

Loving the Flock

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From the Editor

Hopefully by the time this issue is published we will be on the downside of the terrible death toll inflicted by the novel coronavirus. Disasters large and small cause us to reflect on the reasons why. Are the higher coronavirus death tolls in certain countries due to those populations being more sinful than others? I had to answer this question after 9/11 almost twenty years ago. My answer in “Repentance in the Time of Plague” is based on the sermon I preached from Luke 13.

Our main article this month is Alan Strange’s “Loving the Flock When It Seems That They Do Not Love You.” As a seminary trainer of pastors he gives sage advice on the nature and practice of pastoral love and care. His decade in the ministry gives weight to his advice on how an imperfect pastor can learn to love an imperfect congregation.

This month two books on pastoral ministry will be useful in applying the advice of Alan Strange. Allen Tomlinson presents a review article “Sage Advice for the New Pastor,” based on a new book by Charles Wingard, *Help for the New Pastor: Practical Advice for Your First Year of Ministry*. Pastor Wingard’s three and a half decades of pastoral ministry, as well as his teaching practical theology to seminary students make him well qualified to write such a book. It is unique in its focus on the first year of pastoral ministry, a time when some of the greatest trials and worst mistakes take place.

Readers may have noticed that Charles Wingard has been reviewing books on practical theology regularly in OS. So, it is special to have his first book on that subject reviewed along with an older book (2008) that he reviews, Kent Philpott’s *How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches*. This is another fine book with a special focus: smaller churches.

David Noe and Joseph Tipton give us part 4 of “Chrysostom’s Commentary on Galatians.” This new translation offers a fascinating insight into the intellectual and spiritual mindset of ancient church history.

Hospital chaplain Gordon Cook reviews a book offering a theological critique of the philosophical presuppositions of modern healthcare. During a worldwide pandemic those assumptions not only become evident but also may become more susceptible to change.

T. David Gordon reviews *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread*, by Cailin O’Connor and James Owen Weatherall, in his review article, “How False Beliefs Spread.” Gordon categorizes this book as among what he calls “stupid studies,” not because the study itself is stupid, but because it deals with the sociology of knowledge, showing how easily misled by false information and cultural assumptions people are, and

always have been. The sociology of knowledge is the study of the relationship between human thinking and the cultural assumptions that often reinforce misinformation. Peter Berger is one of the best known sociologists, and he is the pioneer of the modern discipline of the sociology of knowledge. This is a very important discipline for pastors to be aware of as they seek a comprehensive understanding of the culture in which they minister. So, don't miss the footnote in Gordon's review that provides further reading in this field.

The poem this month, "Scattered Feathers," was inspired by the present plague.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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- “How Can a Session Shepherd Its Pastor?” (Lawrence Eyres) 8:2 (Mar. 1999): 29–31.
- “Some Thoughts on the Preparation of Men for Ministry.” (John Kramer) 6:4 (Oct. 1997): 94–96.
- “An Open Letter to a New Pastor in His First Charge.” (Arthur Fox) 4:2 (Apr. 1995): 34–36.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantThoughts

Repentance in the Time of Coronavirus

by Gregory E. Reynolds

“There were some present at that very time who told him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1–5).

Accidents, disease, and crime take lives every day, but when a mass disaster like the World Trade Center attack of 2001 happens it raises questions. Why did the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, spread and attack some nations and some cities more than others?¹ Was it because some nations or populations are more sinful than others? Some Christians believe that the answer is, “Yes.” Believers in biblical times made the same mistake. In Luke 13 Galileans among Jesus’s audience brought news of Pilate’s injustice towards some of their own, perhaps because they were perceived to be revolutionaries. These were killed at Passover by Pilate (v.1). And Jesus has his own disaster story. The tower of Siloam, connected with a reservoir supplying Jerusalem with water from Gihon, collapsed and killed eighteen.

So, the question is: Is every disaster or evil, great or small, God’s special judgement on individuals or groups? Many people today, including believers, think so. According to the Bible there is only one nation in history with whom God has established a covenant: Israel. In the new covenant the visible church is the covenant community distributed among the nations. In the Mosaic covenant God established blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience, so there is a correlation between the spiritual and moral state of the nation and God’s relationship to them. The theocratic situation is the only time in history when covenantal religion and civil government were coextensive. The prophets were called to bring covenant lawsuits against the disobedient nation of Israel. We also see that the Lord judged certain pagan nations, like Egypt, the Amorites, and the nations of Palestine during the exodus when their sin reached a fullness (Gen. 15:16 “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). But we only know this because God’s assessment is given to us in his Word. It is a mistake, therefore, to apply these sanctions to America, any other nation, or any group of people. Jesus’s words are instructive, then, in this regard.

¹ This article is based on a sermon that I preached shortly after 9/11 at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in Manchester, New Hampshire, on September 23, 2001.

On the personal level Job’s “friends” made the same mistake. Counselor Eliphaz is functioning in light of a covenant of works when he says, “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?” (Job 4:7). Blessings and curses were an exact payment for obedience and disobedience: “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev. 18:24–25).

So, was Pilate’s attack on the worshipping Galileans or the victims of the falling of the tower of Siloam more sinful than others? Jesus answers with an emphatic “No!” But note how he phrases his answer: “do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others?” All accidents, tragedies, deaths, and disasters are a stark reminder that all people are presently and continually under God’s wrath and curse, as Romans 1:18 clearly teaches: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Jesus assumes that all people are sinners! Again Paul is clear in this universal indictment: “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, . . . so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9, 19, 23). However, this is not to say that every disaster is not a form of God’s judgment. The mistake is in saying that a particular disaster is necessarily a punishment for the particular sins of particular individuals or nations.

Good and bad things happen to all people. There are common curses and common blessings on all people. Rabbi Harold Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*² begs the biblical question: Why do good things happen to bad people? The answer is God’s common grace, or undeserved favor, as Jesus said in the Sermon of the Mount: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:44–45).

What should our response be to a worldwide disaster like the present pandemic, affecting 184 nations as of this writing? Jesus answer could not be plainer: “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (vv. 3, 5). The coronavirus should first of all work deep repentance in us Christians as we remember that we deserve God’s judgment and that it is only God’s utterly remarkable grace that makes us righteous in his sight, and will spare us from the final judgment, because Jesus has been judged for us. The present tense of the verb “repent” (*metanoēte*, μετανοῦτε) reminds us that the Christian life is to be one of continual repentance, a constant turning from the practice of sin to the way of righteousness.

Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:4–6)

As the Westminster Larger Catechism answers the question: “What is repentance unto life?”

² Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Random House, 1981).

WLC Q. 76. A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.

These Scriptures are among the proof texts for this answer:

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matt. 3:8)

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor. 7:10)

The consequence of not repenting is that “you will all likewise perish” (vv. 3, 5). The comparison “likewise” does not mean one of the same in kind, but that judgment will come with unexpected suddenness and finality. All evils and disasters are a foretaste of final judgment. Great disasters, like COVID-19, are meant to be stark reminders of this extremely serious reality. On that great and awful day the wicked “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).

Instead of looking at the wicked with disdain, which we are often tempted to do, compassion is the order of the day. If we remember what we are by nature, we will learn the lesson Paul was teaching the Corinthian church about their attitude toward the wicked, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Seek to be a comfort to those who are suffering in this pandemic. All the heroism and help that people and nations are offering is a revelation of God’s goodness and mercy, a blessing of his providence.

Along with being part of the help we should be seeking opportunities to compassionately warn our neighbors and families to flee the wrath to come by turning and trusting Christ, freely offered to them in the gospel. Religion presently is thought to be a general comfort for the suffering and the fearful, a kind of mere placebo. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to distinguish Christianity by the undeserved favor of God shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:18–21)

Along with the uniqueness of God’s grace in Christ, we need to communicate the power of the historical nature of that gospel. It is only truly good news because the eternal Son of God came into this world as a man to redeem us from sin and death.

The idea of transcendence has lost its footing in the assumptions of modernity. All is material and physical health; life in this present world is all many people have. We can often be caught up in this mentality and the way of life it demands. The gospel view is radically and thus wonderfully different:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

The hope of another world and the historical resurrection of the dead is central to the exclusivity of our message: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:19–20).

A day of ultimate reckoning is coming! We need to remind ourselves of this and call sinners to turn to the Lord of the present world and the one to come.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. (Luke 21:33–35)

The “greater sin” is an unrepentant and thus unfruitful life. Of all our blessings how much is used for the glory of God? Every disaster is a reminder that we all need to repent and believe the gospel.

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ServantWork

Loving the Flock When It Seems That They Do Not Love You

by Alan D. Strange

We are to love the flock to which God has called us to serve as overseers—regardless of our perception of their love for us.¹ To be sure, just as a man seeking a wife, we should, *before accepting a call from a particular congregation*, ascertain that they gladly receive our ministrations and that we enjoy mutual love and respect (as Paul loved, and was loved and respected by, those he references in 1 Thess. 2:1–13). Paul commends the Thessalonians for receiving his ministry to them, particularly his preaching of the Word of God, which they rightly regarded not as the word of men, but as it truly was, the Word of God. Clearly, they loved and received him, even as he did them, speaking to and of them in the most affectionate terms, likening himself to a father and even a nursing mother to them.

So, too, as much as possible, a man who is a candidate for a pastoral call should ascertain that he has a true heart for ministry to those seeking to call him and that they truly receive his ministry to them, particularly his preaching of the Word. This is why the process of the pastoral call should never be perfunctory. It is preferable that a candidate visit the congregation and preach and teach in that congregation over the course of a number of weeks and Lord’s Days. Only in this way can all parties have any hope of making a reasonable assessment of the suitability and fitness of both parties for each other.

A congregation’s call to a minister is of the utmost importance and they ought not to issue, nor should he accept a call, unless all parties have done all that is reasonable to ascertain whether or not this is the man that the congregation should call. However—as is also true with a man and a woman who think that they should get married—a congregation and pastor may *think* that they know and love each other; however, they can never really love each other until they take the time to know each other. Such real and deep knowledge does not happen apart from a pastor and a congregation living together for some time.

Here again the analogy of a marriage is apt as minister and congregation frequently are said in the early part of his tenure to enjoy a honeymoon and inquiry is made after some time along the lines of “is the honeymoon over?” when problems come to the fore. This reflects the reality that once a marriage ensues it is not simply wine and roses all the time but involves the hard, but immensely rewarding, work of learning to live together, which involves pain and pleasure, as we die to sin and live to righteousness. In a ministerial relationship such occurs as it does in a marriage.

What is a man to do if he discovers that his wife does not trust or respect him as he thought she did (or if she changes or appears to change in this)? This is not uncommon as we get to know each other: we are all sinners, and when the bloom is off the rose we see things about each other that we did not earlier see. A congregation will come to learn in

¹ This article is based on “Loving the Flock When It Seems That They Don’t Love You,” an address by Alan D. Strange to the URCNA Pastors’ Conference, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, June 2013.

some practical ways, however godly their minister may be, that he is but a man, a man who has many faults along with his virtues (even as a wife will learn this about her husband in practical ways that hitherto eluded her). And, even as a man will learn this about his dear wife—that she, as lovely as she is, has many faults and shortcomings—a minister will come to see that his congregation is not everything that he dreamed, imagined, or hoped it to be (even as he is not all that they had hoped a pastor would be to them).

What are a congregation and a minister to do when they come to see these things about each other? Particularly, in light of this topic, what is a minister to do when he comes to a clearer-eyed assessment of his congregation? Well, what is a man to do when he discovers that his wife is a sinner and not only falls short in her own ways but also is not as loving of him as he thought (or expects)?

He is to love her, even as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:22–33). Remember, Christ loves the church even though the church at times resists Christ and never perfectly submits to Him. The church at times resists Christ, even as wives resist husbands, and congregations resist their pastors, failing to respect him and love him as they ought. So a husband ought to love his wife, even when she fails or seems to fail to respect him, and a pastor ought to love his flock, even when they fail or seem to fail to love and respect him. The love of a husband for his wife and a minister for his flock may be made easier by greater real or perceived receptivity, yet the responsibility to love remains on the part of the one called to love (minister or husband), whether or not he believes that his wife loves and respects him.

A husband, once he has entered marriage and made vows, sticks by them through thick and thin. Similarly, once a minister has been installed in a particular congregation, and thus taken the requisite vows, he does not abandon that congregation. Only upon proper process can the ministerial call be dissolved—and that only in the proper circumstances (another valid call is in the offing, for instance), not merely because things have grown difficult, including real or perceived lack of affection on the part of a congregation.

