

ORDAINED SERVANT



The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension

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ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement Of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal Ordained Servant will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. Ordained Servant publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of Ordained Servant or of the Church.

2. Ordained Servant occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Ordained Servant does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, Rev. Larry Wilson and Rev. William Shishko

Contents: Vol. 8, No. 2

<i>Editorial Notes</i>	23
<i>Evolution: The Materialist Juggernaut - A Christian Challenge</i> (Pt. 3), by Gregory Reynolds.....	24
<i>How Can a Session Shepherd Its Pastor?</i> , by Lawrence Eyres.....	29
<i>Elder to Elder: How Important is Faithful Family Visitation?</i> , by Dick G. Vanderpyl.....	32
<i>"That Offends Me!"</i> , by Larry Wilson.....	36
<i>A Life and Death Matter</i> (or: <i>Where Do You Draw the Line?</i>), by the Editor.....	39
<i>The Indiscriminate Gospel Offer</i> , by John Calvin.....	42
<i>Which Is More Hierarchical - Presbyterian or Reformed?</i> , by the Editor.....	43
<i>Pastor to Pastor: The Riches of Spurgeon</i> (Pt. 4), by William Shishko.....	47

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In this issue we are pleased to offer two articles by ordained servants of our Lord who speak to us out of their long experience in the offices of pastor and elder. The first needs no introduction because he has served his entire ministerial life in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We refer here, of course, to the Rev. Lawrence Eyres. It is our hope that his wise words will stimulate our elders to reassess their own efforts to take pastoral care of their pastor! The other man—ruling elder Dick Vanderpyl—has served during practically all of his adult life as a ruling elder in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. It was my privilege to serve as the pastor of one congregation in which Dick served. And I am pleased that I can take this opportunity to acknowledge the debt I owe to him for many valuable lessons that I learned in doing home visits with him. I used to wonder—even before I went to New Zealand—why the Christian Reformed Churches I had encountered some forty-five years ago had such a high level of faithful attendance in their worship services. What I learned from Dick—and from other elders of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand—convinced me that one of the 'secrets' was a diligent home-visiting eldership. And I remain convinced of this today. In this article that Dick kindly sent us he explains why he also believes quite firmly that faithful family visitation is essential to the well-being of a congregation.

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With the previous issue of *Ordained Servant* we enclosed a form letter addressed to Sessions. In it we asked for some important feedback. If your Session has not yet responded to this request we hereby ask you, again, to do it. We believe it will help us to better serve you if you give us the information that we have requested. You can use email, if you wish, by sending your responses to—williamson.1@opc.org—or you can send it by the old-fashioned method (which is sometimes referred to today as snail mail).

We've recently seen some evidence that the age-old debate about the Reformed Faith and the free offer of the gospel is continuing. Being among those who firmly believe that God does freely offer salvation to sinners—and by this we mean *all* sinners who hear the gospel preached without distinction or exception—I thought I would do a word-search through *some* of Calvin's work to see what the great Reformer had to say. We hope you will find his statements as encouraging as we did.

□

We have had a number of favorable comments about the series of articles written by Darrell Hart and John Muether. However, rather strong exception has been taken to one statement in the last issue. In a note to the editor, Rev. Thomas E. Tyson says: "My main problem is with: 'But Professor Murray was not a favorite of the students!' Whoa! What's the basis for this? How do Hart and Muether know? They weren't there. I was, and I disagree. For the rest, it was good to read this tribute to a beloved teacher. Thanks for running it."

□

Finally, we would draw your attention to the very helpful article by one of our Committee members—Rev. Larry Wilson—on the subject of *taking* and *giving* offense. We think this article needs to be widely distributed, carefully read and digested *and* skillfully put into practice by our pastors and elders. Which of us cannot think of times when we could have handled a difficulty in our congregation much better if we had thought through as clearly as Larry has what the Bible says on this subject. His goal is "to help church leaders to consider some weaknesses which Satan seeks to exploit in his war against Christ and the church." It is our opinion that he has done just that in this thought-provoking article.



Evolution: The Materialist Juggernaut

A Christian Challenge

Part 3

by

Gregory Edward Reynolds, M. Div. © 1997

III. The Implications of the Challenge to Evolutionary Science.

1. Pedagogical: *Implications for the Classroom*

The second round of the Creationist-Evolutionist debate, like the first round (Scopes Trial), comes to focus in the public school setting. The following are suggestions and observations of what I think the most articulate and well-informed creationists are seeking to implement in the schools for which we are all paying.

Philosophy of Science and Modesty in the Scientific Enterprise

It is not the atheism of the evolutionary scientists to which I object. It is the disingenuousness of their method of communicating their atheism in the public forum that I find reprehensible. Science, of course, by its very nature cannot prove or disprove the existence of God. The problem is that in the public school debate the nature of the scientific enterprise is never admitted. Evolutionary thought and its atheistic presuppositions have attained the status of unquestioned authority. This undermines the purposes of both good science and sound pedagogy. Orthodox Darwinist, Michael Ruse has said, "Teaching scientific creationism will stunt abilities in all areas ... Thus I say keep it out of the schools."⁶⁹ This seems to be precisely the kind of obscurantism that good pedagogy should oppose. The development of critical thinking can only take place in the context of the free exchange of ideas.

John Angus Campbell makes a cogent case for such freedom in "John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, and the Culture Wars: Resolving a Crisis in Education" (*The Intercollegiate Review*, Spring 1996). "Debating Darwinism and comparing it with alternatives is the appropriate liberal education approach to this issue. Furthermore, I hope to persuade you that teaching the technical details of science - the

⁶⁹ Campbell, "Culture Wars," 45.

nuts and bolts, the 'science' part of science - will not be sacrificed by an approach to science that stems from a view that teaching science is not that different from teaching social studies."⁷⁰ Campbell maintains that *The Origin of Species* employs an *abductive* argument. "The same events may be explained equally well by more than one hypothesis."⁷¹ Rather than undermine the study of science a true debate format would require a careful study of each discipline, the history of that discipline, and various sides of debated issues regarding that discipline. "The precise knowledge required to distinguish real from apparent design, the knowledge of biology required to discuss intelligently whether or not Darwinian stories were more plausible than intelligent design stories would unleash a tremendous - and perhaps even distinctly American - motivator to the study of science."⁷² "The enemy of learning in the classroom is not passion but indifference."⁷³

To insist that it is "cheating" to invoke the supernatural is itself an unverifiable statement, coming from outside of science. In fact, evolutionists regularly invoke materialistic assumptions to explain phenomena, assumptions which are not verifiable themselves. What ought to be recognized is that all scientists and students bring certain assumptions to the observation of the phenomena. Along with discussion of the patterns of phenomena, which is the domain of science proper, the discussion of which assumptions best account for those patterns and phenomena is equally legitimate in the classroom. The absence of the latter level of discussion undermines the entire concept of an education.

Furthermore, evolutionary thought has a stranglehold on almost every discipline in the modern academy. The scientific method itself has been imposed on disciplines, from sociology to theology, that are not its proper domain. Evolutionary theologian

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁷¹ Ibid., 47.

⁷² Ibid., 49.

⁷³ Ibid., 47.

Teilhard de Chardin asserted, "Evolution is a light which illumines all facts, a trajectory which all lines of thought must follow."⁷⁴ To insist that only the observable and quantifiable is real spells the death of intellectual and spiritual life. Consequently, much of American intellectual academic life is presently stagnated and is in a radical state of atomistic disarray. True science deals with the observation and manipulation of *the physical world* for the material benefit of mankind. The Bible encourages this enterprise. In fact, the history of science, as we have indicated, shows that modern science is a product of the unified worldview of the Reformation (cf. Alfred North Whitehead). But the province of science is limited. Recent modern science has intruded into other disciplines to such a degree that the general populace now expects "scientific" validation for everything it thinks and does (cf. Jacques Barzun, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment*). Stephen Jay Gould had it right when he said, "Honorable and discerning scientists have always understood that the limits to what science can answer also describe the power of its methods in their proper domain."⁷⁵

My plea is for a little scientific humility in the classroom and in the public forum. The best way to insure this at every level of public education is to teach the philosophy of science. Neil Postman has recently submitted this idea in *The End of Education* (the word "end" here is a McLuhanesque pun). The idea is that every scientist *surmises* a cosmology of his or her preference. This in turn is couched in a worldview which *assumes* certain basic ideas about God, man and the world. These *faith assumptions* help shape hypotheses, rules of evidence, the philosophy of fact and the conclusions of research. All students need to be made aware of the epistemological context of the scientific enterprise. This alone will demystify the sacerdotalism of modern science. And it will rid the classroom of the intellectual bullying that has forced so many young minds to think that the assertion of Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." is intellectually untenable.

