believers possess the right, at all times, in proper circumstances and from good motives, to unite themselves in mutual covenant to obey and execute the laws of Jesus Christ; and that, while they do so, they enjoy and exercise all the rights and authority which he has conferred on any visible church. [Crowell. 57].

Again he tells us how essential *church power* is conveyed to a new group:

Having seen that every church is formed of believers, whose rights are equal, by a voluntary compact, in virtue of which they were endowed with church power; that one church is neither superior nor inferior to another in rights and authority; that all ecclesiastical authority comes directly from Christ, and not from, nor through, any particular church, or churches, or church officers; that each church is separately accountable to Him for the use or abuse of its power; that a suitable number of disciples may, for good cause, and in an orderly way, form themselves into a church by mutual covenant, and exercise the highest ecclesiastical power, without being connected with, or dependent upon, any other church... [Crowell. 85].

I summarize. According to Crowell this authority does not proceed from any earthly source!

1. It is not derived from another church through a church letter!
2. It is not bestowed through a mother church!
3. It is not given by a combination of churches!
4. It is not given by a church ordained officer or officers!
5. Nor is there any essential connection with or dependence upon any other church!

This cuts the EMDA tree down and extracts stump, root and all!

Crowell then goes on to tell us exactly how this church authority is conferred.

The proof is, therefore, complete, that the power which each and every church exercises is conferred directly by Christ, is continued on condition of obedience to his laws, and is withdrawn when that obedience ceases. It is also plain, that when a company of baptized believers assume these obligations in obedience to the plain will of their Master, and faithfully fulfill them, they become a church, authorized to perform all acts proper to a Gospel church. No bishop, no council of ministers, nor delegation from other churches, nor sanction of the church universal, can impart to them the least degree of church power. The reasons why it is a duty, in most cases, to call in the assistance of neighboring churches and ministers when the formation of new church is contemplated, is for mutual counsel and prayer; but they can impart no power to the new body, for they have none to spare; and what they possess is in its nature incommunicable by human agency. It must come from Christ alone. [Crowell. 69-70].

Here is as clear a statement of DA as one could ask for. Those who compose a new church are endowed with church power!

Note these points :

1. This power or authority is conferred **directly** by Christ!
2. This power or authority does not come from any church or churches!
3. Other churches cannot impart such power for what they have is incommunicable!
4. No bishop, elder, council of ministers or delegation from other churches can impart the least degree of church power! There is no proxy power in the hands of delegates to constitute a church!
5. The calling of other churches and ministers to a constitution service by the group which purposes to constitute a new church is for counsel and prayer i.e., assistance not EMDA!
5. The power for constitution comes from Christ alone!

6. They (those who seek to form a new church) receive the highest ecclesiastical power without being connected to any other church or society on earth! They get this power from Christ!

Crowell labors to make his concept of DA so clear than even EMDA men will be unable to misunderstand or to wrench what he is saying out of context! He goes even further:

Every church derives its ecclesiastical power immediately from the Lord Jesus Christ, comes into possession of it by conforming to his will, and is accountable directly to him for its rightful exercise. [Crowell. 114].

Church authority he teaches comes **immediately** from Christ!

But what about succession? Does not this have to come from another church? Crowell is as clear on this as the sun is above the clouds of EMDA fog!

Fourth, it is distinguished from these systems [Papal, Episcopal, etc., --JC] by the principle that all church power is in the church as a body, not in its ministers; that it comes to each church directly from the Lord Jesus Christ according to his promise, by virtue of the union of its members in the church relation, and is not transmitted by succession from any previously existing body... [Crowell. 117].

These quotes are on the subject of Church constitution, not some other issue. They express where the authority is—in Christ! They tell us how it is obtained—directly from Christ! They testify that this authority does not come from another church! It does not come through ordained men! It is not transmitted by succession from any other body!

This testimony is cogent proof that DA was taught by Baptists!

These quotes are not oblique.

They are not vague allusions.

Rather they are direct, express, explicit, concrete and clear! These quotes are straightforward and unquestionable. No man can have any question about what Crowell meant! They are chock-full of DA but expunge and obliterate EMDA! They leave no place for the waffling maneuvers for which EMDA men are infamous!

One will read every page of *GCC* without finding one single reference from any Baptist author which teaches EMDA! None of these men who have written in defense of EMDA have been able to find one explicit reference—stating their position! There is no such quote in the annals of Baptist history! What this means is that after 2000 years there is not one statement of EMDA found in the whole avalanche of Baptist documents! We ask EMDA men why this is? But we receive no response! There must be good reason for this! Remember, it is hard to prime a pump without priming water and this is especially true when the cistern is dry!

There can be no question that what Crowell sets forth here is Baptist doctrine! He was

recognized as standard Baptist authority. His book was quoted by Baptists. Crowell is good Baptist testimony and the jury will not overlook his testimony. This is one of the great faults of *GCC*—it failed to provide any direct evidence of EMDA in Baptist history! No facts! Bro Fenison's whole case depended on EMDA being the constant doctrine of Baptists throughout history but the records do not support his theory! All he brings forth is supposition. An ounce of fact is worth a ton of fiction!

In the next article we will consider some of the other errors in this book.

Notes:

Bryan Station Baptist Church. www.bryanstation.com

CP—Jarrel, W. A., *Church Perpetuity*. 1894.

Crowell—*The Church Member's Manual*, William Crowell. 1857.

Graves. *GIW*—*Great Iron Wheel*, 1855.

Graves. *NGIW*—*New Great Iron Wheel*, 1884.

Graves. *OL*—*Old Landmarkism*. 1881.

Hiscox. *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*. 1894.

Jones, T. G.—*The Baptists*. Published by Grace-Landmark Pub. 2003. Note. Pages may be different than the original. 1860. [Note: this is not a misprint but a coincidence that Graves and Jones both q. Crowell on p. 41 of their respective books—JC]

Newell--*The Berea Baptist Banner*. Elder D. P. Newell, III. September 5, 2006, p. 407-9, *Death Blow to the Self-constitution Proponent's Demands*.

SCO—Milburn Cockrell. *Scriptural Church Organization*. www.bereabaptistchurch.org

Voice C—*Voice In the Wilderness*. Medford Caudill. *Self- Constitution...A Misnomer*. March 9, 2006.

Voice S—*Voice In the Wilderness*. William Stang. *Where is the Authority?* Dec. 06, 2006, p.25.