Once you have accepted the call and are within a congregation, endeavoring to serve as their pastor, what are you to do when the congregation does not seem to love you? Even as a man does not abandon his marriage because he perceives his wife not loving him, so a man does not abandon a call as pastor because he perceives (real or not) that the congregation is lacking in love to him. By the way, this husband/wife, pastor/church analogy is, as we have seen, not inappropriate for several reasons, not the least being that a minister represents Christ to the congregation (as a man in his own way represents Christ to his wife, Eph. 4:33).

Why does a man love a wife who he perceives fails to love him as she should or as he thinks she should? Because God loves him, and he loves God and delights to obey him. Why does a man love a church that he perceives fails to love him? Because God loves him, and he loves God and delights to obey him. God calls you to love the flock regardless of their real or perceived lack of reciprocation. If one keeps in mind that our duty is first to God and then to our neighbor, we can continue loving our neighbor even when we perceive them as unlovable, because God loves us and thus gives us the strength to love them. Additionally, since God loves them, we are to love them.

We are to love the flock regardless of their response because God never stops loving us or them, even though, especially in light of his ineffable holiness, he has no reason to love the likes of us or them. We may feel that we have no reason to love the likes of our flock, but we are empowered to do so in loving a God who loves the unlovely and by that love beautifies them. Here is a wonderful thing: in loving, a husband beautifies his wife and a minister beautifies a congregation. Maybe it is a congregation that has a reputation for

being hard or inhospitable. A kind, loving minister, after some time, will likely help shape, by God's grace, his congregation to become more kind and loving, more welcoming of the stranger, and more caring for one another.

When a man takes a call, he is to endeavor then to love and serve that congregation, even if he senses or believes that they lack love for him. He is to give himself to them, to wash their feet (John 13): preach, pray, visit, counsel, and administer among them (to be among them as Paul was among the Thessalonians). Even as a husband is to give himself to and for his wife, so a minister should give himself to and for his congregation. Or as a father and mother give themselves for their children, as Paul compares himself to parents, as we have seen, in 1 Thessalonians, so a minister gives himself for his congregation. These are the people God has given to you and you to them: love and serve them.

Yes, preach to them the living Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) in the context of a loving father/mother/husband/Christ-like relationship. Not only preaching, though—here is the point—but being like Paul was to the Thessalonians, even as a nurturing mother and guiding father. Do we love our people like this in any respect? Listen to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” Does this sort of language, in its depth and intensity, capture our love for the flock? Or does the language of Paul embarrass us in our cold, loveless, cynical culture? Look at Paul’s language and check yourself against it.

This is the sort of thing that John Piper means when he reminds us that we are not professionals in the ministry. This is not to say that there is not a professional aspect to what we do, and that we are not to operate in a properly professional way, but we are never merely professionals. We are more like caring husbands or parents to our flock—or husbands or dear friends who employ the most affectionate of terms to the sheep under our care—who long to see Christ formed more and more in them and labor in fervent love to that end day and night. Pray for yourselves without ceasing for this sort of heart to be formed in you and this sort of love to characterize your ministry to the flock.

This service of the minister to his people is not conditioned on their conduct or understanding and not conditioned on your perception of their affection for you. A husband is not to refuse to love and give himself to his wife because of her real or perceived shortcomings, even her failure to love. Similarly, as long as one is the pastor of a particular congregation he has a divine obligation to love those under his care, regardless of their real or perceived lack of love of him. Again, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, even our Lord Jesus Christ, continues to love us though we are very unworthy of his love and though we never in return love him as we ought. Pastors need to be willing to love and never receive in return the kind of love that they bring to the people, since they are ambassadors of Christ to the congregation and he never receives in return anything close to what he gives. Let us learn to love regardless of the love that the flock returns, remembering that Jesus loves us in this way and keeps loving us though we keep failing to love him as we ought in return.

Notice the proposition that I have been given to address—“loving them when it *seems* they do not love you.” We need to recognize that we only have our perceptions. There are times when, because we misunderstand something, we *perceive* that someone does not love us, care for us, like us, or respect us. This sense sometimes stems from our own sin: a person or persons fail sufficiently to admire us, praise us, recognize us, etc., so we conclude that they do not love us. In other words, someone may not fail to love us truly but only fail to fill our love buckets, because we are looking to them to provide what only God can by way of love and acceptance. When we look to our parishioners this way, we are bound to be

disappointed with them, even as they with us, when they look to us for what only God can give them.

We must remember that we do not have a “God’s eye” view of our people. We cannot read their hearts, as tempting as we may find that notion, and as much as we may attempt to do it. We may quite misunderstand “the signals” from this or that person by mistaking something cultural or temperamental for a lack of love (“these quiet Midwesterners don’t appreciate me; these noisy New Yorkers don’t respect me”; the various ethnicities and regions all have their ways of expressing things that may differ from our desires or expectations).

Only Christ is the truth incarnate, and we need to be really very careful and humble by not going around and pronouncing that we know what is really going on with people. This would be an ungodly judging of our brethren, of our flock. It is important, then, to remember the “seems” in this equation, because our *feeling* of a lack of love, or perception of a lack of love, can say more about us than them.

It can stem from our own sins and idols. We crave adoration, and when people fail to give it to us as we think they should, it is easy to dismiss them and to think, “they do not love me.” We may think others do not love us because of our own pride and envy (and the other deadly sins). We should be careful not to mistake the “feeling” of not being loved with the fact of not being loved. The truth is that we can often make the mistake of thinking that our deepest feelings are the truth and end up worshipping our emotions and letting them control us rather than being controlled by him who is truth.

God’s Word, however, not what I feel most deeply, is what determines truth (Eph. 4:25). This is important to remember when we “speak the truth.” I may think that I am speaking the truth to my wife or my friend or someone else that I “tell off” and “let have it.” But such venting often misses the truth of God about that person. I may wish to tell my friend that he is this or that. But if he is God’s child, he is precious to God, and the ultimate truth about him is not the frustration that I feel with him that prompts me to call him a “loser.” He is not, in Christ, a loser, even if he has much lamentable behavior.

We need to learn to speak of each other, and to each other, the way that Christ thinks and speaks of us. He regards us as his dear children in spite of all our sin and misery, and when he confronts us about sin he never does so in a way that indicates that that is all that he thinks about us. No, when he confronts us through his Word and Spirit, it is always contextualized with the truth that we are his, and that what he calls us to is not something alien to whom we are as new creations in Christ, but simply to be who we are in Christ as new creations.

Having considered that we must love others, regardless of their love, or lack thereof, to us—whether or not we correctly perceive that—how do we love them when, perhaps, they really do not love us? Sometimes our perception that the flock, or some of the flock, does not love us, is correct—they do not love us. Perhaps, in such cases, then, the first thing that we need to address is this: what are some reasons that people might have for not loving us?

Let us address a few reasons that are “our fault,” while still acknowledging that the congregation ought to love us regardless of what our shortcomings may be. Our sins are many and not easy to hide, especially as we engage our people (they will also not love us if we withdraw and hide from them). Think of sins on our part as ministers that may irritate and put people off: a proud, dismissive, lording-it-over-them spirit; a lack of respect for them (contempt of them); being (or seeming) greedy—mercenary; being controlling, manipulative—though “for their own good” (some very gifted men are like this); being angry and throwing tantrums, or bullying by your behavior; being lazy, lustful, gluttonous,

self-seeking, self-promoting. We manifest these sorts of sins in the flesh far more than we wish to acknowledge (even as we walk in the flesh more often than we care to admit).

We need to acknowledge, though we are all commanded to love one another, that we are not always loveable and to be actively at work on this in our lives by pursuing holiness in humility, kindness, and approachability; real holiness is always approachable. Because of the sorts of things cited in the above paragraph, God's people are often challenged to love the likes of us who serve as their ministers. There are, in other words, many reasons that the flock may find us unlovable and thus have a hard time loving us (or simply fail to do so). The right response here on the part of ministers is repentance, chiefly for the sake of Christ, who is our gracious Lord and Savior and to whom we should render joyful obedience. We also respond for the sake of those to whom we minister—not only because we are to be examples to the flock, but because repenting of what makes it hard for them to love us is the way that we ought to treat them. By doing this we help them to fulfill their obligation to love us as their minister.

Reasons that are "their fault" in failing to love us are also not difficult to discover. Their own sins meet ours—they are impatient with our impatience, they are greedy and do not like our greed—and they fail to love. Particularly, they may sense our lack of love for them and this galls them and tempts them not to love us. Perhaps, they cannot accept our temperaments and personalities: we are quiet and they prefer louder or we are voluble and they prefer more reserved. We need to change in many ways, though not basic personality (careful here: we cannot claim this while excusing any sin—that is not mere personality).

While a congregation is to love its minister even if he is genuinely unlovable for some unmortified sins, they do not have the right to seek to make their minister over into something that he is not, something that is contrary to the way that God made him. This is not to say that a man cannot grow in, and ought to seek to grow in, for instance, his social skills that will permit him to more readily engage people. It is to say that the congregation is not to expect someone who is of a more retiring disposition to become a glad-handed extrovert.

Consider the ways, wrong and right, in which we respond to a lack of love (or a perceived lack of love). Perhaps the chief temptation, for most of us, is to engage in withdrawal—this is a very real temptation that often also occurs in our families. Do not withdraw. Rather *ora et labora* (pray and labor) for and with them. Give yourself selflessly to them. Even when they are envious, greedy, proud, etc.—all the things for which they despise you. Give and give and give, and you can, because you have received superabundantly. Remember you are a sinner and your people are sinners. God's grace is sufficient for you all.

We can also be those who are known for blowing up and lashing out, if withdrawal is not our response to a perceived lack of love from the flock. Do not pitch a fit in or out of the pulpit. Do not slander or gossip about your real or perceived enemies. Do not be bitter and full of hatred toward those that oppose you. Understand the use that God intends to make of opposition in your life (and remember that some people will hate even the most godly persons, certainly something experienced by our Lord and the apostle Paul). Some will resist the truth and will resent your confronting them with their sin. Do not "let them have it" in the pulpit; do not "preach searchingly" so as to expose hypocrisy that we are certain of because some people do not love us. Preach searchingly in love, not "beating them up" because of a lack of love on your part.

We ought to respond not by clamping up or blowing up but by learning patiently how to deal with those who do not love us, seeking to win them by firm yet loving engagement,

disciplining in love when needed (be careful here). Engage, in fact, in the sort of self-sacrifice for the flock that Warfield counseled in his masterful sermon, “Imitating the Incarnation:”

Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, His followers, not away from but into the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will we be to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them. It means forgetfulness of self in others. It means entering into every man’s hopes and fears, longings and despairs: it means manysidedness of spirit, multiform activity, multiplicity of sympathies. It means richness of development.²

If the people know that we preach what we preach to ourselves as well as to them and are struggling to love just as we call them to do, that will enable us to say more to them and to be received by them. A people who know that you love them will be, in the main, receiving and loving in return.

You are opposed sometimes because some are resistant to Christ’s Lordship and resist you as his ambassador. But do not be too quick, as we often are, because of our tendency to excuse and justify ourselves, to conclude that the flock’s disaffection is persecution for righteousness’ sake (again, it may be, but it is self-serving, and often self-deceiving, to quickly conclude this).

Above all, remember that, while you were yet a sinner, Christ loved you and died for you. He washed the feet of his confused, doubting disciples. It is when poor, doubting souls are drawn to Christ that minister and congregants most love each other. And this is what you, as Christ’s minister, are privileged to do: minister, so that you and your people are drawn to Christ, drawn to love him with all your being, and you are drawn to love your people, and your people are drawn to love each other, including you, their minister, with a pure, fervent heart.

It is only when we love him, in response to his loving us, that we love each other. So it is that pastors love their people and the flock loves the pastor. This is a loveless world. Only in Christ, as we commune with him and each other, as members of his mystical body, only then are we very unloveable people able to love him and each other. Amen.

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² B. B. Warfield, “Imitating the Incarnation,” in *The Person and Work of Christ* (1914; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1970), 574–575.