In *The Blind Watchmaker*, Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins says, "It is absolutely safe to say that,

if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane."⁷⁶ Theologian Michael Bauman responds, "It seems to me, Dawkin's arrogance aside, that we ought to be far more wary of Darwin and his hide-bound modern disciples than we now are, because even though those followers of Darwin now admit that Darwin was not entirely right, they too often refuse to admit that Darwin's religious critics are not entirely wrong."⁷⁷ "Scientists often fail to admit, sometimes even to recognize, that so many of the issues and findings of science are neither purely scientific nor genuinely empirical. Because all empirical endeavors build upon, and proceed according to, various presuppositions, and because those presuppositions and procedures are inescapably philosophical, no scientist and no scientific procedure is truly philosophy-free... Even in the pursuit of something as fundamental as self-definition, science alone is utterly insufficient."⁷⁸ "Too often scientists teach and write as if the only real options available to us are science or mysticism, empiricism or bias, fact or feeling."⁷⁹ "Science, to be kept serviceable and humane, must be kept humble and teachable."⁸⁰

Fairness to Christian Commitment

The problem in the public education system is that Christians realize that evolutionists, under the guise of science, are seeking to impose their own assumptions, or faith, on their students. And when Christians challenge evolutionary science's assumptions or conclusions along these lines they are labeled "extreme right wing fundamentalists" and the discussion is supposed to end, as if there were an unassailable consensus among scientists and educators. The hubris one encounters among evolutionists in their characterization of the Christian position is sometimes astonishing. The vapid *ad hominem* quoted above is only one example. Isaac Asimov's 884 page *New Guide to Science* has three pages of anti-creationist vituperations.⁸¹ At best the orthodox Darwinist relegates religion to psychologically useful fantasy. Science deals with objective "facts" while religion deals with the subjective realm of faith. This

⁷⁴ Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 130.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁶ Michael Bauman, "Between Jerusalem and the Laboratory: A Theologian Looks at Science," *Premise* (Vol. III, No. 2, Feb. 29, 1996): 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸¹ Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 69, fn. 2.

epistemological distinction is a polite way of saying religion is simply irrelevant.

Particularly illuminating along these lines is the response of evolutionists to an exhibition celebrating the centennial of The British Museum of Natural History in 1981. The exhibition was on Darwin's Theory. The sign which greeted visitors asked: "Have you ever wondered why there are so many different kinds of living things? One idea is that all the living things we see today have EVOLVED from a distant ancestor by a process of gradual change. How could evolution have occurred? How could one species change into another? The exhibition in this hall looks at one possible explanation - the explanation of Charles Darwin." An adjacent poster said: "Another view is that God created all living things perfect and unchanging."⁸² One of the museum's senior scientist dared tell the public in a lecture: "The idea of evolution by natural selection is a matter of logic not science ... the inevitable logical consequence of a set of premises."⁸³ The responses in the pages of *Nature* reveal a zeal unequaled by theologians. One editorial asked with dismay "is the theory of evolution still an open question among serious biologists?"⁸⁴

The editors of *Nature* were astonished to discover that this question was more controversial among scientists than they had realized.⁸⁵ Needless to say the exhibition was modified along more orthodox Darwinian lines, as heavyweights like Anthony Flew question the integrity of "civil servants" who had a duty to present established truth. The museum officials were denounced for their "abuse of the resources of a state institution to try to put [their pet theory, cladism] across to all the innocent and predominantly youthful lay persons who throng these public galleries, as if it were already part of the established consensus among all those best qualified to judge."⁸⁶ Here we come face to face with the danger of not distinguishing between what is properly "scientific" and what is truly speculative. As Phillip Johnson has well said, "Whenever science is enlisted in some other cause - religious, political, or racialistic - the result is always

that the scientists themselves become the fanatics."⁸⁷

The fact that there is a raging debate among scientists themselves, which is largely unknown to the general public, is itself a scandal that needs to be exposed. Scientists who stick to the rules of their own discipline should be glad for such debate. The unwillingness of many to even admit that there is such a debate, much less affirm its validity, is evidence of the death of creative thought in all but the most technical areas of research. We are being reduced to a culture of technocrats without any reason for existing apart from our own narrowly defined activities in the technopoly. Neil Postman has eloquently analyzed this scenario in *Technopoly*.

Some may think that the concerns expressed above are esoteric and impractical. Ideas, however, have consequences. Sometimes their practical implications are not evident for several generations. It is no accident, for example, that the now-popular belief in the "random universe" of Darwin has spawned random acts of violence. Such violence is an historical novelty. It is no accident that the belief that we live in a "godless universe" has produced an epidemic absence of moral accountability in every institution of our civilization. Cheating and lack of respect for authority is rampant in our schools, as you well know. Can we expect to renew the teaching of "values" when Darwinism and the materialistic philosophy that it has spawned have robbed us of the concept of spirit and mind? All sorts of criminal and immoral behavior is widely believed to be ultimately chemical in its origin. How can anyone then be held responsible? As C. S. Lewis poignantly observed of English education over half a century ago: "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."⁸⁸

2. Religious: *The Nature of Faith*

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ... By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:1,3). The

⁸² Ibid., 133.

⁸³ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸⁸ Clives Staples Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 16.

A Christian Challenge

materialist's Bible, if he had one, would read: "Without faith we understand that the worlds were framed by a chance process. The visible is all there is and we are therefore without meaning, so eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die."

Both statements are based on *a priori* commitments, and in that sense they are both faith assumptions, because they are not empirically verifiable. Because of this I have argued that both creationism and evolution should be equally respected in the public forum and, therefore, in the public schools.

However, I do not think, as I have also argued, that evolution is adequate to explain the evidence encountered in the various scientific disciplines. That the things observed by evolutionary scientists with the marks of extreme intelligence written all over them should spring spontaneously from nothing requires an act of faith that defies the imagination and, to this observer, the intelligence as well.

Now let me go one step further and say the I do not believe that evolution, or for that matter any other theory or religion, is adequate to account for anything.

The Challenge of Created Reality

The Apostle Paul gives us what we might call *A Pauline Point to Ponder*, in Romans 1. "Since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and deity, so that they are without excuse" (1:20). He also says that people "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (1:18). The implication of this for scientists is that, whether they acknowledge it or not, they do their science *en coram Deo*, before the face of God. The proof of God's existence is all around us, and even in our very consciousness and reasoning power, as well as in our consciences. Scientific investigation itself is a revelation of the God of the Bible. In fact, the evidence is not like the signature or style of an artist, or "footprints in the sands of time." God is omnipresent and, therefore, he impinges on every aspect of reality, every object and every thought, and at every moment. The great unifying mystery underlying the subatomic quest is not matter or energy, as Heisenberg has discovered, but the invisible power of Almighty God. The Eternal Son of God through Whom God made the worlds is also the One by whom God upholds all things, by the word of His power (Heb. 1:2,3). Jesus Christ is

the Logos or reason underlying all of created reality (John 1:1). As Job was once asked by God, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know!...Who then is able to stand against Me? Who has preceded Me that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is mine" (Job 38:4,5;40:10,11). From a biblical perspective science can never get "to the bottom" of reality, because God is there.

So, our presuppositions about God determine whether or not we view the evidence as proof or not. That equally intelligent minds can come to such dramatically different conclusions viewing the same phenomena leads us to conclude that one's presuppositions are determined by something other than the evidence itself. The Bible points to man's vested interest in maintaining his independence from God. Genesis shows us that is the root of man's problem. Viewed thus, Darwinism is a sophisticated "suppression" of the truth.

According to the Bible the "suppression" of this evidence is much like the "obstruction of justice," eventually a day of reckoning comes. The Bible calls this the Day of Judgment. Thankfully, by turning to the crucified and resurrected God-man Jesus Christ, suppressers may be forgiven and learn by faith the way of knowledge pursued by the once unbelieving Augustine: "Credo ut Intelligam" - "I believe in order that I might understand."

Conclusion

Science is a highly useful, but limited and tentative enterprise. It is not done in a vacuum without the faith assumptions of the scientist. Whether or not evolution is a theory adequate to account for the extant evidence, and whether or not scientific naturalism is a philosophy of life adequate to meet the challenges of life, I leave you to decide.

Stephen Meyer put it eloquently, "If the simplest life owes its origin to an intelligent Creator, then perhaps man is not the 'cosmic orphan' that twentieth century scientific materialism has suggested. Perhaps then, during the twenty-first century, the traditional moral and spiritual foundations of the West will find support from the very sciences that seemed to undermine them."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Meyer, "The Origin of Life," 40, 41.

Evolution: The Materialist Juggernaut

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Gregory E. Reynolds is presently serving as regional missionary for the Presbytery of New York and New England and is currently located in Manchester, New Hampshire. With this installment we conclude this series.



HOW CAN A SESSION SHEPHERD ITS PASTOR?

by
Lawrence Eyres

The assumption of this article is that pastors are sinners still, and that ecclesiastical jurisdiction includes by inference, counsel, exhortation, encouragement and criticism, positive and negative—all short of, but preventive of, judicial discipline. There are no devices to accomplish this end either directly mandated in Scripture nor required in the secondary standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian form of government, by its very nature, militates against one-man rule in the church. We ministers all need the counsel of those who share with us rule over the household of God.

The need for shepherding pastors is not without Scriptural support, if not by open declaration, yet by inference.

Acts 20:28-31: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [or bishops], to shepherd the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. For you know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn you with tears.” Were these ruling elders, to be distinguished from ministers? Dogmatism on either side is unwarranted. But surely teaching was encompassed in “...to shepherd the church of God...” And it is likely that many of those elders were selected and groomed for office under Paul’s personal oversight. Still he could prophesy that some of them would “rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” The Apostle, speaking prophetically, tells

us that the selection and installation of ministers cannot be infallibly done! And he reminded them that he had warned them of the danger even while he was among them (Acts 19:8-10).

