

REO Pays Tribute: Dr. Robert Picirilli

There are probably very few in the Free Will Baptist denomination who have never heard about Robert Eugene Picirilli. And if you haven't, well, why haven't you? Have you been paying attention at all? You need to get to know about this living legend pronto. In my mind, he and Leroy Forlines are the very epitome of today's Free Will Baptist theology. One of my great regrets is only managing to have Picirilli for one class in college (and Forlines not at all). The one Dr. Pic course I had was Fundamentals of Philosophy and unfortunately, my immature college self didn't fully appreciate this great man and did not pay enough attention in that one course. But since then, I have grown to truly recognize his theological genius and denominational significance.

Picirilli was born in North Carolina in 1932. In 1949 he left his home state to become a student at Free Will Baptist Bible College where he received his B.A. in 1953. But he was only getting started. During those first years at FWBBC, he had made a commitment to God to dedicate his life to the school. So in order to be qualified for a college professorship position, he determined to pursue his higher education. To this end, he earned an M.A. in theology from [Bob Jones University](#) in 1955 and a Ph.D. in New Testament Text from the same institution in 1963. In 1967, Bob Jones University awarded him the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

While still at Bob Jones, he made his move to return to FWBBC as a member of its faculty. As he recalled it in an interview by [The Helwys Society Forum](#), after attaining his M.A. he felt a pressure to apply for teacher status a little sooner than expected in order to support his growing family. (At the time he and his wife had three daughters and would later have two

more.) So just after attaining his M.A. in 1955, he approached Dr. L.C. Johnson about it. It is very fortunate for the entire denomination that this other great Free Will Baptist man wisely decided to give Picirilli the position in 1955.

He has been involved with the workings of FWBBC (now [Welch College](#)) ever since. Before retiring, he had various roles including professor, registrar, academic dean, and many other crucial school-related positions. But the college is not Picirilli's only area of impact. He has also had a profound influence on the denomination and the Christian world as a whole. He is today considered one of the most respected and influential writers, teachers, and thinkers in Free Will Baptist history. Among his best literary works are Book of Galatians; Romans; Paul the Apostle; Grace, Faith, Free Will; and Discipleship. He has also been involved with the Southeastern Section [formerly Southern Section] of the Evangelical Theological Society to which he has presented numerous papers and serving twice as the society's chairman. He has been a fellow of the Institute for Biblical Research and a member of the Research Commission of the American Association of Bible Colleges. He also frequently contributes to denominational works of discipleship, biblical instruction, and scholarship.

Picirilli retired a number of years ago and continues to reside in Nashville. In his retirement he continues to be extremely active in various ministries. He attends [Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist church](#) where he frequently teaches classes on various topics and regularly teaches a Sunday school class. He also remains involved with Welch, frequently engages in various scholarly studies, is a much sought after revival preacher at churches all over the country, and currently serves as chairman and treasurer of the Free Will Baptist Historical Commission.[1. He even contributed to an article for [Rambling Ever On.](#)]