ServantClassics

Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians¹

Parts 1–4

by David C. Noe and Joseph A. Tipton

Part 1

This introduction teems with much passion and great fervor. In fact not only the introduction, but indeed the whole letter, so to speak, is like this as well. For those who always speak calmly to their students, when the students require sternness, this is characteristic not of a teacher but of a corrupter and an enemy. Consequently, even our Lord, though he often spoke gently with his disciples, sometimes used a more rough style, at one time blessing, at another rebuking. So, when he announced that he will lay the foundations of the church on Peter's confession, he said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah."² But not long after these words he said: "Get behind me, Satan. You are my stumbling block."³ And in another passage, again, he said, "Are you also so completely foolish?"⁴ Moreover, he inspired them with such fear that even John said that when they saw him conversing with the Samaritan woman and reminded him about eating, yet: "No one dared to say to him, 'What are you looking for?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'"⁵ Paul understood this, and following in the steps of his teacher he varied his speech with an eye to the need of his students, at one time cauterizing and cutting and at another applying a gentle salve. Thus, to the Corinthians he said: "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?"⁶ Yet with the Galatians he took a different tack, "O you foolish Galatians."⁷ And not just once but even a second time he employed this sort of threatening. He upbraided them at the end of the work, saying, "Let no one cause me troubles."⁸ And again he seeks to minister gently as when he says, "My little children, whom I again bring forth with labor pains."⁹ There are in fact many such expressions as these.

But it is evident to all, even on a first reading, that this letter is full of passion. So, we must explain what it was that had aroused Paul's anger against his students. For it was no

¹ This translation is based on the text provided in *Sancti Patris Nostri Joannis Chrysostomi, In Divi Pauli Epistolam Ad Galatas Commentaria*, Oxford 1852, Field.

² Matthew 16:17.

³ Ibid., v. 23.

⁴ Matthew 15:16.

⁵ John 4:27.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:21.

⁷ Galatians 3:1.

⁸ Galatians 6:17.

⁹ Galatians 4:19.

minor issue, nor something trivial, since Paul would not have employed such a marked thrust.¹⁰ Becoming angry in the face of misfortunes is typical of cowardly, cruel, and miserable men, just as losing nerve at major obstacles is the habit of those more sluggish and dull. But Paul is not such a person. So then, what was the particular sin that had stirred him up? It was something great and excessive, and something alienating them all from Christ, as he himself said a little further on: “Look! I tell you plainly that if you submit to circumcision, Christ will do you no good at all.”¹¹ And again, “Whoever of you seek to be justified by the law, you have disqualified yourselves for grace.” So, what in the world was this sin? We must identify it rather precisely: those of the Jews who had come to faith were at the same time both holding to their former commitment to Judaism and inebriated by empty doctrine. And wanting to arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of teachers, going to the people of Galatia they began to teach that it was necessary to be circumcised, and to keep sabbaths and new-moons, and not to tolerate Paul who was removing such practices. “For Peter, James, and John (the first¹² of the apostles who were with Christ),” they say, “do not forbid such practices.” And truly they did not forbid them. Yet in doing this they were not presenting it as authoritative teaching, but rather accommodating the weakness of the believers who came from the Jews. But Paul, because he was preaching to the Gentiles, had no need of such accommodation.

Therefore, when he was in Judea, he himself also employed this sort of accommodation. But his opponents, in their deception, were not stating the reasons why both Paul and the other apostles were making an accommodation. Instead, they deceived the weaker brothers in claiming that they should not tolerate Paul. For he had shown up “yesterday and a moment ago,” while they had been with Peter. He had become a disciple of the apostles, while they were disciples of Christ. And he was by himself, while they were many and the pillars of the church. So, they were casting at him the charge of hypocrisy, alleging that he was himself abrogating circumcision, “though he has clearly made use of such things elsewhere and preaches one thing to us, but differently to others.”

Therefore when Paul saw that the whole gentile world was aflame, that a troubling fire had been lit against the church of the Galatians, and that the whole structure was tottering and ran the risk of falling, he was gripped on the one side with righteous anger and on the other with despair. He made this very clear indeed when he said, “I wanted to be present with you then, and to change my tone.”¹³ He is writing the letter to respond to all this. And from these opening comments he refers to that which they were saying while undermining his reputation, saying that the others were disciples of Christ, though Paul himself was a disciple of the apostles. Thus, he began like this: “Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men.”¹⁴ For those cheats were saying (as I mentioned before) that he was the last of all the apostles and had been taught by them. For Peter and James and John were called first, and were the main leaders of the disciples. They received their teaching from Christ, and thus more obedience was owed them than him. They, moreover, did not forbid circumcision nor keeping the law. Thus, making these claims

¹⁰ The vivid metaphor Chrysostom employs here is military. καταφορά (*kataphora*), prevalent in the Roman historians Polybius, Josephus, and others, is typically used to describe the sudden downward stroke of a sword.

¹¹ Galatians 5:2.

¹² πρῶτοι (*prōtoi*) indicates both chronological priority and preeminence.

¹³ Galatians 4:20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:1a.

and others like them, Paul's opponents were seeking to diminish him and were at the same time exalting the glory of the other apostles. This they did not in order to extol them, but that they might deceive the Galatians by inappropriately persuading them to pay attention to the law. So, naturally he began in this fashion. For because they were treating his teaching with contempt, saying that it was from men, while Peter's was from Christ, he immediately, from the introduction, set himself against this notion, stating that he was an apostle "not from men, nor through men." For Ananias baptized Paul,¹⁵ but he had not freed him from error and did not lead him to faith. Instead, Christ himself after ascending sent that astounding voice to him, through which the Lord caught him like a fish. For while Christ was walking along the sea, he called Peter and his brother and John and his brother. But Paul he called after ascending to heaven. And just as the other men did not need a second voice but immediately, dropping their nets and all their other affairs, followed him, so Paul also from that first call ascended to the most important position, was baptized, and undertook an implacable war against the Jews. And it was in this respect most of all that he surpassed the other apostles. "For I labored more than they," he said.¹⁶ But for the time being he does not argue this. Rather, Paul is content in claiming equality with the other apostles. For he was eager not to show that he surpassed them, but to refute the premise of the error. Thus, his first statement, "not from men," was common to all men. For the gospel has its origin and root from above. But the second statement, "not through men," is particular to the apostles. For Christ did not call them "through men," but of his own accord "through himself."

Why did he not mention his call and say, "Paul, called not from men," but instead mentioned his apostleship? It is because his whole argument concerned this point. For his opponents said that the apostles had been entrusted with this teaching by men, and thus it was necessary for him to follow them. But Luke made clear that it was not delivered to him "from men" when he wrote: "And while they were worshiping and fasting before the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now set apart for me Paul and Barnabas.'"¹⁷ From this it is clear that the authority of the Son and the Spirit is one. For Paul says that in being sent by the Spirit he was sent by Christ. And it is clear from elsewhere that Paul attributes the things of God to the Spirit. Thus, when he is speaking to the elders of Miletus he says, "Keep watch for yourselves and for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has set you as pastors and overseers."¹⁸ And yet he says in another letter, "Those whom God has established in the church, first apostles, second prophets, then pastors and teachers."¹⁹ So, he uses this expression indiscriminately, saying that the things of the Spirit are of God, and those of God are of the Spirit. And in another way he also stops up the mouths of heretics, saying, "through Jesus Christ and God his Father."²⁰ For because heretics say that this word was attributed to the Son as though he were lesser, see what Paul does: he

¹⁵ Acts 9:18.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

¹⁷ Acts 13:2.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 20:28ff.

¹⁹ Chrysostom has here conflated, whether deliberately or as a consequence of quoting from memory, two different passages: Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. From the latter he took the words οὓς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ Θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας (*hos men etheto ho theos en tē ekklēsia prōton apostolous, deuteron prophētas*), while he finished the quote with a portion from Ephesians 4, namely ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (*poimenas kai didaskalouς*).

²⁰ Galatians 1:1b.

uses the word in the case of the Father thereby teaching us not to apply any principle whatsoever to an inexpressible nature, not to establish measures or degrees of divinity between the Son and the Father. For after he said, “through Jesus Christ,” he added “God the Father.” If in mentioning the Father by himself he had said, “through whom,” then they would have devised some sophism,²¹ saying that this expression “through whom” is applied to the Father, since the works of the Son reflect on him. And yet Paul mentions the Son and the Father at the same time; and in applying this expression to them jointly he no longer allows their argument any place. For he does not do this as though attributing now the deeds of the Son to the Father. No, he shows that this expression admits no difference in substance whatsoever. And what then would those say who, with respect to baptism, consider it somehow lesser because one is baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit? For if the Son were lesser than the Father, then what would they say now that the apostle here begins with Christ then moves on to the Father? But we shall speak no such blasphemy. We must not in contending with them depart from the truth. No, even if they should rage ten thousand times, we must keep our eyes on the standards of piety. Therefore, just as we would not say that the Son is greater than the Father simply because he mentioned Christ first—for that would be the very height of absurd foolishness and consummate impiety—so neither would we say that because the Son is placed after the Father we must suppose that the Son is lesser than the Father.

Next we read “who raised him from the dead.”²² What are you doing, Paul? Though you desire to lead the Judaizing men to faith, you do not bring before them any of those great and brilliant expressions such as you wrote to the Philippians. You said, for example, “Though being in the form of God he did not consider equality with God something to be laid hold of.”²³ You also later said to the Hebrews that “He is the radiance of God’s glory, and the express image of his nature.”²⁴ And then the son of thunder in his introductory words shouted forth that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”²⁵ Many times Jesus himself, when discussing²⁶ with the Jews, used to say that he is as powerful as the Father, and that he possesses the same authority.²⁷ But do you, Paul, not say here any of those things? Instead, omitting them all, do you mention Christ’s dispensation according to the flesh, making his cross and death the main point? “Yes,” he says. For if Paul were addressing people who had no grand conception about Christ, then saying those things would be

²¹ Chrysostom uses here the verb σοφίζω (*sophizō*), “to act like a sophist.” In this he alludes to a long tradition stretching back to Gorgias, Prodicus, and other opponents of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues who made the weaker argument the stronger.

²² Galatians 1:1c.

²³ Philippians 2:6.

²⁴ Hebrews 1:3.

²⁵ John 1:1.

²⁶ Chrysostom uses here the somewhat unusual participle φθεγγόμενος (*phthengomenos*). This is done apparently *variationis causa*, since he has in previous sentences made use of a range of synonyms including γράφω (*graphō*), λέγω (*legō*), ἀναφωνέω (*anaphōneō*), and ἀναβοάω (*anaboaō*).

²⁷ In his use of the terms δύναται (*dunatai*) and ἐξουσίαν (*exousian*), Chrysostom registers the long-held distinction between ability and authority and ascribes both to Christ. This distinction is perhaps more common to students of the Latin language, where it is represented by the terms *potentia* and *potestas*. Though the two do not mutually entail the other, in the persons of the Trinity the distinction is not consequential.

called for. But since those who believe that they will be punished if they depart from the law are opposing us, Paul thus mentions the acts through which Christ abolishes the need of the law. I mean, to be precise, the benefit that arose for all from his cross and resurrection. For the statement “in the beginning was the Word,” and “He was in the form of God” and “making himself equal to God” and all such—these would suit someone demonstrating the divinity of the Word, not someone adding anything to the present topic. But the statement “who raised Him from the dead” is characteristic of someone calling to mind the chief point of the kindness on our behalf, the very thing that serves Paul’s purpose for the question under discussion. For many people are in the habit of not attending to words that represent God’s majesty as much as they are to those that manifest his kindness toward men. Therefore, declining to say those kinds of things he spoke about the kindness that was done for us.

Part 2

But then heretics counterattack, saying, “Look, the Father raises the Son.” But now that they have become diseased, they are willingly deaf to lofty doctrines and select the lowly doctrines as well. And these statements were expressed this way: 1) for the sake of the flesh, 2) for the Father’s honor, or 3) for some other purpose. The heretics, by selecting from among these and scrutinizing them one by one, disparage themselves (for I would not say that they succeed in harming the Scriptures). Such persons I would gladly ask, “Why do you make such claims? Do you want to prove that the Son is weak and not strong enough for the resurrection of a single body?” And truly, faith in him made even the shadows of those who believed in him raise the dead.²⁸ Then those men who were believing on Him, though remaining still mortal, by the mere shadow of their earthen bodies and from the shadow of the clothes that were attached to those bodies raised the dead.²⁹ And yet Christ was not strong enough to raise himself? So then how is this lunacy not obvious and the intensity of this madness? Did you hear him saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up?”³⁰ And again, “I have the authority to lay down my life, and I have the authority to take it back again”?³¹ Why then is the Father said to have raised him up? To show that the Father does all the same things as the Son. And yet this is especially said for the sake of the honor that is due the Father and for the weakness of the listeners.