The Apostle stresses matters concerning the need of pastors throughout 1 Timothy: “But if I am delayed, I write that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house[hold] of God,

“...the Presbyterian form of government, by its very nature, militates against one-man rule in the church. We ministers all need the counsel of those who share with us rule over the household of God.”

which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (3:15). It would seem that Paul, as in 2 Timothy, was grooming Timothy to succeed him, not as an apostle, but as a leader in the churches of Europe and Asia when he would finish his earthly course. Thus - “Take heed unto yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for

in doing this you will save both yourself and those that hear you” (4:16). Solemn words. Mysterious though it be, Paul suggests that both the conduct of the minister and the content of the message is not altogether separate from his salvation! “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine...Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning [their sin being confirmed by two or three witnesses] rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest may also fear” (5:17,19-20). We can draw the following conclusions from these verses: (1) Vs. 17 sets high value to the teaching ministry—background for the following. (2) Vs. 19 warns against entertaining trivial criticisms against Christ’s minister. (3) Vs. 20 requires public rebuke of a minister who degrades his office through flagrant sin (See Galatians 2:11-21.) Underlying the whole passage is the assumption that Christians—even men with proven gifts—have within

On Giving and Taking Offense

them the seeds of all evil and need to guard themselves, and be guarded, from these sins!

In summary, our pulpits should be occupied by gifted and proven men, though they are sinners still. Even Paul himself was moved to revised his estimation of Demas. (Compare Colossians 4:14 with 2 Timothy 4:10.) And while serious sin in ministers should be met with judicial discipline, preemptive action on the part of his fellow elders

is also necessary. My concern is: **What mechanisms are needed for the prevention and forsaking of those subtle sins that confront pastors in their high and lonely calling?** Or to put it differently: **Are the sessions of our churches adequately shepherding their pastors?**

Ministers are primarily under the jurisdiction of their presbyteries. Some OPC presbyteries have pastoral oversight committees. Also a visitation committee has a measure of responsibility in this area. But is this enough? For example (as has happened too often in our churches), a pastor attempts to counsel a woman in his congregation. He begins with the highest of motives, but as time goes by, an emotional bond develops and he becomes involved in censurable behavior that brings grief and shame on him, to his counselee, the church and the honor of Christ. Presbytery committees are remote at best and are sentenced to deal with such offenses after the fact. Who is close enough to intervene **in time?**

Other dangers call for close and prompt attention. We are hearing about “burnout” in the ministry. Who is there to care and sense the onset of such problems? Who is there to observe problems within the pastor’s family, problems that, if not dealt with early, may have devastating consequences? Indeed, the minister’s eminent position can become lonely. He needs advice to be sure, but he also needs loving, understanding friends. There are numberless stressful situations that can, at the least, hinder his usefulness, and at the worst, bring him down. Who is there to listen, to understand, to encourage and to pray with and for him

in his need?

I must confess that a godly wife is a gift from heaven in such situations, but his fellow rulers in the church are there for problems such as these, even as they, with the pastor, are there for the needs of the congregation. And here is one reason for the conviction that all elders are **undershepherds of Christ** (see Peter 5: 1-4).

Some OPC presbyteries have pastoral oversight committees. Also a visitation committee has a measure of responsibility in this area. But is this enough?

But first, let me underscore a general rule that **must** be observed in all such dealings. The rule is **strict confidentiality!** That is not to say that confidentiality must cover sins or crimes that ought to be dealt with by either ecclesiastical or civil authorities. But unless circumstances clearly dictate, divulging

confidence is a breach of the Ninth Commandment. “A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Proverbs 11:13). “A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness” (Proverbs 12:23). The range of confidentiality is broad, but a man who doesn’t know the difference between what must be said and what should be held in confidence ought not to be an elder.

A second requirement has to do with how the pastor sees himself. The minister of the Gospel is a **servant**. In former generations the pastor may have been looked on as the **master**. Any member of the congregation who questioned or disagreed with him was regarded as disagreeing with God. Thankfully, this era is passing (although we may now be in danger of going too far in the opposite direction). The minister needs to know that he too is a sinner, capable of misreading the Word of God, having within his own flesh the root of every sin. Just as Christ humbled Himself to be our Redeemer, so the minister of the Word must be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,..” “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” “Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus” (James 1:19; Matthew 20:28; and Philippians 2:5).

“That Offends Me!”

And now for three mechanisms by which sessions may shepherd their pastors: **The pastor should seek the counsel of his elders.** It is for him to proclaim all the counsel of God, but he ought to accept counsel from his session. They are out there in the congregation. They can better judge how he is coming across.

It’s wrong for elders to sense dissatisfaction with their pastor’s preaching till the tension builds to where they “blow up.” They should not belong to the “club” which never says anything until they can criticize. He needs to know when he is being effective. An ounce of encouragement is worth a pound of criticism. I once (and only once) had an elder who would, from time to time, stop by my office and ask how the next ~~Sunday~~ ^{Sunday} ~~services~~ were coming along. I’d tell him, and then he’d say, “Let’s pray about it.” I would suggest that **every session should periodically set aside some time for discussion of the pastor’s needs and concerns.** After a good exchange, let them join him in prayer before the throne of grace.

The next mechanism is not something mechanical: it is an “ad hoc” sort of thing. The pastor ought to take the initiative whenever he feels the need to **seek advice in personal problems** with regard to the church, with respect to his family—indeed, anything that burdens him. True, he should be discreet in this lest he be perceived as running to them whenever he faces the least difficulty. But I know how it feels to work and pray and see nothing changing. I’ve known times of depression that lasted for months due to my sense that the church I was serving was in a rut it couldn’t climb out of. So, when a pastor delivers his soul to his people and nothing changes, what is he to do? At such times, he needs loving and understanding friends!

Finally, there ought to be certain elders who can sense the on-come of problems in the pastor’s personal or family life before he is sufficiently aware of them. It’s difficult to

know how the selection should be made—that is, which elders have the gifts and graces to deal delicately, yet lovingly and firmly, with emerging problems in their pastor’s life. It could be a sub-committee, or one or two of the pastor’s own selection, who are allowed the liberty to approach

him privately when real flaws of any sort first appear. But a godly, fatherly man who has lived through many times of testing and can use a gentle touch that works more wonders than an iron fist, can be a god-send and a conveyer of wisdom to a man of God who has no prior experience. This person or sub-committee should report to the pastor first, and to the session only when circumstances require.

I would suggest that every session should periodically set aside some time for discussion of the pastor’s needs and concerns. After a good exchange, let them join him in prayer before the throne of grace.

These are not **last words** on a subject that has been dealt with for generations, but **first words** on a crying need within the church of Jesus Christ. I would recommend that presbyteries set aside an evening within a stated meeting to study and “brain-storm” on this subject. The need is there, but setting up a program is not the answer. This is a spiritual matter more than an organizational one. It deserves serious consideration.

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ELDER TO ELDER

How Important is Faithful Family Visitation?

by
Dick G. Vanderpyl



The question – and hence the purpose of this article – is: “How important is faithful family visitation for the well-being of the church?” The answer is: It’s very important!

The RCNZ in the '50s

In the early fifties young migrants from The Netherlands settled in New Zealand, with their membership certificates in their pockets from their home churches. They were cautioned to seek churches that faithfully contended for the truth of God’s Word. Hence, most of them were somewhat reluctant to hand over their credentials at the first “port of call.” They floated around from one job to another. And it was much the same with the churches also. Their English was not the best at the time, and so—as they met one another in coffee bars or boarding houses—they talked of their experiences in their new culture, and of how they fared on the Lord’s Day.

I was twenty-five at the time and I was searching for a true and faithful church, comparable to what I had left behind in the home country. I was advised to make contact with a local Presbyterian Church, which I did. But I soon found out that the elderly pastor was not only a freethinker but also a member of the local Freemason Lodge. His wife regularly ‘worshipped’ at the Higher Thought Temple in town. (Others had similar experiences). In corresponding with my pastor of my hometown in Holland I was reminded by him to read again Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, which spells out clearly the marks of the true Church and wherein the true Church differs from the false one.

In the end we had no option but to establish our Reformed Churches. We began with three churches in the main cities (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch); with young pastors, young members, and hence a young inexperienced session, but...we were full of zeal. As a young and inexperienced office-bearer, my pastor accompanied me on the first few home-visits. I vividly remember my first evening with a newly married couple. My expectations were high; too high! I expected a high level of conversation as we sought a common ground of spiritual growth and experiences. I was quite disappointed, to say the least, and expressed this in my report to session. However, my experienced pastor played this down somewhat, advising me later (in private) that human nature being what it is, it is not often that there is a willingness to expose one’s spiritual emotions, and that one should read between the lines, so to speak. Another time, while visiting a young family, I dawdled a bit at the beginning, talking about the weather, the husband’s work, and so on. Then he suddenly burst out, “Please, get on with the home-visit; I’ve still got some work to do”. There and then I made a silent oath, never ever to allow this to happen again but instead—after a brief time of getting the feel and atmosphere of the home—to get into the conversation for which I had come. In the main, I have stuck to that decision throughout my life.

Young elders as we were, we had to learn and grow up fast, and as we did so we realised more and more the value of family visitation. In the Old Testament the understanding of “elder” was “the bearded one”, which indicated the age and wisdom needed to lead. We did not have the

How Important is Faithful Family Visitation?

wisdom of years but commenced our journey in life on a long and arduous road of spiritual growth and sanctification.

Important for the Family

Family visitation has proved to be beneficial to families and individuals, to the office-bearers in their oversight, and certainly also to the church as a whole. From a family's point of view there certainly are definite benefits. The majority of them look forward to such a visit and some even have a checklist of questions in relation to problems in the home or church life. Of course there are those who clam up and let the elders do the talking. But many are willing to expose themselves to trusted elders and seek advice in marital and/or family problems, e.g. with their children, wayward or otherwise. They may also have problems in relation to the preaching, education, youth-work or even strife with others in the church community. Anything goes! And such visits can become highlights in the life of the family and church community when joys and pains can be shared and prayed for.

Office-bearers ought to be willing to expose themselves in their own struggles at times. There is no need to pretend that, because they are spiritual leaders, they are immune to the wiles of the devil. Their task includes comfort and instruction, warning and admonition, an opening of the Scriptures and a time of prayer with the family. A most important matter for the elders is not to neglect visits to the sick and those who are bereaved. As a church, we are one body in Christ, and we are reminded that if one member suffers all the members suffer with him or her (or if one member is honoured, all the members will rejoice with that one). Elders must at all times be on the alert lest members drift away from the church. This becomes a greater possibility if the responsible elder does not keep his finger on the pulse of their lives via home visits.

Important for the Church

From the above you can see how important faithful family visitation is for the family; but it is also vital for the church. Beginning with the New Testament Church mutual encouragement, following the pattern of Christ's humility, was to be practised by all (cf. Philippians 2 and Hebrews 10:25). And then, in Acts 20:28 we read Paul's exhortation to the elders to be faithful shepherds of Christ's Flock and giving them specific and detailed charges how to care for the flock. You will remember that Jesus had charged Peter to feed His sheep on His behalf. Further on we read that Peter also passed this charge on to his fellow-elders: "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money (power?), but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but by being examples to the flock*". (1 Peter 5:2-4). Here, Peter stressed the need for the right kind of leadership; not a domineering one, but one by example and instruction. Note also the reward of the unfading crown (wreath) of glory given by the Lord Jesus, the Chief-shepherd to His faithful under-shepherds.

Elders are called, therefore, to be spiritual watchmen, posted on the walls of Christ's Church, never to be silent day or night (Isaiah 62:6). Never ever were they intended to be Board managers. Jeremiah warns them to listen when the trumpet of warning is sounded (6:17). So does Ezekiel when he warns his watchmen to be on guard, to be on duty at all times, to warn the wicked and the unrighteous to turn away from their evil ways, as they are accountable to the Lord. That's how vital to the well-being of Christ's church this is.

The Belgic Confession of Faith, one of our Confessional Standards, tells us that all things – and that certainly includes the family

How Important is Faithful Family Visitation?

also— must be managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Faithful family visitation therefore is a must, an obligation, because it does affect the well being of the “true church of Christ” Think of Paul’s description of the Church as one body, a unit, but made up of many parts (1 Cor. 12:12), inter-dependent on each other.

The Purpose of Family Visitation

What then, in general terms, is the real purpose of family visitation by the elders of the church?

One of the many **Church Orders** states that “pastoral calls shall be exercised over all the members of the congregation. The minister of the Word and the elders shall conduct annual home visitation, and faithfully visit the sick, the distressed, the shut-ins, and the erring. They shall encourage the members to live by faith, comfort them in adversity, and warn them against errors in doctrine and life.” This same Church Order also defines the task of the elders:

“They shall have supervision over the congregation—and their fellow office-bearers—exercising admonition and discipline and seeing to it that everything is done decently and in order. They shall, together with the minister, exercise pastoral care over the congregation.”

What more can we add to it! Faithful family (home) visitation is important for the well being of the body of Christ. At such visits the family’s relationship to God and His Church are talked about; in particular it may stress such matters as Bible reading and prayer, growth in grace, Christian witnessing in their community and how to make the Sunday, as the Lord’s Day, more meaningful. (There are a goodly number

of directives available to stimulate fruitful conversations. A wise elder will avail himself of such guides to lead a structured conversation satisfying both elder-visitor and the family). There is nothing worse than an empty casual conversation, which will neither satisfy the elder nor the visiting family and hence be a dishonour to the Lord! Its purpose, as an official family visit, is to measure the spiritual health of the members of the congregation. Do they stay close to the Word of God? Is there growth in faith, hope and love? Is there growth in their service to God and faithfulness in doing good? Are the straying ones being admonished, the backsliders encouraged? Thus the heart and lifestyle of its members may gauge the well being of the church. Family visitation is therefore a valuable resource of oversight and will also affect the minister’s preaching.

With faithful home/family visitations sessions will know how the church lives at the grass-roots level. It’s a way to find the needs in the congregation; it’s a barometer of the spiritual (growth) level. It helps pastors in their ministry of the Word. Both sides in the visitation are therefore enabled to encourage one another and certainly never to be a “one way” dialogue. Both parties ought to feel free to share in their spiritual growth and sanctification.

Initially, in the fifties, the Dutch element in our churches was rather reticent to say the least; there was a holding back, avoiding saying too much, not overly keen to open up, or freely and gladly share their spiritual and marital ups and downs with the office bearers. (And definitely not in the presence of other members of the family.) At that time the elders were no older or more experienced than the average church member. All this has changed as the first generation matured and grew in grace and the knowledge of God’s Word. Gradually we were conditioned by the evangelical world around us and learned to speak more freely about our faith and life in Christ.

How Important is Faithful Family Visitation?

Our churches here in New Zealand brought this “tradition” of home-visitation with them in the early fifties, and the trend for such visits is still as strong as it was then. There are and always will be weaknesses in the system. But this is not the fault of the “tradition” but lies mainly in the weakness of elders who are unsure of themselves, who may dodge issues, and who may dawdle more than probe the spirituality and/or who may never have learned the art of listening. While visits are based on an annual sequence, this must and does not stop a concerned elder from calling more than once on a family to help them with godly and practical advice. Members of the church should never hesitate to call upon their elder when there is a particular need. Often, such members will tend to go directly to their pastor. A wise pastor should advise his elder and even ask him to come along, unless of course it is some matter of confidentiality.

As a point of interest, home or family visitation definitely does not have its origin from the Low Lands (in the Netherlands). Reputable church historians have found sufficient evidence that such visits were being carried out right after the apostolic era. One of the greatest of the Church Fathers, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, even had regrets that he had spent so little time in pastoral relationships. After a lapse during the Dark Ages, John Calvin once again introduced family visitation and emphasized its validity, even to the extent that the elders were required in his congregation in Geneva to visit the members prior to the observance of the Lord’s Supper. This meant four visits per year for each family. At the time of the Reformation, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands made the decision that families should be visited once a week to replace the Roman Catholic weekly Confessional.

Of course there will always be objections and words such as inquisitions, or “it’s none of

your business” may be heard. (Once a family man was asked how his personal spiritual life was. To which the reply—“Indeed, as you said it, it is personal”—made it quite obvious that he considered this none of the church’s business). But fortunately this is very rare

Let me once more emphasize the importance of regular visits to the families in one’s district. Always be well prepared for each individual family and member and their needs. Be a good listener and keep on listening. The Apostle Paul had some good advice: “*Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone*” (Col. 4:5,6).

And so, if all parties concerned are faithful in their responsibilities, as members of the body of Christ, may we then say with David (to put it in the plural) ‘*One thing we ask of the Lord, this is what we seek: that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.*’ (Ps.27: 4)

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"THAT OFFENDS ME!"

by

Larry Wilson

"That offends me!"¹ Who hasn't heard that? Particularly, what pastor, elder, or deacon hasn't heard it? It makes us shudder. How should we respond? It depends on what kind of offense it is! We want unity and harmony in the church. But unless we consider that there are different kinds of offense and that God's ordained servants must make different responses to each, we won't get it.

What is an offense?

What is an "offense" according to God's Word? It's something that trips up someone so that he falls into sin or unbelief. The New Testament uses it as a noun. *"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way"* (Rom. 14:13; cf. Rom. 14:20; 1 Cor. 8:9). It also uses it as a verb. *"It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall"* (Rom. 14:21; cf. 1 Cor. 8:13).

The verb use is very instructive. When it's active, it means "to cause to stumble or fall". For example, *"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea"* (Matt. 18:6).

But when it's passive, it means "to stumble over, to take offense". But in this case, the blame isn't on the "stumbling block." It's on the one who stumbles. For example, *"And they took offense at him"* (Mt. 13:57). Literally, "they stumbled over him." Jesus was the stumbling block, but he didn't sin. It was their own fault that they stumbled. They *"took offense ... because of their lack of faith"* (Mt. 13:58).

¹I am indebted to Dr. Garry Friesen for the basic ideas expressed in this article. For a more detailed discussion of this theme, please see his book, *"Decision Making and the Will of God"* (Multnomah Press, 1980), pp. 377-426.

This is a very important distinction. In other words, it's a sin to give offense. But it's also a sin to take offense when none is given.