Paul says, “And all the brothers that are with me.”³² Why has he never once done this elsewhere in the course of his letter writing? In other places he provides only his own name, or that of two or three others by name. Here he speaks in terms of a whole group and consequently does not mention anyone by name. So why does he do this? His opponents were slandering him as the only one who was preaching as he did, and that he was introducing something new into his doctrines. Thus, because he wanted to remove suspicion and show that he counted many who shared his opinion, he wrote the

²⁸ Acts 5:15.

²⁹ Acts 19:12.

³⁰ John 2:19

³¹ John 10:18.

³² Galatians 1:2a.

“brothers.” By this he makes clear that the very things he is writing he also writes in accordance with their judgment.

Next he adds “to the churches of Galatia.”³³ For this fire of false teaching was spreading not just to one city, nor two or three, but to the whole nation of the Galatians. Look with me here how Paul felt so much indignation. For he did not say, “to the beloved,” nor “to the saints,” but “to the churches of Galatia.” This expression was indicative of someone irritated in spirit and exhibiting his distress, that is, not addressing them by their names with love nor with honor, but by their assembly only. And he does not address them as the churches of God either, but simply “the churches of Galatia.” In addition he hurries to engage the rebellious element. Therefore, he also used the name “church,” shaming³⁴ them and drawing them into unity. For since they were divided into many factions, they could not be addressed by this title. For the designation “church” is a designation of harmony and concord.

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁵ Paul everywhere uses this tag by necessity, but he especially does so now when writing to the Galatians. Since they were in danger of falling from grace, he prays that it might be restored to them yet again. Since they made themselves God’s enemies, he beseeches God to lead them back again to that same peace. He says, “God our Father.”³⁶ And here the heretics again are easily caught. For they claim that when John in the introduction to his Gospel says, “And the Word was God,”³⁷ he says this clause without an article for this reason: so as to diminish the divinity of the Son. And again that when Paul says the Son is “in the likeness of God,”³⁸ he did not say that concerning the Father because of the fact that this too is used without the article, what answer would they make here when Paul says, not, “from God”³⁹ but, “from God the Father”?

Then he calls God “Father,” not with a view to flattering them, but vigorously upbraiding and reminding them of the reason why they have become sons. For it was not through the Law but through the washing of regeneration that they were counted worthy of that honor. Therefore, he sows the traces of God’s kindness everywhere, even in his introduction, as though he were saying, “How is that you, who were slaves and enemies and estranged from God, suddenly call him Father? Surely it is not the Law that gave you this kinship? Why then indeed, abandoning the one who has led you so close to him, are you running back to your tutor?”⁴⁰ It is not only in the case of Father, but also in that of the Son that these titles suffice for demonstrating their benefaction. For the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when carefully examined, clearly shows all his kindness. Indeed, he shall be called Jesus for this reason, it says, “Because he will save his people from their sins.”⁴¹ And the appellation “Christ” calls to mind the anointing of the Spirit.

³³ Ibid., 1:2b.

³⁴ The word Chrysostom uses here, ἐντρέπον (*entrepōn*), Paul employs in a similar context in I Cor. 4:14. Galatians 1:3.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:4.

³⁷ John 1:1.

³⁸ Heb. 1:3.

³⁹ Here the article τοῦ (*tou*) is used with θεοῦ (*theou*), while in the subsequent clause it is anarthrous.

⁴⁰ Chrysostom here references Galatians 3:24, in which Paul compares the Mosaic Law to a tutor, leading the underage Israel to himself.

⁴¹ Matthew 1:21.

We come next to the phrase “who gave himself for our sins.”⁴² Do you see that he did not merely submit to the service of a slave nor a compulsory service, nor was he handed over by someone else, but rather “gave himself”? Consequently, whenever you hear John saying that the Father gave his only-begotten Son for our sakes, do not for this reason disparage the value of the Only-begotten, nor suspect anything merely human is meant. Even if the Father is said to have given him up, this is not said in order that you should consider his service that of a slave, but in order that you might understand that this was also acceptable to the Father. The very thing Paul here makes clear when he says, “According to the will of our God and Father.”⁴³ It is not “according to a command” but “according to the will.” For since the will of the Father and the Son is one, whatsoever the Son desired, these things also the Father willed.⁴⁴ Next we read, “For our sins.”⁴⁵ We pierced ourselves, he says, with a thousand evils and were liable to the harshest punishment. And the law did not free us but condemned us in rendering our sin more manifest and not being able to free us or turn God away from his anger. But the Son of God both made possible that which was impossible – doing away with our sins and turning us from enemies to his friends – and gracing us with myriad other good things.

So, Paul next says, “That he may free us from this present evil age.”⁴⁶ Other heretics again snatch at this phrase, casting aspersions on this present life and using Paul’s testimony to do so. “For look,” the heretic says, “Paul has dubbed the present age evil.” And tell me, then, what is an age? Time, measured in days and hours. So what? Is the mere passing of the days evil, and the course of the sun too?⁴⁷ No one would ever say that, even if he veers to the extremes of stupidity. “But he did not say, ‘time’,” the heretic says, “no, he called the present life evil.” And to be sure the actual words do not say this. But you do not stop at those words which you twisted into an accusation: instead, you are hacking out a path for your own interpretation. You will therefore permit us also to interpret what has been said, all the more so since what we say is pious and reasonable. So, then what should we say? That none of those evils would ever be responsible for good things, and yet this present life is responsible for thousands of crowns and such great rewards. The blessed Paul himself, at any rate, unmistakably praises this life when he says as follows: “If my living is in the flesh, this is for me fruitful labor; and as to what I shall chose, I do not know.”⁴⁸ And as he sets before himself the choice between living here and casting off this life to be with Christ, he prefers to pass through the present life. But if it were evil, then he would not have said such things in his own case, nor would anyone else be able to make use of it for the end of virtue, no matter how zealously intent on doing so. For no one could ever use wickedness and turn it to a good end. Such a person could not use prostitution as a stimulant to self-control nor envy as a goad to friendliness.

⁴² Galatians 1:4a.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:4c.

⁴⁴ Chrysostom here varies the vocabulary in each clause, from ἐβούλετο (*ebouleto*) in the first to ἤθελεν (*ēthelen*) in the second. Presumably this is to demonstrate both the unity and distinction of the will of the Father and Son in their intra-Trinitarian relationship.

⁴⁵ Galatians 1:4a.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:4b.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom means here that by which the days are measured, i.e. the sun’s rising and setting.

⁴⁸ Philippians 1:22.

For indeed, Paul says about the presumption of the flesh that “it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it do so,”⁴⁹ he means this, that wickedness which remains wickedness cannot be virtue. Consequently, whenever you hear “wicked age,” understand that it means that its deeds are wicked, that its will has been corrupted. For neither did Christ come in order that he might kill us and lead us away from the present life, but that, when he has freed us from this world, he might make us ready to become worthy of dwelling in heaven. For this reason he said while speaking with his Father: “They are also in the world, and I am coming to you...I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one,”⁵⁰ that is, from wickedness. And if you are not content with these words, but still persist in holding that this present life is evil, you should not criticize those who commit suicide. For just as he who extricates himself from wickedness does not deserve reproaches but rather commendation, so also the man who ends his own life by a violent death as through hanging or other things like that would not, according to you, deserve to be blamed. But as it is God punishes such persons more than murderers, and all of us, quite appropriately, find such persons loathsome. For if it is not a good thing to destroy other persons, it is much more ignoble to kill oneself. Yet if the present life is evil, we ought to reward murderers because they free us from that evil!

Still, apart from these things, they also trip themselves up because of what they themselves say. For when they claim that the sun is god, and after that the moon, and they worship these as the causes of many good things, they make mutually contradictory statements. For the use of these and other heavenly bodies does nothing else but contribute to the present life for us, which they call evil, sustaining and illuminating various objects and bringing fruits to their ripeness. So how then do those who are gods in your view introduce into the composition of an evil life such a great public benefit? But neither are the stars gods—heaven forbid; they are the works of God made for our use—nor is the world evil. But if you object to me that there are murderers, and adulterers, and grave robbers, I answer that these do not at all pertain to the present life. For such are not sins that come from life in the flesh, but from a corrupted will. Because if these were the deeds of the present life, as part and parcel with it, nobody would be free nor pure. Yet see how it is impossible for anyone to escape the peculiar qualities of life in the flesh. What are these? I mean things like eating, drinking, sleeping, growing, being hungry, thirsty, being born, dying, and all things similar to these. Nobody would be exempt from these things—not the sinner, not the righteous man, not a king nor private citizen—but we all are subject to the necessity of nature. Consequently, no one would escape the performance of even sinful acts if such were apportioned to the nature of this life, as such actions are not.

Do not tell me that the those who succeed are scarce. For you will find that no one has ever overcome these natural necessities. So, until even one person succeeding in being virtuous is found, your argument will not be at all diminished. What do you mean, you wretched and miserable man? Is the present life evil, when in it we have come to know God, in it we philosophize about the things to come, in it we have gone from being

⁴⁹ Romans 8:7.

⁵⁰ John 17:11a, 15.

men to angels, and join in the chorus of the heavenly powers?⁵¹ And what other proof will we look for that your understanding is evil and corrupted?

“Why then,” our opponent says, “did Paul say that the present age is evil?” He was using a common manner of speaking. For we are quite accustomed to say, “I had a bad day.” We mean by this not the time itself but lay the blame on what transpired or the circumstance. Thus, Paul used a common expression when he blamed acts of the wicked will. And he shows that Christ has both freed us from our former sins and secured our future. For by saying, “who gave himself for our sins,” he made clear the former. And by adding “that he might free us from the present evil age,” he indicated safety for the future. For the law was weak compared to the one, but grace has proven effective against them both.⁵²

Next we read, “according to the will of our God and Father.”⁵³ For because they thought that they were disobeying God, as the one who had given the Law, and they were afraid of abandoning the old covenant and come to the new, he also corrects this assumption of theirs by saying that these things also seemed good to the Father. And he did not say simply, “the Father,” but “our Father.” So, he uses that word immediately, reprimanding them by saying that Christ has made his Father our Father.

Part 3

There follows this: “To whom be glory forever. Amen.” This expression is also unfamiliar and strange. For we find the word “Amen” placed nowhere at the beginning or the introductory remarks of a letter, but rather after many other words. Then, showing that the things he used already are a sufficient charge against the Galatians, and that his argument is adequate, he added this preface. For incontrovertible charges do not need a long build-up. So, reminding them of the cross and resurrection, of the ransom for sins, of security for their future, the intent of the Father, the will of the Son, of grace, of peace, of all God’s gifts, he ended his argument with a doxology. Paul did this, not only for the reason I just mentioned, but also because he was contemplating what God did in a single blow and in the smallest amount of time to us, given who we were.

These ideas, which he was unable to set out plainly in argument, he summarized with a doxology—offering up praise on behalf of the whole world. It was not one worthy of the subject, but simply what he was able to express. Therefore, he afterward used an even more forceful expression, just like one greatly inflamed by consideration of God’s kindnesses. For after Paul says, “To whom be glory forever, Amen” he embarks on a quite pointed rebuke. So, he says, “I am astonished that you are so quickly moving away from him who called you in the grace of Christ for another gospel.”⁵⁴ Because they supposed that they were pleasing the Father through keeping the Law, as the Jews thought when they were persecuting Christ, Paul first shows them that they are not provoking Christ alone in behaving this way but also the Father. For he says that in doing this they are defecting not just from Christ but also from the Father. In the same way that

⁵¹ Chrysostom may have in mind such passages as Ephesians 2, where Christians are said to be “seated with Christ in the heavenly places.”

⁵² Sc. present and future.

⁵³ Galatians 1:4c.

⁵⁴ Verse 6.

the old covenant is not only from the Father but also from the Son, so also grace is not from the Son alone, but also from the Father, and all things are held in common between them. “For all that belongs to the Father is mine.”⁵⁵

And yet when he said that they abandon even the Father, he posits two faults: that there was a change and that this change was very rapid. Yet surely the opposite is worthy of accusation as well, namely, to have abandoned the Father after a long time. But here his argument deals with a deception. For the one who abandons after a long time deserves accusation, and the one who falls at the first charge, and in the light skirmishes, furnishes a singular example of total weakness. He in fact charges them with this, saying:

What is this, that those who deceive you need no time at all, but a first assault was enough to subdue and capture all of you? So what sort of excuse do you have? For if this arose among your friends, I mean the accusation, and someone had abandoned his former friends and useful intimates, he would be worthy of reproach. But the man who runs away from the God who calls him, just think how great a punishment he would be liable to!