The sin of giving offense

When Paul talks about strong and weak brothers in Romans 14-15 and in 1 Corinthians 8-10, he warns against the sin of giving offense. He commands stronger brothers to take pains not to cause weak brothers to fall into sin. *"When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall"* (1 Cor. 8:12-13).

The sin of giving offense is one which a strong brother commits by doing something which is ordinarily a legitimate act of Christian freedom. But in certain circumstances it becomes wrong because it influences a weak brother to do something against his conscience. God holds the strong brother responsible for that sin because he failed to show Christ-like love and servanthood when it came to the weakness of his weak brother. He committed the sin of giving offense.

What makes the weak brother weak? First of all, a weak brother is weak in his knowledge of God's Word (1 Cor. 8:4, 7). This makes him weak in faith (Rom. 14:1). *"But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin"* (Rom. 14:23). Therefore, he's weak in conscience (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12). His conscience is oversensitive. It condemns him for doing what God's Word permits. Moreover, the weak brother is weak in self-control. *"For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols"* (1 Cor. 8:10)?

This means that a weak brother isn't just a young Christian. He's not just a Christian who gets upset

“That Offends Me!”

because he thinks you're wrong. Maybe these brothers have weaknesses. But that doesn't make them weak brothers. A weak brother is a Christian who can be influenced to sin against his conscience by the example of a differing strong brother because he's weak in his knowledge, faith, conscience, and self-control.

The strong brother is strong because he's been instructed in God's Word. *“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself”* (Rom. 14:14; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-7). The strong are strong where the weak are weak — in knowledge (1 Cor. 8:7, 10), faith (Rom. 14:22), conscience (Rom. 14:22), and self-control (1 Cor. 10:29-30). Strong brothers are mature believers who exercise biblical Christian freedom with clear consciences and aren't wrongly influenced by others who make different judgment calls.

Unhappily, this doesn't automatically make strong brothers strong in love (1 Cor. 8:1). But they ought to be strong in love. *“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up”* (Rom. 15:1-2). God holds the strong responsible for the weak.

The sin of taking offense

In this light, realize that you have to relate to more than one kind of differing Christian. There are weak brothers. There are also strong brothers who disagree with some of your judgment calls but who follow biblical principles about Christian liberty in such things.

But there's another kind of differing believer. Believe me, you will encounter them. They're the ones who refuse to accept others who make differing judgment calls. Instead, they keep pushing others to conform to their conclusions. They get upset at those who resist. They take offense when no offense is given.

Earlier, we saw that it's a sin to give offense. But we also saw that it's a sin to take offense when none is given. Now we see why this distinction is so important. You see, the real reason why someone takes offense is not the actions of the other person. It's his own pride or unbelief.

The people of Jesus' hometown “took offense at him.” Jesus was a stumbling block, but not in the sense that he committed the sin of giving offense. Rather, he was a stumbling block in the sense that he was the occasion for their sin of taking offense. They probably blamed Jesus. But in reality, the reason they took offense was *“their lack of faith”* (Mt. 13:57-58). The sin was theirs, not his.

This kind of differing believer is not a weak brother. He's firm in conviction and willpower. He's not about to blindly follow examples with which he disagrees. But he's not a strong brother either. He's weak in Biblical knowledge and he's weak in love. He can't differentiate between God's commands and his own personal application of God's commands. He makes his own applications binding — not just for himself, but for everyone else. He's a legalist, a “Pharisee.” He takes offense at those who resist his pressure to conform to his judgment calls. He takes offense when none is given. He takes offense because of his own pride. The sin is his, not theirs.

Where the rubber meets the road

Sometimes pastors, elders, and deacons, deeply concerned not to give offense, let themselves and the church get taken hostage by someone who takes offense. It seems that every time Christ's kingdom is advancing — whether a pastor is being called, a budget is being approved, a church is being planted, a building program is being developed, a Christian school (or a Christian home school support group) is being formed, etc. etc.—someone steps forward to say of something, “That offends me!” Eager to avoid conflict in the church, and failing to realize that taking offense is a sin in itself — a divisive, peace-breaking, conflict-producing sin — God's ordained servants often backpedal in order to appease the offended one.

Now, as those who've been blessed with good teaching, we need to beware of the ease with which we do fall into the sin of giving offense (1 Cor. 8:1). So whenever someone says, “That offends me,” we'd better examine ourselves. We need — by abiding in Christ — to bear the fruit of a humble, Christ-like attitude of servant-love toward all our brethren, including our weak brothers. But if it

“That Offends Me!”

becomes evident that the person saying, “That offends me,” is actually guilty of the sin of taking offense, we had better not try to appease it. If we do, we fall into sin ourselves. We sin by failing to deal with divisive judgmentalism in Christ’s church. We had better deal with it not as a hurt we need to soothe but as a sin we need to confront.

Jesus never backed off from saying or doing things which were right, even though he knew the Pharisees would take offense at them (cf. Mt. 15:1-14). He kept doing what brought his Father glory and advanced his own Kingdom. At first, when the Pharisees questioned him, Jesus simply explained why he did what he did. But when they started trying to turn people away from following him, Jesus began more directly to rebuke them. He also began to warn others about the Pharisees. He told his disciples to “*be on guard*” (Mt. 16:6) and to “*leave them*” (Mt. 15:14). Finally, Jesus openly rebuked the Pharisees.

So, in light of Christ’s example, how should God’s ordained servants relate to those who take offense when none is given? First and foremost, beware of being an offense-taker yourself (Mt. 6:12, Lk. 12:1, Rom. 14:3). (Don’t be too quick to exonerate yourself. As Martin Luther incisively said, “There’s a pope, a devil, and a Pharisee in every human heart.”) If an offense-taker questions you, gently and patiently explain why you believe and behave as you do (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Don’t give in to his pressure to conform to his personal dos and don’ts, especially if it impinges on the gospel (see the whole book of Galatians). Keep pursuing peace (Rom 12:18; 14:19). Try to build him up in Christ. If he refuses your efforts to be a peacemaker, back off and commit him to God. Warn the church as a whole of the sin of taking offense (Rom 15:14). Make sure you keep the grace of God in Christ central in all your ministry. I hope that it goes without saying that you’ll love the offense-taker for Christ’s sake and pray for him each step of the way. Maybe the Lord will use these things to bring him to greater maturity in Christ.

But what if the offense-taker escalates his efforts to pressure others to conform to his personal criteria of acceptance and fellowship? If the offense-taker starts to hurt the church, to hurt individual believers

spiritually, and/or to hurt the church’s witness to the world, confront him on the private level. Seek to lead him to repentance (Mt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1). If private confrontation doesn’t restore the offending brother, then you must pursue the further steps for church discipline which our Lord Jesus spelled out (Mt. 18:15-20). Public rebuke is what our Lord Jesus did in effect when he publicly condemned those who so persistently opposed him (Mt. 23). The final step of excommunication is what he did in effect when he took the Kingdom away from the Jews and gave it to the Gentiles, culminating in the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. (but in hope of restoration, Romans 11).

Conclusion

It is a sin to give offense. But it’s also a sin to be “touchy,” to take offense when none is given. It’s important that God’s ordained servants realize that both of these things are sins and act accordingly.

Now brothers, let’s be honest. I’ve committed both of these kinds of sins — I’ve both given and taken offense at varying points in my Christian pilgrimage. How thankful I am that I have a faithful Savior who has loved me and received me, whose righteousness covers me, and whose Spirit is sanctifying me. The goal of this article is not to provide fuel for self-righteousness. My goal rather is to help church leaders to consider some weaknesses which Satan seeks to exploit in his war against Christ and the church. My goal is to encourage us in church leadership to recognize these sins as sin and to help God’s people to experience the triumph of God’s grace in Christ over these sins.

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A LIFE AND DEATH MATTER

by

G. I. Williamson

A wise teacher once made an interesting observation. He said that art and theology have one vital thing in common, namely, the importance of knowing where to draw the line. I was struck by the obvious truth of that statement fifty years ago and it seems even more relevant today.

We now have the technology to keep a human body functioning even when the most advanced medical science tells us the brain is dead. And we all know that it costs a lot of money to pay for the operation of many of the latest life-sustaining machines. So the question that more and more forces itself upon our minds is this: *where should the line be drawn?* And perhaps even more important: *who is going to draw it?*

While I was waiting in the hospital, recently, for my wife to receive out-patient knee surgery, I noticed a free offer. It was a coupon to send for the official Living Will and Medical Power of Attorney form provided by the Iowa State Bar Association. So I decided to send for it. The document is reproduced on the next two pages.

It is my opinion that this document draws the lines where they ought to be drawn rather well, that is to say, (1) between *any act calculated to hasten or bring about the end of life*, on the one hand, and *any act calculated to accomplish nothing more than to prolong the process of dying*, on the other. If this was the only line drawn in this document, of course, I would not feel that it provided adequate security. But it is not the only line drawn. No, the other line is drawn (2) between *a person chosen by the signer of this declaration as fully reliable and trustworthy*, on the one

hand, and *all other persons*, on the other hand. This, of course, would not always prove to be much of a safeguard when used by those who are outside the covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ. But for those within that covenant—and, especially, if the persons making use of this document stand within a godly covenant family line—there will be a large measure of comfort if that designated person is wisely chosen.

I believe we all need to give thought to this matter and to make prudent preparations for the possibility that such could be needed. I would even think it might be proper for members of the church to receive advice from the elders and/or deacons of the church, if they are uncertain about such matters. All too often such things are left until it is too late to know, for sure, what the stricken person would have wanted. And then, suddenly, someone has to take responsibility without any forewarning at all. It is to avoid such unnecessary impositions that documents such as these have been developed.

But surely here, if ever, *godly* wisdom is needed. And it is our opinion that the elders of the church—men of sound scriptural knowledge and rich life experience—are the ones best qualified. As they make their regular, annual home visits they should be prepared to offer counsel and advice in these matters as much as they can before such events take place.

What do some of you elders think about this issue? Perhaps your insight and/or experience could help us to build upon whatever is of value in this article—or correct what is said here if that is needed. We are convinced that there is need for careful foresight in this matter.

A Life and Death Matter

DECLARATION RELATING TO LIFE-SUSTAINING PROCEDURES
(Living Will)
AND
DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE DECISIONS
(Medical Power Of Attorney)

I. DECLARATION RELATING TO LIFE-SUSTAINING PROCEDURES

If I should have an incurable or irreversible condition that will result either in death within a relatively short period of time or a state of permanent unconsciousness from which, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, there can be no recovery, it is my desire that my life not be prolonged by the administration of life-sustaining procedures. If I am unable to participate in my health care decisions, I direct my attending physician to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining procedures that merely prolong the dying process and are not necessary to my comfort or freedom from pain.

This declaration is subject to any specific instructions or statement of desires I have added in "Additional Provisions" below.

II. POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE DECISIONS

I hereby designate _____
(Type or Print) Name of Agent Phone Number

(Type or Print) Street Address City State Zip Code

as my attorney in fact (my agent) and give to my agent the power to make health care decisions for me. This power exists only when I am unable, in the judgment of my attending physician, to make those health care decisions. The attorney in fact must act consistently with my desires as stated in this document or otherwise made known.

Except as otherwise specified in this document, this document gives my agent the power, where otherwise consistent with the laws of the State of Iowa, to consent to my physician not giving health care or stopping health care which is necessary to keep me alive.

This document gives my agent power to make health care decisions on my behalf, including to consent to refuse to consent, or to withdraw consent to any care, treatment, service, or procedure to maintain, diagnose, or treat a physical or mental condition. This power is subject to any statement of my desires and any limitations included in this document. My agent has the right to examine my medical records and to consent to disclosure of such records.

OPTIONAL: If the person designated as agent above is unable to serve, I designate the following person to serve instead:

(Type or Print) Name of Alternate Phone Number

(Type or Print) Street Address City State Zip Code

OPTIONAL: ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS - Insert here specific instructions or statement of desires (if any):

Signed this _____ day of _____, 199 __,

Your Signature (Declarant/Principal)

Type or Print Your Name

Street Address

City State Zip S.S.#

IMPORTANT NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT MUST BE SIGNED BEFORE A NOTARY PUBLIC OR TWO WITNESSES. SEE REVERSE FOR NOTARY OR WITNESS FORMS. IF YOU WANT TO EXECUTE EITHER A LIVING WILL DECLARATION OR A MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY, BUT NOT BOTH SEPARATE FORMS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE IOWA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS FORM OR NEED ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE IT, YOU SHOULD CONSULT AN ATTORNEY.

A Life and Death Matter

NOTARY PUBLIC FORM

STATE OF IOWA, _____ COUNTY, ss: _____

This document was acknowledged before me on _____ 199_ by _____
_____, Notary Public

WITNESS FORM

We, the undersigned, hereby state that we signed this document in the presence of each other and the Declarant/Principal and we witnessed the signing of the document by the Declarant/Principal or by another person acting on behalf of the Declarant/Principal at the direction of the Declarant/Principal, that neither of us is appointed as attorney in fact by this document; that neither of us are health care providers who are presently treating the Declarant/Principal, or employees of such a health care provider. We further state that we are both at least 18 years of age, and that at least one of us is not related to the Declarant/Principal by blood, marriage or adoption.

Signature of First Witness

Signature of Second Witness

Type or Print Name of Witness

Type or Print Name of Witness

Street Address

Street Address

City State Zip Code

City State Zip Code

GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING THIS DOCUMENT

1. "Health care" means any care, treatment, service, or procedure to maintain, diagnose, or treat an individual's physical or mental condition. "Life-sustaining procedure" means any medical procedure, treatment, or intervention which utilizes mechanical or artificial means to sustain, restore, or supplement a spontaneous vital function, and when applied to a person in a terminal condition, would serve only to prolong the dying process. "Life sustaining procedure" does not include administration of medication or performance of any medical procedure deemed necessary to provide comfort care or to alleviate pain.
2. The terms "health care" and "life-sustaining procedure" include nutrition and hydration (food and water) only when provided parenterally or through intubation (intravenously or by feeding tube). Thus, this document authorizes withholding nutrition or hydration that is provided intravenously or by feeding tube. If this is not what you want, you should set forth your specific instructions in the space provided on page 1.
3. The following individuals shall not be designated as the attorney in fact to make health care decisions under a durable power of attorney for health care:
 - a. A health care provider attending the principal on the date of execution.
 - b. An employee of such a health care provider unless the individual to be designated is related to the principal by blood, marriage, or adoption within the third degree of consanguinity.
4. The power of attorney for health care decisions or the declaration relating to use of life-sustaining procedures may be revoked at any time and in any manner by which the principal/declarant is able to communicate the intent to revoke, without regard to mental or physical condition. A revocation is only effective as to the attending health care provider upon its communication to the provider by the principal/declarant or by another to whom the principal/declarant has communicated the revocation.
5. It is the responsibility of the principal/declarant to provide the attending health care provider with a copy of this document.
6. A declaration relating to use of life-sustaining procedures will be given effect only when the declarant's condition is determined to be terminal or the declarant is in a state of permanent unconsciousness, and the declarant is not able to make treatment decisions.

SUGGESTIONS AFTER FORM IS PROPERLY SIGNED, WITNESSED OR NOTARIZED

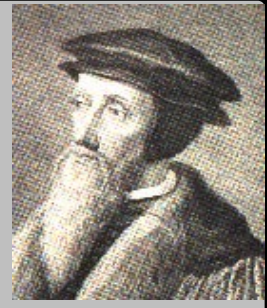
1. Place original in a safe place known and accessible to family members or close friends.
2. Provide a copy to your doctor.
3. Provide a copy(s) to family member(s).
4. Provide a copy to the designated attorney in fact (agent) and to alternate designated attorneys in fact (if any).

The Indiscriminate Gospel Offer

from *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*

by

John Calvin



“We know that the promises are effectual only when we receive them in faith, but, on the contrary, when faith is made void, the promise is of no effect. If this is the nature of the promises, let us now see whether there be any inconsistency between the two things, viz., (1) that God, by an eternal decree, fixed the number of those whom he is pleased to embrace in love, and on whom he is pleased to display his wrath, and (2) that he offers salvation indiscriminately to all. I hold that they are perfectly consistent, for all that is meant by the promise is, just that his mercy is offered to all who desire and implore it, and this none do, save those whom he has enlightened. Moreover, he enlightens those whom he has predestinated to salvation. Thus the truth of the promises remains firm and unshaken, so that it cannot be said there is any disagreement between the eternal election of God and the testimony of his grace which he offers to believers” (*Institutes* III, xxiv, 17).

But why does he mention all men? Namely that the consciences of the righteous may rest the more secure when they understand that there is no difference between sinners, provided they have faith, and that the ungodly may not be able to allege that they have not an asylum to which they may retake themselves from the bondage of sin, while they ungratefully reject the offer which is made to them. Therefore, since by the Gospel the mercy of God is offered to both, it is faith, in other words, the illumination of God, which distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked, the former feeling the efficacy of the Gospel, the latter obtaining no benefit from it. Illumination itself has eternal election for its rule (III, xxiv, 17).”

“That Christ is offered to us in the Gospel with

all the abundance of heavenly blessings, with all his merits, all his righteousness, wisdom, and grace, without exception, Paul bears witness when he says, ‘Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he has

made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,’ [2 Cor. 5:20, 21]” (III,v,5).

“Every promise which God makes is evidence of his good will. This is invariably true, and is not inconsistent with the fact, that the large benefits which the divine liberality is constantly bestowing on the wicked are preparing them for heavier judgment. As they neither think that these proceed from the hand of the Lord, nor ac-

knowledge them as his, or if they do so acknowledge them, never regard them as proofs of his favor, they are in no respect more instructed thereby in his mercy than brute beasts, which, according to their condition, enjoy the same liberality, and yet never look beyond it. Still it is true, that by rejecting the promises generally offered to them, they subject themselves to severer punishment. For though it is only when the promises are received in faith that their efficacy is manifested, still their reality and power are never extinguished by our infidelity or ingratitude” (III,ii,32).

“In regard to the matter in hand, I deny that God cruelly mocks us when he invites us...The promises being **offered alike to believers and to the ungodly**, have their use in regard to both” (II,v,10).

(By word search of the **Ages CD** entitled: *The John Calvin Collection*).