So, when Paul says, “I am amazed,” not only does he say this to upbraid them because—after such a great gift, after such a great forgiveness for their sins, and an extravagance of kindness—they deserted to the yoke of slavery. At the same time he is also showing what kind of opinion he holds about them, that it is a sort of serious and earnest one. For he would not have been surprised at what happened if he had supposed that they were the sort to be deceived easily. “But since you are of noble character,” he says, “and of the type that have suffered a good deal, this is why I am amazed.” This should have been adequate to regain them and bring them back to their former beliefs. Paul makes this clear in the middle of this letter when he says, “Did you suffer such serious trials in vain, if indeed it was in vain?”

Next Paul adds “You are changing your position.” He did not say, “Keep going,” but “you are changing your position.” In other words, “I do not yet believe, nor do I suppose that the deception is complete,” which itself also is, again, the statement of one who is recovering. Consequently, he makes this point more clearly later on: “I am confident in your case, that you will consider nothing else.”⁵⁶

Next Paul adds that they are departing “from the one who called you in the grace of Christ.”⁵⁷ The calling is of the Father, and the reason for the calling is the Son. For the Son himself is the one who reconciled and gave that reconciliation freely. For we were not saved according to works in righteousness.⁵⁸ But rather these belong to the Father, and those works belong to Christ.⁵⁹ “For my things are yours,” he says, “and yours mine.”⁶⁰ And note that Paul did not say, “You are turning back from the Gospel,” but

⁵⁵ John 16:15.

⁵⁶ Cf. Galatians 5:10.

⁵⁷ This is the continuation of v. 6 of chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Cf. Titus 3:5.

⁵⁹ Chrysostom very artfully employs here a concatenation of pronouns with specific referents to Father and Son in an interlocking ABAB order, also known as *synchysis* or sometimes *chiasmus*: Μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐκεῖνα τούτου (*Mallon de kai tauta ekeinou, kai ekeina toutou*). Cf. H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), §3020.

⁶⁰ A paraphrase of John 16:5, quoted above.

“from the God who called you.” For the latter expression was more likely to inspire horror; and he has used this to strike them more deeply. For those who were wanting to deceive them did not do this all at once, but while gently drawing them away from the idea, they did not draw them away from the terms. For this is how the devil’s cunning works: it does not set obvious traps. For if the deceivers had said, “abandon Christ,” of course they would have been on guard against such tricksters and corrupters. But as it is, allowing them to stay in the faith yet attaching the title of “gospel” to their deception, they were undermining the whole structure with great impunity. The speech concealed the wall-breakers, through their phraseology, like a curtain.⁶¹

Thus, since they were calling their own deception the “gospel,” Paul himself does well to fight back verbally and speaks quite boldly. He says, “You have gone over to another gospel, one which is not another gospel at all.” Well put! For there is not another one. But nevertheless, the very thing that those who are diseased suffer—that they are harmed by healthy foods—Marcion⁶² suffered. For he snatched at what was related here, saying, “Look, even Paul said that there is not another gospel.” For they do not accept all the evangelists, but only one, and they mangled and rendered them of no effect, however they pleased. So then, what about whenever Paul himself says, “According to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ”?⁶³ Therefore, the things they have said are really ridiculous, except that even if they prove to be ridiculous, it is necessary to disprove them for the sake of those who are easily beguiled. What then shall we say? That even if tens of thousands write gospels, and write the same things, these many are one, and the fact of their being one will not be at all harmed by the multitude of the authors. Therefore, just as if someone writes one thing and then on the other hand says something opposite, the things written would not be one. For what is one and what is not one is judged not by the number of those writing, but by the identity and difference of what is said. Thus, it is clear that even the four gospels are actually one gospel. For whenever four say the same things, they are not different things because of the difference of the persons, but there is one because of the complete harmony of the things they say. For Paul is not here speaking about the number but about the discordance of the things said. So if, then, there is one gospel in Matthew and a different one in Luke as far as the meaning of the contents and the sense of their doctrines is concerned, they rightly criticize the Word. But if these accounts are really one and the same, they should stop acting so foolishly and pretending that they do not understand things that are really very clear to mere children.

Next Paul says, “Unless perhaps there are some people harassing you and wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ.” This means, so long as you remain of sound mind, you will not recognize another gospel; so long as you look at things that are right and not imagine those that are perverted, those that do not exist. For in the same way that the eye mistakenly sees one thing for another, so also the mind, roiled up by an admixture of

⁶¹ The metaphor which Chrysostom employs is that of siegers and sappers seeking to undermine a city’s defenses. Concealing screens were carried by some, behind which the engineers sought to dig beneath the walls’ foundations in order to topple them.

⁶² Marcion of Sinope (c. 85–c. 160). Much of our knowledge of him and his thought comes from Epiphanius of Cyprus in the fourth century. Briefly, he held that the God of the Old Testament, whom he labeled a “demiurge,” was different than the God who sent Christ Jesus. This heretical view involved him in, among other things, a wholesale rejection of continuity with the church of the old covenant and a radically truncated canon of Scripture.

⁶³ Cf. Romans 16:25.

wicked arguments, typically suffers this same kind of disruption. So, for this reason, those who are addled in their wits, mistakenly imagine one thing for another. But this kind of madness is more troubling than what I just described: it is not the kind that produces harm in our sense perceptions but in the things we think about; not that kind which occasions destruction in the pupil of the eyes of the body but in the eyes of the understanding.

“And wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ.”⁶⁴ And surely they were introducing only one or two commands, instituting anew only the command of circumcision and of special days. But in showing that a whole, when slightly modified, is ruined, he says that the gospel has been rendered void. For just as in royal coins the one who cuts off a small part of the impress renders the whole coin counterfeit, so also the one who distorts even the least significant portion of a healthy faith thereby defiles the whole of it, moving away from the original toward things that are worse. Where then now are those who criticize us as lovers of strife on account of our disagreement with heretics? Where now are those who say that there is no gap between us and them but that the difference arises from a lust for power? They should heed what Paul says, that those who innovate even just a little bit have distorted the gospel. And these people⁶⁵ are not changing just a little. For how could they be, since they claim that the Son of God is something created? Have you not heard that even in the Old Testament someone who gathered wood on the Sabbath, violating only one commandment, and not even the greatest one, paid the ultimate penalty for it?⁶⁶ And when Uzzah steadied the ark as it was about to topple over, he immediately died because he touched a ministerial function⁶⁷ that was not permitted to him. Thus, both the transgression of the Sabbath and touching the ark when it was about to fall rendered God so indignant that those who dared such acts received not even a little leniency. So, the one who defiles the awe-inspiring and ineffable articles of the faith, will such a person find any defense or leniency? No, not so. But this very thing then is the cause of a whole host of evils, namely, when we do not become irritated over the small matters. For this reason greater sins were introduced among them because the lesser ones did not receive the required correction. And just as those who ignore the wounds in their bodies provoke fevers, putrefaction, and death, so also when it comes to souls, those who overlook even the smallest problems compound it with greater ones.

A certain person, one might say, stumbles over fasting, and it is no great concern. Another man is strong in the faith that is correct, but acting like he is not for the moment loses his confidence. Nor is this anything very terrible. Still another man became irritated and threatened to abandon the correct faith. But neither is this worthy of punishment. For he sinned in anger, one might say, and by impulse. And someone could find ten thousand such examples of sins introduced into the churches each and every day throughout the churches. Therefore, we have become utterly ridiculous to both Greeks and Jews since the church is splintered into ten thousand pieces. For if those who were attempting at the beginning to turn away from the divine ordinances and cause some slight disturbance had

⁶⁴ Verse 7.

⁶⁵ Sc. heretics.

⁶⁶ Cf. Numbers 15:32, 36.

⁶⁷ Cf. 2 Samuel 6:6ff. The noun Chrysostom uses, διακονίας (*diakonias*), is surprising, as one might expect here a reference to the actual object which Uzzah touched, διακόνημα (*diakonēma*). He apparently has in mind, however, not Uzzah's act of touching the ark but his usurpation of an office that did not belong to him.

met with a deserved rebuke, the plague that is present would not have arisen, and such a great storm would not have overtaken the churches.⁶⁸

Note that Paul at least says circumcision is an annulment of the Gospel. And yet now there are many among us that observe the same day of fasting that belongs to the Jews and similarly keep the Sabbaths. And we bear with these things generously, or rather like the wretches we are.⁶⁹ And why should I talk about the practices of the Jews since some of our people also observe many customs of the Greeks, like watching of omens, the flight of birds, signet-rings, the observance of days, an interest in genealogy and booklets, which when their children are being born, they compose to their own detriment.⁷⁰ In this they teach their children at the outset to give up efforts at virtue and lead them, for their part, under the yoke of the deluded tyranny of fatalism.

But if Christ is no benefit to those who are circumcised, how much will faith, in the end, work for the salvation of those who have carelessly involved themselves in such great wickedness? And though circumcision was given by God, nevertheless since it was defiling the gospel by not being performed at the proper time, Paul did everything so as to cut off⁷¹ circumcision. So, then since Paul showed such great zeal in the case of Jewish customs, when they were being observed in an untimely fashion, will we not cut off the Greek custom? And what sort of a defense might we have? Because of this our affairs are now in disarray and confusion, and those who are studying, filled with much presumption, upended the proper order. What was right side up has become upside down. If someone raises some small objection, they spit on their rulers, since we “trained them poorly.” And yet even if their superiors were quite wretched and filled with ten thousand evils, it would not be right for the student to disobey. For if Christ says about the Jewish teachers that since they sat in the seat of Moses it would be right for them to be listened to by the disciples⁷²—and yet they possessed works so evil that he ordered his students neither to emulate them nor to imitate those things they do—what leniency would they deserve, those that spit upon and tread underfoot the presiding officers of the church, they who by the grace of God live morally? For if it is not proper to judge one another, how much more improper it is to judge one’s teachers.

“But if even I, or an angel from heaven should preach to you something other than what you have received, let him be anathema.”⁷³ Notice Paul’s apostolic wisdom. For, so that someone won’t say that for the sake of self-aggrandizement he was cobbling together dogmas peculiar to himself, he even anathematized himself. And since they were fleeing for excuse to titles of dignity, that is James and John, he also mentioned angels. “Don’t talk to me about James and John,” he says. “For even if it is one of the firstborn angels from heaven who corrupts this preaching, let him be anathema.” And he did not simply say, “from heaven,” but since the priests were called angels: “For the lips of a priest will guard knowledge, and they will seek out the law from his mouth, because he is an angel

⁶⁸ Chrysostom perhaps has in mind here, in addition to the conflict in Galatia, Paul’s mention in 1 Corinthians 11:30ff. of those who had died as a punishment for their abuse of the Lord’s table.

⁶⁹ Note Chrysostom’s typical change of mind, for rhetorical effect, in the midst of conveying an exegetical point.

⁷⁰ This is a reference most likely to the composition of horoscopes.

⁷¹ Chrysostom here and in the next sentence introduces two puns for dispensing with circumcision, namely περικόψαι (*perikopsai*) and περικόψομεν (*perikopsomen*).

⁷² Matthew 23:2ff.

⁷³ Verse 8.

of the almighty Lord.” Now in order that you not think that priests are now called angels, he implicitly refers to the powers above with this addition “of heaven.” And he did not say if they proclaim things that are opposite or if they pervert the whole. But he said even if they preach something “just a little different” from that which we have preached, and if they disturb something minor, let them be anathema.

Paul continues, “As I have said before, I also say again now.” For lest you suppose that these are impulsive words or were said with exaggeration or a kind of haste, he uses the same things again a second time. Someone driven to say something in anger would likely soon have a change of heart. But the man who says the same things a second time shows that he spoke after weighing matters carefully, and after earlier becoming sure of it he stated it. Abraham, for example, when asked to send Lazarus, said, “They have Moses and the prophets. If they do not heed these, neither will they heed the risen dead.”⁷⁴ Christ introduces Abraham as saying these things thereby showing that he wants the Scriptures judged more valuable than those raised from the dead.