WHICH IS MORE HIERARCHICAL : THE REFORMED OR THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT?

by

G. I. Williamson

It has been alleged that the Presbyterian form of Government is inherently hierarchical, whereas the Reformed is not. For example Rev. Bruce Hoyt (a minister of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand [RCNZ]) in a paper presented at a ministers' conference in N.Z.—and later published in *Lux Mundi*—says: “Presbyterian polity is inherently hierarchical in its gradation of courts” [Our underlining]. And in proof of this statement he offers the following from two Australasian denominations:

The government of the church is vested in courts designated respectively Sessions or Parish Councils, Presbyteries, Synods and General Assembly, in regular gradation of authority and in the order named (Pres. Ch. of NZ-BO, Chap. 1, Sect. C.3).

It is lawful, and agreeable to the Word of God, that there be subordination of congregational, classical, provincial, and national assemblies, for the government of the church (WA-FPCG, p. 405).

It is my contention, however, that—while acknowledging that there is always the danger of hierarchical development in every church—this is an incorrect assessment. If anything it is the continental form of church government that has at least one *inherently* hierarchical principle embedded in it which has caused serious harm in the history of these churches.

I speak of article 31 of the Dordt Church Order which reads as follows (in the NRC Psalter):

If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right of appeal to a major ecclesias-

tical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles formulated in this General Synod, as long as they are not changed by another General Synod.

To a Presbyterian this certainly sounds hierarchical, even though we recognize without question that the Synod of Dordt did not intend it to be. Even so, it is my contention that this formulation has not worked *against*—but instead has worked *for*—the development of hierarchy.

Take the 1924 CRC decision on Common Grace as a noted example. In discussing this recently with a retired minister it was pointed out that the intention of this decision was to quiet unrest and tension in the CRC over this issue. I was told that leaders of the Church appealed to Herman Hoeksema personally to simply let the matter rest—for the time being at least—with the assurance that if he did so there would be peace, and no one would bother him. Yet, with all due respect, this well-meant advice does not seem to me to comport with this article. This was a decision made by a General Synod. It was “agreed upon by a majority vote.” I would therefore maintain that Rev. Hoeksema was, at this point, acting correctly when he was immediately stirred into action against this 1924 decision. I say this because this article only provides two options: either (1) accept as “settled and binding” the decision of the majority, or (2) start proving the decision to be in conflict with the Word of God. Since Rev. Hoeksema could not do the former in good conscience he—rightly in my view—had no other option but to set out to prove this decision to be wrong. What he has been faulted for, in my opinion, is precisely that for which he deserves

WHICH IS MORE HIERARCHICAL?

praise! He took seriously what it said in article 31 of the church order.

Now the point I wish to make is that in authentic Presbyterian church government the shoe is, so to speak, on the other foot. What I mean is that the burden of proof for anything and everything that is “settled and binding” rests upon the majority, not the minority.

And here, again, I give an example. In the early history of the OPC it was recognized that the hymn book of the old Presbyterian Church USA was seriously deficient. So a committee was appointed to work on a new book for the Church. As the work progressed it was clear that a relatively small minority held that only the inspired Psalms should be sung in the worship of God. The majority, however—though recognizing that the minority view was the consensus view of the Westminster Assembly, and the view expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith—opted for the continued use of uninspired hymns. The result was the now well-known *Trinity Hymnal*. It is certainly the song book of a large majority of OPC congregations. And the content and production of this book was decided upon by a large majority vote at the Denver Assembly in 1960, which I myself attended. Yet it has never been required that any OP congregation use this book—or this book only. There are some congregations that do not use it at all, but use only the Psalter (usually in the RPCNA version). And there are other congregations that supplement *Trinity Hymnal* with a complete Psalter.

What a contrast between this and, for example, the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). One of our former congregations—the Blue Bell congregation in Pennsylvania—left the OPC to join the CanRC. They were using, at that time, the RPCNA *Book of Psalms for Singing* (which I regard as the most accurate in the English language). Yet they were required to abandon that Psalter and to conform to the majority by using the much looser *Anglo-Genevan Psalter*.

Another example comes from my former congregation in New Zealand. It decided, at one time, to call itself the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Silverstream. But the General Synod decided that only the word Reformed could be used, and

the local church ‘had to get in line.’

In the OPC only three things are regarded as “settled and binding” in various degrees: (1) the first—and highest—authority is the Bible.¹ (2) The second is what we call the Westminster Standards²—the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. (3) The third is the Form of Government, Book of Worship and Book of Discipline.³ (4) Decisions of the General Assembly, however, are not “settled and binding” unless they are [a] judicial in nature, or [b] involve modification of the secondary standards by due process.

As a case in point, the recent G.A. decision to uphold the deposition of Dr. Terry Gray—the Calvin College Professor who wanted to be allowed, as a ruling elder, to hold that Adam may have had pre-human ancestors—is settled and binding. It is settled and binding because the General Assembly determined, by due process, that Dr. Gray’s view is contrary to the Standards of the Church (both supreme and secondary) and because there is no broader assembly to which Dr. Gray can appeal here on earth.

There was a time when it was incumbent upon Presbyterian office-bearers in American Presbyterian bodies to hold that the Pope is THE ANTI-CHRIST. But this was challenged, successfully, and the Westminster Confession was changed so as to eliminate this as a view that is settled and binding.

The OPC has been extremely careful, during the more than forty years that I have known the church and served in it, to avoid imposing anything as settled and binding without a rather lengthy and involved process involving three important steps. (1) A G.A. has to determine that something ought to be binding by a two-thirds majority vote. (2) Then it has to send the matter to the Presbyteries for consideration, debate and

¹ Scripture alone has final, or supreme, authority.

² These can be amended, but they are authoritative unless and until they are amended.

³ No one is required to subscribe to these documents—the FoG, the BoW and the BoD—in detail, but to *approve* them and operate by them in the Government of the Church.

WHICH IS MORE HIERARCHICAL?

approval. (3) Then, if two-thirds of the Presbyteries of the Church support what is proposed, it goes back to the next G.A. for final approval. If, at this point, there is again a two-thirds or greater majority vote for the proposed change it becomes a part of the (thus amended) official secondary standards of the Church and *therefore* “settled and binding.”

Back in the 1960s efforts were underway to seek organic union between the OPC and the CRC. At that time the CRC appointed a Committee to meet with our Committee to seek to pinpoint the more important differences in matters of Church Government and to resolve them. The Committee report to the 1963 Synod had the following to say:

“...we conclude that there is a clear clash between the OPC and the CRC with reference to the relationship that is thought to exist between the authority of major assemblies and the sufficient, and unique authority of the Word of God. For the reasons given above the OPC is most unwilling to bind its membership, especially in the areas of faith and worship, with anything that is not directly prescribed by Scripture. And, on the other hand, the OPC cannot accept the willingness of the CRC to bind its membership with precepts that, though they may not contradict Scripture, do go beyond Scripture, and this in the areas of faith and worship. References to a few of the items in the proposed revision of the Church Order may serve to illustrate the sort of thing to which the OPC would be expected to take exception.

1. Art. 50—Synod is to designate the Bible versions to be used in the worship services.
2. Art. 51—The congregation shall assemble for worship at least twice on the Lord's Day to hear God's Word.
3. Art. 54—Worship services shall be held in commemoration of the specified days.
4. Art. 55—Synod stipulates the versions, liturgical forms, and songs that are to be used in worship services.
5. Art. 56—At one of the services each Lord's Day, the Word shall be preached as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.
6. Art. 58—Sacraments shall be administered with the use of the ecclesiastical forms.

7. Art. 63—Specifies frequency with which the Lord's Supper shall be administered.

8. Art. 63—Specifies that Lord's Supper be preceded by a preparatory sermon, and be followed by an applicatory sermon.

9. Art. 64—Specifies the contents of public prayers.

10. Art. 68—Specifies annual home visitation.

11. Art. 72—Marriage shall be solemnized with the use of the ecclesiastical form.

The above listing is not exhaustive. More illustrations could be cited. Many synodically binding decisions would fall under the same objections of the OPC. The question for the OPC is not whether such practices, as are referred to above, are good or not but whether such practices may be made binding upon the local congregations. The OPC judges that such practices may not be made binding upon the churches since such practices are not prescribed by the Word of God, the sole source of authority in the church. The OPC concludes that those matters about which the Word of God is silent should be assigned to the realm of ecclesiastical adiaphora (i.e., things neither required nor forbidden by God), and as such cannot be made binding upon the churches.