And Paul (and when I say, “Paul,” I again mean Christ) places Scripture on a higher level than angels descending from heaven, and quite rightly. For the angels, though they are very important, are but in reality servants and ministers. But the Scriptures were all delivered not by slaves but by God, master of all, to be written down. That is why Paul says: “If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you.” And with a great deal of understanding and inoffensively, he did not say, “a certain so and so.” For why would it, after all, be necessary to mention peoples’ names since in employing such comprehensive language he includes all entities, both those above and those below? For through his anathematizing of evangelists and angels, he encompassed every rank. And through himself he included everyone similar and like unto himself. “Don’t tell me that your co-Apostles and others are saying these things. For I do not even exempt myself if I preach such doctrines!” And he does not make such comments as though he were condemning the apostles, nor as though they were turning aside from proper preaching. Far from it! “Whether we, or they,” he says, “this is how we preach.”⁷⁵ But he wants to show that he does not make allowance for persons whenever the message deals with the truth.

Part 4

“For am I persuading men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? Yet if I were now seeking to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”⁷⁶ “So even if I were deceiving you,” he says, “in saying these things, can I really mislead God who knows the secret things of the conscience, whom it is always my entire goal to please?”

Do you see the apostolic high-mindedness? Do you see the sublimity of the gospel? Writing to the Corinthians he said the same thing: “We do not defend ourselves to you, but we give you cause for boasting.”⁷⁷ And again, “From my perspective it counts for very little that I am judged by you, or by a human tribunal.”⁷⁸ For when a teacher is

⁷⁴ Cf. Luke 16:29–31.

⁷⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:11.

⁷⁶ Verse 10.

⁷⁷ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12.

⁷⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:3.

compelled to defend himself to his students, he both submits to this and chafes against it. He does this not because of rebellion—heavens no—but because of the fickleness of the knowledge of those who were being deceived and because they do not trust him much. Therefore, he said this and all but made the following point:

Is my message really before you? Is it men that are going to pass judgment on me? My message is actually before God, and for the sake of the scrutiny that rests with him we do all things. And we would not have come to such a great degree of wretchedness as to defend ourselves to the master of all things for what we preach, for corrupting his doctrines.

Consequently, at one time making a defense and at the same time struggling against such persons, he has said this. For it is appropriate not that students sit in judgment on their teachers, but that they trust them. “And when order is turned upside down, and you sit as my judges,” he says, “understand that I do not have a long argument against you as my defense, but everything we do is for the sake of God, and thus we defend ourselves to him concerning these doctrines.”

The one who wishes to persuade men causes many ills and perversions and uses deception and deceit, so that he can win over and capture the sentiment of his listeners. But the one who seeks to persuade God and is eager to please him has need of a simple and pure conscience. For the divine is not subject to deception. “From this it is clear that even we,” he says,

not for the sake of lording it over others, nor merely to gain students, nor desiring from praise do write and send these doctrines. For we are not eager to please men, but God. If we were wishing to please men, I would still be with the Jews; I would still be persecuting the church. But one who has disdained his whole nation, and his family, and his friends, and relatives and such a reputation, and has exchanged these things for persecutions and hostilities and wars and daily deaths – it is quite clear that even these statements that I now make, I say them and send them to you not desiring glory from men.

And he said this, since he intends to narrate the earlier part of his life and his sudden conversion and to show through clear proofs that he truly had changed, lest they suppose that he is defending himself to them in doing these things and become agitated. For that reason he said to them in advance, “So am I pleasing men?”

You see he knows how to say something lofty and great at the right time, to correct those who are learning from him. And yet he could have made use of other proofs that he was preaching truthfully, that is, with signs, wonders, dangers, imprisonments, daily threats of death, hunger and thirst, nakedness, and other such things.⁷⁹ But since his argument at this point was not against false apostles, but against the true Apostles, and the latter had shared in these things—I mean Paul’s dangers—he aims his argument from another vantage point. For, when he went against the false apostles, he develops the comparison thusly: he introduces the notion of his patience in the midst of dangers, saying, “Are they servants of Christ? I speak like one who is delirious. I am a servant

⁷⁹ Chrysostom’s sources for these experiences of Paul are Romans 8:35 and 2 Corinthians 11:25ff.

even more. I have been in hardships more abundantly, been beaten more, imprisoned more, at the very brink of death so often.”⁸⁰ Now, however, he speaks of his former way of life, and says, “I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not one that is according to man. In fact I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁸¹

Note how confidently and thoroughly he affirms this point, that he became a disciple of Christ, with no man as his mediator, but with Christ deigning through himself to reveal to Paul all knowledge. And what sort of a demonstration could there be to those who disbelieve that God has revealed to you by himself, and not through someone else’s mediation, these inexpressible mysteries? “My former way of life,” Paul says. “For I would not have experienced such a sudden conversion unless God were the one who made the revelation.” For those that are taught by men, whenever they are impetuous and incendiary toward those who oppose them, need time and much skill in order to be persuaded.

But Paul was converted so suddenly and became absolutely sober while at the very pinnacle of his raving, that it is quite clear that he encountered a divine and instructive vision and immediately returned to complete health. Therefore, he is compelled to give an account of his earlier way of life, and he calls them as witnesses of the things that happened.

You do not know that the only-begotten Son of God condescended, from the heavens, to call me. How could you know, unless you were there? You know though that I was a violent persecutor. Indeed, my violence had spread even toward you. And yet there is such a great distance between Palestine and Galatia that my reputation would not have crossed so much distance, unless the things that were happening were truly excessive, and none could endure it.

So then, he says, “For you heard about my former way of life, that I was persecuting the church of God excessively, and seeking to destroy it.”⁸²

Do you see how he sets down each point emphatically and is not ashamed? He did not simply persecute the church, but he did so with all vehemence, and he did not only persecute the church but even sought to destroy it, that is, he tried to snuff it out, to overwhelm, ruin, and obliterate it. Such is the work of one “seeking to destroy.” “And I was excelling in Judaism beyond many of those of my own age in my own nation, abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers.”⁸³ Now lest you think that this was a deed of passion, he shows that he was doing all of it with zeal. Even if his persecution was not according to full knowledge, it did not arise from vainglory, nor was he avenging some private injury, but “abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers.” And in saying this he means the following:

If I was doing these things against the church not because of man but because of a righteous zeal—misguided for sure, but zeal nonetheless—how could I now, as I

⁸⁰ Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23.

⁸¹ Vv. 11–12.

⁸² Cf. v. 13.

⁸³ Cf. v. 14.

strive on behalf of the church, since I know the full truth, be doing these things from vainglory? For if that kind of passion did not rule me when I was deceived, but zeal for God led me to that, how much more now that I know the truth would it be right for me to be exempt from this suspicion? At the same time I was converted to the teachings of the church and put off the whole Jewish system, then I took on at that point a far greater zeal. This is proof that my conversion was genuine and was brought about by divine zeal. If this were not the case, what else was it, tell me, that caused so great a change to happen, to forfeit honor for contempt, tranquility for dangers, and safety for hard work? There is nothing else at all, but only the love of the truth that would do this.

When God, who set me apart and called me through grace, was well pleased to reveal his Son in me that I may proclaim him among the gentiles, I did not immediately take counsel with flesh and blood.⁸⁴

See what he is eager to point out here, that for the time during which he was passed over he was disregarded for a certain inscrutable purpose. For if he had been foreordained from his mother's womb to be an apostle and to be called to this ministry and was called at that time and when called obeyed, it is clear that God was postponing it for a certain reason. So, then what was this dispensation? Perhaps you expect while listening to the introduction to hear an exordium as to why in the world God did not call him with the twelve apostles. But in order that I may not get distracted from the matter at hand, prolonging my explanation too far, I appeal to your love, that you not learn everything from me, but seek them out from among yourselves and appeal to God to reveal them. We have, in fact, already received some explanation of these matters when we were discussing with you the change in his name and why God renamed the one called Saul, Paul. And if you have forgotten, when you read this very book,⁸⁵ you will come to know all the details. But for the time being let us keep to what follows; let us also examine how he again shows that what happened to him was not at all of human origin, but rather that God managed all things for him with great foresight.

"And he called me through his grace." God said that he had called Paul because of his excellence: "For he is my chosen vessel," he said to Ananias, "to make my name known before the Gentiles and kings."⁸⁶ That is, he was sufficient both to serve and to display a great work. And God set this down as the cause of his calling. But Paul himself says everywhere that the entire business was of God's grace and inexpressible benevolence. For he says, "But I was pitied,"⁸⁷ not because I was sufficient, nor because I was suitable, but "in order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him unto everlasting life."⁸⁸ Do you see the extreme perfection of his humility? Because of this, he says, I was pitied, so that no one would despair, learning that the worst of all men enjoyed God's benevolence. For he makes this clear when he says, "In order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him."

⁸⁴ Cf. vv. 15–16.

⁸⁵ The NPNF identifies this as the *Hom. de Mut. Nom.* iii, p. 98.

⁸⁶ Cf. Acts 9:15.

⁸⁷ Cf. I Timothy 1:16.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Paul next says, “To reveal his Son in me.”⁸⁹ In another passage Christ says, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son desires to reveal him.”⁹⁰ Do you see that the Father reveals the Son, and the Son reveals the Father? It works the same way also when it comes to glory: the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father the Son. “Glorify me,” Jesus says, “that I may glorify You.”⁹¹ And, “Just as I have glorified you.” So then, why did Paul not say, “to reveal his Son *to me*,” but “in me”? He shows that he not only heard those things which concerned the faith through words, but also that he was greatly filled with the Spirit, that the revelation completely illumined his soul, and that he possessed Christ speaking within him.

So, he says, “That I may proclaim him among the nations.”⁹² For it is not only his believing that has come from God but also that God elected. “Thus, he has revealed himself to me, not only so that I may see him, but that I may carry him to others.” And Paul did not say simply to “others,” but, “That I may proclaim him among the nations.”⁹³ He is hereby giving a sampling of a not insignificant point in his defense, the identity of his disciples. It was not necessary to preach similarly to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Paul next says, “I did not immediately consult flesh and blood.”⁹⁴ Here he mentions the apostles obscurely, referring to them by their nature. And if he also says this about all men, we do not at all deny it.⁹⁵ “Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me.”⁹⁶ If then someone should examine these very words individually, it might seem like they are full of much boasting, and that they are far from an apostolic disposition. For self-endorsement and taking no one as a partner in your knowledge seems to be the mark of foolishness. The Scriptures say, “For I saw a man who seemed to himself to be wise, and yet the fool has more hope than he.”⁹⁷ And, “Woe to those who are understanding in their own eyes and seem knowledgeable in their own sight.”⁹⁸ Again, Paul himself says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes.”⁹⁹ So, one who has heard so much of such admonitions from others, and who himself gives the same admonitions to others would not fall victim to this, not just Paul but really any man at all. But, as I was just saying, when this expression is scrutinized by itself, it can raise suspicion and give offense to some listeners. So, let us establish the reason why Paul was making these claims, and then all will applaud and be amazed at him for saying this.

We proceed as follows. We do not need to pour over the mere words, since many other absurdities will follow. Nor is it necessary to interrogate the expression itself but to pay close attention to the writer’s intention. In our lectures if we do not use the same procedure and examine the thinking of the speaker, we will incur much hostility, and everything will get thrown upside down. For in our own arguments we would not have

⁸⁹ Verse 16a.

⁹⁰ Cf. Luke 10:22.

⁹¹ Cf. John 17:1, 4.

⁹² Verse 16b.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ In other words, Chrysostom means that Paul received instruction neither from the Apostles nor from anyone else but only Christ.

⁹⁶ Verse 17.

⁹⁷ Cf. Proverbs 26:12.

⁹⁸ Cf. Isaiah 5:21.

⁹⁹ Cf. Romans 12:16.

used this kind of figure, and we would scrutinize the knowledge of the one who said such a thing. We will be subjected to much hatred, and all things will become confused. And why is it necessary to speak about particular words, when even in the case of deeds if someone does not keep to this standard all things become topsy-turvy? Even doctors cut and break a person's bones, and thieves often do such things. Therefore, how wretched would it be if ever we are unable to tell the difference between a thief and a doctor? Another example is murderers and martyrs when they undergo the same tortures. But there is a very great difference between them. And if we do not hold closely to that standard, we will not be able to know these things, but we will say that even Elijah was a murderer, and Samuel and Phineas as well, and that Abraham was indeed a killer of children, if we intend to scrutinize just the bare actions.

So then, let us examine Paul's intention, the reason why he wrote these things. We must look at his purpose and how he behaved, generally speaking, toward the apostles. Then we will understand his comments and his thinking in saying these things. For he was not disparaging others, nor was he exalting himself when he said these things, nor when he made the prior comments. How could he be, when he also anathematized himself? But everywhere he maintains the steadfastness of the gospel. For because those who were destroying the church were saying that they had to follow the apostles—who were not forbidding the practices at Galatia—and not follow Paul—who did forbid what they were doing—then little by little a Judaic deception was introduced.

So, Paul is compelled to stand nobly against these practices. He does this, not because he wants to speak ill of the apostles, but from a desire to repress the folly of those who were improperly elevating themselves. Therefore, he says, “I did not consult flesh and blood.” For it would have been extremely inappropriate for someone who had learned from God to subsequently refer to men. The one who learns from men naturally accepts men again as partners. But he who has been counted worthy of that divine and blessed voice and has been taught all things by the one who possesses the storehouse of wisdom, what reason does he have subsequently to refer to men? Such a man would be acting justly not in learning from men, but in teaching them. So then, he did not make these claims insolently but to show the value of his own message.

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ServantReading

Sage Advice for the New Pastor

A Review Article

by Allen C. Tomlinson

Help for the New Pastor: Practical Advice for Your First Year of Ministry, by Charles Malcolm Wingard. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018, xvii + 206 pages, \$14.99.

Dr. Charles Wingard is one of the most earnest and efficient pastors I have had the privilege to know. We served in the same presbytery for several years while he pastored two churches in New England. I heard him preach on several occasions, including twice to my own congregation. I can still remember his exhortation to the presbytery on 1 Timothy 2:24–26. That was many, many years ago, and I still remember his sermon, not because I have a good memory (I don’t!), but because he is such a powerful preacher of the Word of God. Dr. Wingard is perhaps the most hardworking pastor I have ever known. He spoke on “pastoral visitation” to our Granite State Reformed Ministers Fellowship during that time he lived in New England. Though I had always thought of pastoral visitation as one of my strengths, Charlie’s goal and practice in this area shone through his presentation making me reevaluate how efficient a job I had been doing. I do not believe I have ever known any pastor more efficient in his use of time or more energetic or more sincerely zealous for the gospel of Christ and for the church of Christ.

So when I picked up this new book, I was both excited, because of my admiration of God’s grace in Charlie’s ministerial labors, but also I felt some trepidation for the sake of the young men who might read this book. With his unusual zeal, energy, earnestness and consistency in all the above, would these new pastors feel intimidated and develop some kind of self-esteem crisis? Or, would they try to imitate this incredibly gifted, experienced, and hardworking pastor and collapse, unable to keep pace with such an “Olympian”?

My excitement was right on target, and my trepidation was wasted energy. This is a wonderful book, which I now plan to assign to any ministerial intern I have the privilege to work with. How I could have used this book for my first year, or even my first ten years in the Gospel ministry! The experienced pastor I did have as my senior pastor the first year I was in full time ministry taught me a good number of the lessons Dr. Wingard covers in this book. However, it would have been helpful to have a written summary of these important and practical lessons, and there are some lessons in this book which I had to learn the hard way. I believe my readers know what I mean by “the hard way.” By trial and error (Often it seemed like more error than trial!). This book could have saved me, and more importantly saved my poor charges whom I was pastoring, many mistakes on my part.

When I began as an assistant pastor back in 1976 in rural Illinois, the senior pastor told me the first day,

Don't start out working so hard that you are unable to keep up such an impossible pace. Also, the people might expect you to keep working that hard always, and you might not have the physical or emotional strength. Work hard, but pace yourself and remember you have other obligations such as family.

Dr. Wingard does not word it the same way, but he makes the same point very forcibly. For example,

What is inexcusable is to permit routine ministerial duties—committee meetings, pastoral visitation, administrative work, and sermon preparation—to take you away from time with your family. Schedule time to be with family, and when you are, give them your full attention. Put away the computer and the smartphone. Focus on the folks at hand—the most important sheep in the flock—your family. (174)

Not only does the book consider the family (and personal) needs of the young minister, as far as not “overbooking” one’s life, but Dr. Wingard also counsels young ministers to not put unbiblical and impossible pressure on church members.

Also, be careful not to wrongfully bind the consciences of your congregation’s members, obligating them to attack social evils. When I was a boy in the rural South, it was the anti-liquor crusade. Other issues have taken its place. I have served as vice president of a crisis pregnancy center, but I do not think any believer is obligated to work in the pro-life movement or to ameliorate any of the myriad of social evils of the day. Let your members work out their commitments in these areas as they take into account their giftings, duties, and interests. For many, caring for their family, tending to their work, and attending public worship are all they can and should handle. Don’t crush them with burdens they were never intended to bear. (46–47)

That is great stuff, considering the moralism and the “practical application” sermons that are heard throughout our land today, that continually place God’s people under heavy burdens of which even the first century Pharisees would have been fearful. What sound advice for young ministers of the gospel!

This book begins at the beginning: your call to the ministry and understanding what that call is biblically. That is chapter one. In chapters 2–18 we have the most important areas of pastoral ministry examined. In chapters 2–4 the topics are:

- Preparing for the pulpit (chapter 2)
- Preparing and delivering the sermon (chapter 3)
- Practical advice on preaching (chapter 4)

Chapter 4 includes: length of sermon, biblical books to preach through first, the purpose of preaching, the need to love the people and not to be impatient when they need to hear the same things again and again. There is more, and all of it very helpful. We are warned to not stir up needless political or social controversy, such as on a blog or Facebook, for, “You are a pastor, not a controversialist.” The topics in chapters 5–7 are:

- Leading worship (chapter 5)
- The sacraments (chapter 6)
- Church administration (chapter 7)

In chapter 7 we are warned not to underestimate the necessity of doing efficient administration, without neglecting our higher priority of proclaiming the Word. If you neglect the necessary administrative duties, it will eventually have a negative effect on your preaching and other more directly spiritual labors. The next chapter deals with:

- Growing through conflict (chapter 8)

The entire book is worth reading for just chapter 8! It took me some time before I realized how much I could grow spiritually and ministerially if I learned the lessons I needed to learn while going through conflicts. For me, and perhaps for most of us, conflict with the other leaders or members of the church is one of the most difficult experiences in the ministry. However, if such conflict is handled properly, i.e., biblically, we can actually grow closer to many of those with whom we have had conflict. In chapters 9–15 the topics are:

- Home visitation (chapter 9)
- Practicing hospitality (chapter 10)
- Counseling (chapter 11)
- Weddings (chapter 12)
- Hospital and hospice care (chapter 13)
- Funerals (chapter 14)
- Denominational duties (chapter 15)

All these chapters give very important and practical advice for the minister to seize these opportunities (weddings, hospice care, and funerals) to minister Christ's love to his people. The pastor and people draw close to one another when we minister God's Word in such times, "striking while the iron is hot."

Dr. Wingard closes the book with important counsel for the minister's personal walk with God and faithfulness in Gospel ministry. Chapters 16–18 speak to:

- The character and habits of effective ministry (chapter 16)
- Small things that yield big results (chapter 17)
- A long and fruitful ministry (chapter 18)

Think of the wise counsel given in the following quotations:

Make sure you praise what is praiseworthy, encourage where you see evidences of grace, and speak words of compassion where needed. You want the number of these interactions to far exceed the number that are focused on controversy. (88)

Your first church is the place to establish habits that will increase your effectiveness in lifelong service to Christ's church. Reflect on the disciplines you will need for the long haul, and make acquiring them a nonnegotiable priority. (174)

. . . for a long and fruitful ministry, you must intercede for your congregation in your secret prayers. (183)

The frequency and intensity of our prayers for ourselves and for our congregations are known only to us and to God. Yet I doubt there is any greater measure of ministerial godliness. If we attempt to carry on a ministry without earnestly praying for our congregations, then we will find ourselves on perilous ground. (184)

. . . you must speak affectionately both *to* your congregation and *about* your congregation.

(185)

Appendix 1 gives "Advice to Student Preachers." How should you dress for preaching? When should you arrive, how long ahead of the announced service? There are many other useful hints.

Appendix 2 is "Tips for Seeking a Pastoral Position." How should you engage with the search committee, write your resume and cover letter, and prepare for interviews.

There is so much sound and useful counsel in this book. Should you try to "resolve conflict by email or text"? How important is it to consult with your wife when you want to practice hospitality as the pastor? How should you organize your time?

My only divergence from the book, not really a disagreement, is that two of his suggestions just have not been needed or workable for me in my years in the ministry. First, a more direct involvement in working with the church budget. The charges I have had did not need financial expertise on my part, for there were godly accountants and others who really knew their stuff. My main job was to teach them what God's Word said about the church's purpose, and how that purpose affects our use of the church's monies; and to teach them about how and why we give as God's people. However, that is the kind of difference that might be found in our different circumstances. At a startup or a very small church, I can see the importance of what Dr. Wingard suggests.

Second, Charlie encourages the young pastor to join at least one or two community organizations for contact with outsiders. I agree that this is ideal. However, when I have tried it, especially where I have been ministering the last thirty-two years, I am unable to keep up with such commitments due to special needs at the church that continually arise. Again, varying circumstances, and I suggest (perhaps) varying personalities, might make a difference from one man to another.

This is an easy book to read and a very important book for its intended audience. And a great review of sound practices for those of us who have been preaching the Gospel for a long time! I highly recommend this book.

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ServantReading

How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches by Kent Philpott

by Charles M. Wingard

How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches, by Kent Philpott. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2008, xiii + 128 pages, \$13.99, paper.

Disappointment is a routine part of pastoral life and is especially acute in small churches where personal and financial resources are few and prospects for growth slim. Many pastors wonder if anyone in the congregation really cares about them. Pay is often meagre; expressions of concern for the pastor and his family's well-being come infrequently or not at all. In some churches little energy is spent caring for anyone in the church. The hurt can be deep. Pastors would like to articulate their hurts to the church, but do not—they do not want to offend, appear self-pitying, or expose themselves to rejection.

What many smaller church pastors are afraid to do for themselves, Kent Philpott does for them. He writes with smaller churches in mind and counsels them on how they can better care for their shepherds. The author is well qualified; when *How to Care for Your Pastor* was published he had more than forty years of experience, much of it in a small California congregation.

Through much of the book I nodded my head in agreement. Seemingly little things—like punctuality and words of thanks—are big encouragements. Money for books and classes must not escape the congregation's notice if they want their pastor to grow as a minister of the Word.

The author encourages a proper congregational mindset. Its pastor is not exempt from the problems common to a fallen world. Not only does he experience the same trials as his flock, but he struggles with many of the same temptations and sins. A fact that should be obvious—the pastor's humanity—must not be forgotten.

Both pastor and congregation should shed the illusion of omnicompetence (my word). Every minister must recognize his own limitations in knowledge and ability, and his congregation must live with those limits. Just as in a healthy marriage spouses do not let flaws obscure the blessings of their partner, so too the congregation must be grateful for God's gift to them of a pastor whose faithful care is demonstrated in a variety of ways.

Poor compensation in smaller churches is common, if not the norm. The author helpfully shares his own tentmaking experience and his wife's work outside the home. He explains how mutual sympathy must exist between the pastor and his congregation as this area of potential conflict and hurt feelings are navigated. I would add that as tight as family budgets are for pastors of smaller churches, financial problems are not always the consequence of poor pay. Pastors and their wives can be financially reckless,

accumulating unnecessary debt and nurturing sinful discontentment. In these situations both the pastor and his wife will require the loving but firm guidance of the church's leaders.

The author is adamant (and correct) that the pastor and his wife parent their children, not the congregation. With thoughtless words and harsh judgments assertive church members can place unsustainable pressure on the pastor and his family to conform to their personal ideals for the minister's family life.

I found Philpott's counsel to churches with young pastors particularly wise. Maturation is a process; the minister you have now will not be the same man when his ministry is over. Wise congregations look on their relationship with the minister as a partnership, one that over time, can grow and flourish.

Ordained Servant readers are committed to traditional pastoral care and might raise an eyebrow when they read that the author does not like to make hospital or home visits. Pastoral visitation is such a significant part of the Presbyterian tradition that young men preparing for ministry would be well advised to cultivate a desire for it, even if it doesn't come naturally. To his credit Philpott does make these visits and is appreciative of a Care Team that assists him.

Contrary to the author and many others, I do not think the pastor's work schedule is unique. True, "pastors do not punch a time clock and do not work regular office hours." But neither do most of the physicians, business owners, salesmen, and farmers in my congregation. I encourage my students to establish a weekly work plan. Be flexible, but remember that bad work habits can easily form without a fixed schedule.