Now it might be argued that the church may exercise authority in the realm of the adiaphora in order that “all things be done decently and in order.” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:40). Article 1 of the present Church Order apparently has this in mind when it states “For the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there should be...” The OPC, as well as the CRC, is committed to this principle for it is clearly stated in the Word of God with reference, as the context indicates, to the worship of the church. The point to consider however is whether the application of this principle may be allowed to eclipse more fundamental Scriptural principles, viz., those having to do with the unique and sufficient authority of Scripture, the liberty of the individual conscience, and the nature of the church and its authority. Such weighty matters cannot be set aside by a simple appeal to 1 Cor. 14:40. Reference at this point may be made to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Sec.6:

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new

WHICH IS MORE HIERARCHICAL?

revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the Worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”

This section of the Confession points us in the direction in which the OPC understands that harmony is to be achieved between (1) the principle that the Word of God is the unique and sufficient authority in the church, and (2) the principle that all things are to be done decently and in order. To the faith and life of the individual nothing is to be added as binding beyond the Word of God. In the affairs of the instituted church “the light of nature, and Christian prudence” may, however, suggest that certain things should be made common to the churches. At this point, it is noticed, the Confession places a limitation upon such decisions in that the circumstances involved must be “common to human actions and societies.” That is to say such decisions must submit to and make allowance for the catholic (universal) nature of the church. The church, in such decisions, must give due consideration to the varying needs and circumstances in which the local congregations find themselves. So, for instance, the local consistory may specify that two worship services are to be held each Lord’s Day because it can make such a decision giving due allowance to that which is “common to human actions and societies,” while it is more questionable whether Synod, which represents a wider range of needs and circumstances, is in as good a position to make a like judgment. Or, for instance, the local church may determine for itself how many members there ought to be in the consistory, what time of day the worship services are to be held, etc., because it is in the best position to make such decisions since it alone is cognizant of the “human actions and society” that is involved.

In Part III of this 1963 report to the CRC Synod—entitled “Resolution of the Differences”—it goes on to say this:

If we have correctly analyzed the nature of the differences between the polity of the CRC and the OPC with respect to the authority given to major assemblies, we must conclude that the position of the OPC is more nearly correct than our own. This becomes evident when we consider the matters that

have been mentioned above, viz., 1) the sufficient, and unique authority of Scripture, 2) the liberty of the individual conscience, and 3) the nature of the church.

This committee therefore concludes that our ecumenical discussions with the OPC have brought into clear focus the fact that a resolution of that which is perhaps most basic of all to the differences in polity (the authority given to major assemblies) rests upon the willingness of the CRC to reconsider its position. It is difficult to conceive how we may in good conscience ask the OPC to accept our customs and habits as binding upon their membership. By what authority may we ask them to accept as binding precepts and practices about which the Scriptures are silent?

...If the CRC can make adjustments in this matter, then this committee can hope for definite progress in the future of our ecumenical relationships with the OPC. Without this sort of adjustment, the prospects of uniting the two denominations, which we have held before ourselves as an ideal for many years, are not promising.”

This 1963 Committee report was, in many ways, remarkable. It stands out as unique in that it had the courage to challenge the growing trend toward hierarchy in the CRC. That it was ignored—that the Committee to meet with the OPC was forthwith eliminated—is just another evidence of the fact that this report was right on the mark.

Conclusion

It is certainly true that both Presbyterian and Reformed bodies have succumbed to the ever-present danger of hierarchical tyranny. But I regard this 1963 report as a powerful witness against the commonly repeated allegation that Presbyterian church polity is *inherently* more hierarchical than Reformed church polity. The truth, in my opinion, is the exact opposite. What I mean is that by making mere majority decisions of major assemblies “settled and binding” (unless and until they are proved to be in error) the seeds of hierarchy were already present in Article 31 of the Dordt Church Order. The three-phase process required by authentic Presbyterian church polity, on the other hand, was wisely designed to be *inherently anti-hierarchical*.

Pastor to Pastor: The Riches of Spurgeon (pt. 4)

by William Shishko



Charles Spurgeon never let his forthright Calvinism hinder his concern for evangelism. Not infrequently he would twit his hyper-Calvinistic brethren with the folly of their position.

“Did (Christ) look upon Jerusalem and say, ‘I believe that the city is given up, predestinated to be destroyed.’ and then coolly go on his way? No, not he. He believed in predestination, but that truth never chilled his heart. He wept over Jerusalem, and said, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.’

Did Christ o’er sinners weep,

□ *and shall our cheeks be dry?”*

The great British Calvinistic Baptist was possessed of the Spirit of His Lord who, on the one hand could say, “No one can, i.e. has the ability to, come to me unless the Father...draws him” (John 6:44) while he has already said in virtually the same breath “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37). Such freedom in declaring all that God has said with respect to God’s sovereignty in salvation and the free offer of the Gospel should mark our preaching as well. And the declarations should come with the loving, earnest passion that marked our Saviour. Nothing less befits the minister who, in word, conduct, and spirit, is set apart to an office that represents the great Saviour of sinners, cf. 2 Cor. 5:20.

Even the Calvinistic doctrines that are commonly alleged to be *prima facie* arguments against evangelistic zeal become powerful spiritual weapons for Spurgeon’s assaults on unbelief in his preaching. Spurgeon’s Arminian devotees must be horrified to hear how their model evangelist inveighed against the teaching of a universal atonement:

“Many divines say that Christ did something when he died that enabled God to be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. What that something is they do not tell us. They believe in an atonement made for everybody; but then their atonement is just this. They believe that Judas was atoned for just as much as Peter; they believe that the damned in hell were as much an object of Jesus’ Christ’s

satisfaction as the saved in heaven; and though they do not say it in proper words, yet they must mean it, for it is a fair inference, that in the case of the multitudes, Christ died in vain, for he died for them all, they say; and yet so ineffectual was his dying for them, that though he died for them they are damned afterwards. Now such an atonement I despise – I reject it.”

Yet for the same preacher the doctrine of “limited atonement” is a powerful cannon ball to lob into the fortress of “Doubting Castle” and against the onslaughts of Romanism:

“My brethren, ours has the advantage of universality in its proclamation and in its bona fide offer, for there is no one living who shall believe in Jesus who shall not be saved by Christ; but it has a greater advantage than this; namely, that those who do believe are saved by it, and they know that Christ made such an atonement for them that for them to be punished for sin would be as much a violation of justice as it would be of mercy.”

In this as with every other aspect of the person and work of Christ that Spurgeon so faithfully expounded for so many years there is an inevitable turning of the doctrine into something that pertains to the actual salvation of sinners. This is the heart of Spurgeon’s power as an evangelistic preacher. It is the reason for the continuing popularity of his sermons as both models for preachers and as rich spiritual food for readers. One cannot read a sermon of Charles Spurgeon without coming away with a fresh, lively, sincere, and heart-affecting presentation of Jesus Christ who came into the world to save sinners. For that reason, alone, Spurgeon’s sermons provide a priceless treasury for us. How often our preaching is anemic because it suffers from a Christ-deficiency. Reading Spurgeon will revitalize your ministerial blood!

In two other important ways Charles Spurgeon the evangelistic preacher provides a challenge to all of us as we minister the Word of God from week to week:

First, he avoided all forms of “preparationism”, i.e. the idea that the unconverted must do or be something before they can be saved by the grace of Christ. Spurgeon called sinners to turn to Christ (not to be confused with walking an aisle!) immediately, just as they were. How refreshing is this Isaiah 55

The Riches of Spurgeon (pt. 4)

type of clear appeal over against the oblique messages that all-too often come from preacher's mouths:

"I say to you, Jesus Christ stands like a great flowing fountain in the corners of the street, and he inviteth every thirsty soul to come and drink. You need not stop and say, 'Am I thirsty enough? Am I black enough?' ... Come as you are! Come as you are! Every fitness is legality; every preparation is a lie; every getting ready for Christ is coming the wrong way. You are only making yourselves worse while you think you are making yourselves better.... Come as you are! If you are the blackest soul out of hell, trust Christ, and that act of trust shall make you clean. This seems a simple thing, and yet it is the hardest thing in the world to bring you to it; so hard a thing that all the preachers that ever preached cannot make a man believe in Christ. Though we put it as plainly as we can, and plead with you, you only go away and say, 'It is too good to be true!' or else you despise it because it is so simple; for the Gospel, like Christ, is despised and rejected of men, because it has no form and comeliness and no beauty in it that you should desire it."

How our own work as evangelists would be revived if we too would so make Christ known as the water of life, then invite people to drink freely of him, without our putting forbidding security guards at the fountain!

Second, Spurgeon truly believed that earnest evangelistic appeals that grew out of the person and work of Christ would be effective for the salvation of sinners. With his own inimitable humor (which in no small measure contributes to the delight in reading Spurgeon's various works), Spurgeon lampoons the kind of preaching that possesses little or no passion for the conversion of the lost:

There are sermons of such a kind that, unless God takes to ripening wheat by means of snow and ice,

and begins to illuminate the world by fogs and clouds, He cannot save souls under them. Why the preacher himself evidently does not think that anybody will be converted by them! If a hundred persons or of half a dozen were converted by them, nobody would be so astonished as the preacher himself...

Indeed, unlike those who fall into a Stoic resignation when regular preaching ministry bears no fruit in the conversion of the lost, Spurgeon possessed an insatiable thirst to see people brought to Christ under his ministry. "We must see souls born unto God," he told the men training for the ministry at his Pastor's College. "If we do not, our cry should be that of Rachel: 'Give me children, or I die.' ... The ambassadors of peace should not cease to weep bitterly until sinners weep for their sin."

When we wonder why our ministries seem to have such little impact on the perishing souls around us, rather than run to the most current evangelistic program or "seeker-sensitive" approach to reaching the lost perhaps we should consider our own hearts first, and then earnestly cry to God to give us a zeal such as Spurgeon exemplifies. While his evangelistic model is certainly not perfect, it is, to my mind, one of the best ones we possess short of the inspired ones given in Holy Scripture. Here, as in so many other areas, may Spurgeon's riches enrich our own ministries to saints and sinners alike.

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