For congregations looking for ideas about how to care for their pastors, this book will prove useful. But to treat it as a definitive guide to pastoral and congregational relationships would be a mistake. The author does not make this claim, but people reading this book must keep in mind that no perfect blueprint exists to guide them. While all pastors expect that their congregations care for them, the shape that care should take will vary from pastor to pastor according to his attitudes toward ministry and the specific needs of him and his family. There is no one solution for care of the pastor. The strength of this book is the author's honesty and openness about his own pastoral experience. With that in mind, I would caution the reader to understand that not every pastor will have the same needs and expectations, or work from the same philosophy of ministry.

To foster enduring relationships there are no substitutes for honest conversations and the cultivation of mutual sympathy and understanding. Get that straight, and this book will provide ideas about how to improve the precious relationship between a pastor and his flock.

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ServantReading

Pursuing Health in an Anxious Age by Bob Cutillo

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

Pursuing Health in an Anxious Age, by Bob Cutillo. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 196 pages, \$17.99.

Much of the discussion regarding modern medicine in America focuses on the high costs of healthcare and how to provide affordable care to all. Dr. Cutillo only touches briefly on these subjects, focusing instead on the philosophy which underlies the healthcare system and the important role that faith communities can play in addressing those philosophical underpinnings.

Dr. Cutillo is a physician for the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless in Denver, Colorado. He also serves as an assistant clinical professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and as an associate faculty member at Denver Seminary. In the past he served several years as a medical missionary in Africa.

Dr. Cutillo begins with a basic tenant. Our health is not a commodity, nor a right. It is a gift. With this distinctly theological perspective, Dr. Cutillo challenges the humanistic myths that underly modern healthcare today: 1) we can control health and obtain the outcomes we desire; 2) we can remove uncertainty from healthcare; 3) we can have life on our own terms independent of God; 4) the physician (or scientist) can be objective in his or her clinical gaze; 5) statistics provide all the answers needed for proper healthcare, defining what is normal and thereby what is abnormal or diseased; 6) the proper application of medical technology and treatment will result in good health; and 7) we can control the day of our death, either by avoiding that day with quality healthcare or by choosing that day and taking our own lives.

These basic assumptions are deeply embedded in our healthcare system. Dr. Cutillo is well read and articulate, skillfully dealing with each assumption, providing compelling arguments for each of his points and excellent examples from his medical background. In several chapters Dr. Cutillo brings Scripture and Christian theology into his discussion, to provide a Christian critique of modern healthcare.

By far his most compelling chapter (well worth the price of the book), is entitled “Just Community.” It looks at justice issues in healthcare from a community perspective. He focuses on our common vulnerabilities; how our health depends upon the health of those around us; and how the health of a society depends on how it cares for its poorest members. He does not limit this to the national debates over funding healthcare in America. He notes that an Ebola outbreak in central Africa has the potential to radically impact our health here in America; thus, we have a vested interest in providing the highest possible care for others around the world. His case for comprehensive reform in

the way healthcare is apportioned is compelling and biblical and will leave even the most progressive among us feeling uneasy about how little we do for others in these matters.

In chapter 10 Dr. Cutillo calls for a robust cooperation between healthcare and the church, noting that the two are not only compatible but are also essential to each other. He offers several examples of faith communities that have programs providing quality healthcare for those in their neighborhoods.

Dr. Cutillo's conclusion calls for a recovery of wonder in a jaded society which assumes that it understands everything.

Dr. Cutillo's book has a couple of shortcomings that should be noted. The first comes from my perspective as a chaplain. America today is a religiously diverse population, and modern American healthcare should not discriminate based on religion. It must provide healthcare in a manner that is sensitive to, and respectful of, all faith traditions. Particularly in chapter 10, Dr. Cutillo focuses exclusively upon the Christian church. This may play well with an Evangelical audience, but to speak to physicians and other healthcare professionals around the nation, those who can actually do something about the nature of healthcare in America today, Dr. Cutillo would need to broaden his discussion to include synagogues, mosques, and temples as well. All religious communities have a common interest in addressing the assumptions of a healthcare system which is often indifferent or even hostile toward those faith communities.

Theologically, Dr. Cutillo is strongly influenced by the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom he quotes at length several times. I have always found Bonhoeffer's views interesting and provocative, but to use his Neoorthodoxy without qualification should raise questions in the minds of Reformed readers.¹ Given this influence I would be reluctant to share the book with readers who are unaware of the distinctions between Neoorthodoxy and a true Reformed and biblical theology.

Despite these shortcomings this book is recommended for healthcare professionals and pastors interested in considering the underpinnings of our modern healthcare system or who are searching for a role for the faith community which extends beyond handholding and prayer.

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¹ For a Reformed critique of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, consider Richard Weikart's *The Troubling Truth About Bonhoeffer's Theology*, CRI (the Christian Research Journal), 2015; or William Macleod's *Bonhoeffer: A Reliable Guide?* Banner of Truth, 2016. Both articles are readily available online.

ServantReading

How False Beliefs Spread

A Review Article

by T. David Gordon

The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread, by Cailin O'Connor and James Owen Weatherall. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, x + 266 pages, \$26.00, paper.

As with many other books, the title is designed (often by the publisher) to attract readers, and the subtitle describes the actual content. Very little in this volume claims that the present age is uniquely misinformed; to the contrary, the authors frequently remind that a variety of economic and political agents have ordinarily misinformed the public in a variety of ways, and the only thing new about the present circumstance is the sheer volume of information—of which some will always be misinformation—to which much of the public is now exposed. The bulk of the book is devoted to explaining “*How False Beliefs Spread*” (emphasis mine), with a special emphasis on the sociological factors.

This is a book about belief. It is a book about truth and knowledge, science and evidence. But most of all, it is a book about *false* beliefs. How do we form beliefs—especially false ones? . . . To understand why false beliefs persist and spread, we need to understand where beliefs come from in the first place. (6, 7)

In this sense it joins a disturbingly large number of writings that I inelegantly refer to as “Stupid Studies,” not because the studies themselves are stupid, but because there are serious studies of the related human phenomena of stupidity, gullibility, deceit, propaganda, etc.¹

The authors are instructors of logic and the philosophy of science, at University of California, Irvine, and their academic training suits them well for a task such as this. The

¹ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1922); Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport, 1961); Peter L. Berger with Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1966); Farhad Manjoo, *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2008); Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Ori and Rom Brafman, *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown, 2013); Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Currency, 2017).

book is well-documented² and includes many examples of misinformation from the fields of science as well as from those of commerce and politics. Much of the interesting analysis attempts to explain what we ordinarily call “the sociology of knowledge” and how the senses of belonging and of sympathy (or non-belonging and antipathy) shape our senses of credibility and trustworthiness (cf. especially chapter 2, “Polarization and Conformity”).

You might think that when we hold false beliefs . . . it is because of some failure to properly process the information we receive from the world . . . But to focus on individual psychology, or intelligence, is to badly misdiagnose how false beliefs persist and spread. . . . Many of our beliefs—perhaps most of them—have a more complex origin: we form them on the basis of what other people tell us. . . . Most of us get our false beliefs from the same places we get our true ones, and if we want the good stuff, we risk getting the bad as well. (7–9)

The book contains many examples of the public spread of both information and misinformation about matters such as the health effects of smoking cigarettes, vaccinations, Lyme Disease, climate change, acid rain, the Cold War, chlorofluorocarbons, and even Edgar Welch in 2016 shooting people at a DC pizza parlor that he thought was the front for a child prostitution ring headed by Hillary Clinton, etc.

As philosophers of science O’Connor and Weatherall are quite knowledgeable—even candid—about misinformation that is occasionally embraced and propagated by scientists:

We also discuss cases in which scientists have come to reject as false a belief they previously held. As we argue, scientists, just like the rest of us, are strongly influenced by their networks of social connections. (12)

Philosophers of science, such as Larry Laudan and P. Kyle Stanford, have argued that these past failures of science should make us very cautious in accepting current scientific theories as true. (28)

Kuhn’s work raised the possibility that to understand science, we had to recognize it as a human enterprise, with a complex history and rich sociological features that could affect the ideas scientists developed and defended. Scientists, from this perspective, were members of a society, and their behaviors were determined by that society’s rites and rituals. (33)

² The book has fifty-one pages of bibliography, and twenty-six pages of endnotes, the latter of which places the reader in the awkward position of constantly flipping back and forth through two books, just to determine whether it is necessary to do so (whether the notes are merely bibliographic or also rhetorical/argumentative). We would benefit from a serious movement among authors and publishers to end this practice and to restore all notes to the foot of the page where they belong. If non-readers find this “distracting,” as they claim, we should simply invite them to watch television or YouTube instead.

And whether we accept what scientists tell us depends on the degree to which we trust scientists to accurately gather and report their evidence, and to responsibly update their beliefs in light of it. (44)

Usually, when scientists behave rationally but gather uncertain data, sharing evidence helps the whole group get to the right belief, even persuading those who were initially skeptical. But sometimes this process backfires, and communication between scientists actually leads to a consensus around the false belief. (63)

So far, we have assumed that all of the scientists in our models share real results, and that they are all motivated by the goal of establishing truth. But the history of science—and politics—reveals that this is often a bad assumption. (92)

Those who adopt a pre-Kuhnian belief in the neutrality of the various activities of scientists will be disabused of such notions by O’Connor and Weatherall, as will those who believe that various political and economic propagandists will lead us to an intellectual Promised Land. Citing the 1917–1919 Committee on Public Information, they quote unfavorably the occasionally rosy view of one of its veterans, Edward Bernays, who conceded himself that

(T)hose who manipulate this unseen mechanism (propaganda) of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. (99, citing Bernays, *Propaganda*, Brooklyn: Ig, 1928, 9)

Nor do O’Connor and Weatherall believe that the First Amendment is any guarantee that truth will prevail: “One take away from this book is that we should stop thinking that the ‘marketplace of ideas’ can effectively sort fact from fiction” (179).

In the closing pages the authors propose as a partial cure to misinformation a reimagining of democracy along lines proposed by Philip Kitcher,³ in which we evade what Kitcher calls “vulgar democracy,” wherein objective truth is subjected to popular vote (what Kitcher called a “tyranny of ignorance”), by deferring to what he called “well-ordered science.” However, the authors’ endorsement of Kitcher is hardly ringing:

But as Kitcher is the first to admit, there is a strong dose of utopianism here: well-ordered science is what we get in an ideal society, free of the corrupting forces of self-interest, ignorance, and manipulation. The world we live in is far from this ideal (186).

Nonetheless, they believe “We need to develop a practical and dynamic form of Kitcherism. . . . And the first step in that process is to abandon the notion of a popular vote as the proper way to adjudicate issues that require expert knowledge. (Ibid.)

³ Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Science in a Democratic Society* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2011).

This desire for some trustworthy agency to inform the public was first proposed by Walter Lippmann in 1921 (note 1, above), and the desire—while certainly noble enough—is no more practicable today than it was a century ago. The desire to be governed by elites who treasure and pursue knowledge and wisdom is as old as Plato’s *Republic*, and, perhaps sadly, as unachievable today as it was two and a half millennia ago.

The authors acknowledge no particular religious orientation, so they cannot be expected to address the spiritual realities that may be fairly evident to Christian believers: humans are deceived deceivers; apart from the grace of God they are like their “father the devil,” who “is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). There is no human system that can save us from our desire to be deceived, whether by ourselves or by others. According to the apostle John, the entire world lies in the power of the evil one, who is called the “deceiver of the whole world” (1 John 5:19 and Rev. 12:9), and his children “will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). At the same time we would not be ignorant of his designs (2 Cor. 2:11), and O’Connor and Weatherall have provided a fascinating account—albeit without reference to any spiritual dimensions—of the variety of social factors that contribute to public misinformation. Church leaders will find much to ponder, and much to appreciate, in this volume.

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ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

Scattered Feathers

So lightning fast they struck
My little flock of laying hens—
Just fifty—with three out of luck.

The fisher cat is fast and fierce,
Striking like a well-timed terrorist,
In cover of night, unseen they pierce,

Leaving feathers in their wake
To teach me about boundaries,
About fences to stop their take.

Plagues are so like those agile
Cats, who imperceptibly take their prey,
Foul molecules that kill the fragile.

But under the wings of the Most
High God, no pestilence can hide,
No scattered feathers boast,

Because the plague of sin and death
Can never penetrate the fortress
Of his gracious, life-giving breath.