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Ordained Servant



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ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement Of Purpose

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

Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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A Reader Asks: “Was It Appropriate for *New Horizons* to Advocate the Three-Office View?”

by

Larry Wilson

A reader sent the following letter to me as editor of *New Horizons*.

Given that our Church disagrees over the biblically mandated number of offices, was it appropriate for *New Horizons* to advocate the three-office view in its report on the 69th General Assembly (August-September 2002)? In any case, the article’s argument is problematic for at least two reasons.

First, while the Westminster Assembly’s *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* proposes a ministerial continuity between the Levitical priesthood and the Gospel ministry, and thus does make an official distinction between elders and ministers, Hebrews 7 seems to indicate that the Levitical order was set aside and replaced by a Melchizedekian one, held by Christ alone.

Second, the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* actually presents a four-office view: Pastor, *Doctor*, Elder, Deacon. Whatever the biblical position might be, four-office (perhaps some would prefer to call it “three-and-one-half”) is the truly presbyterian view “historically practiced.”

Until the General Assembly reaches an enforceable consensus on the various doctrines over which it is divided, what

will be your policy for *New Horizons* with regard to speaking on these issues?

I thank our brother for his keen interest in our Church and her General Assembly. I thank him for his good questions. I commend him for his desire to see the OPC branch of our Lord’s Church conformed more nearly to Scripture. May our Lord grant each of us that earnest desire! After personal correspondence, he withdrew his letter. But because the topic he broaches is both controversial and consequential, and because he reflects questions and objections which many others likely share—which I myself once shared—I think it could be helpful to respond in an article for a more general audience.

Did the article “advocate the three office view”?

The letter disputes the first section of the report (“The Genius of Presbyterianism,” pages 3 and 4). Our brother alleges that it “advocate(s) the three office view.” aaMany of our readers may wonder what on earth that means. For over a century, presbyterians have had a running debate about how to classify the offices in a biblically constituted church. Are there “three offices” (minister, elder, and deacon) or “two offices” (elder and deacon)? In other words, how sharp is the distinction between the minister (sometimes called the “teaching elder”) and the ruling elder? Are

these two distinct offices (the “three-office” view) or are they two functions within one office (the “two-office” view)?

As for me, I’ve come to think that these *labels* are themselves a great source of confusion. There are faithful, godly brethren in the OPC who advocate what they call the “two office” view, but I have to question whether that is really an accurate label. Our Baptist brethren are genuinely “two-office.” They have only pastors and deacons, but no elders. The Brethren are genuinely “two-office.” They have only elders and deacons, but no pastors. But our Presbyterian brethren who call themselves “two-office” have pastors, elders, and deacons. Go figure. I regard myself as a “three-office” man with a high view of the office of ruling elder. Another pastor—a very good friend of mine—inclines to see himself as a “two office” man with a high view of the ordinance of preaching. I’ve visited the congregation he serves. I’ve interacted with his Session. I’ve sat in on Session meetings. Frankly, I can’t tell any *practical* difference between his view and mine. Go figure. The nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian theologian J. H. Thornwell is regarded as the champion of the “two-office” view in presbyterianism. But as I read what he actually wrote, his position looks a whole lot like what I would call a “three-office” view. Go figure. I think these labels tend to be used in such an

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ambiguous way that they create confusion and occasion division.

In any case, one can search high and low throughout the disputed section of the article. No matter how hard he looks he will find no claim for how many offices there are in the church. Our brother *deduced* from implications of certain statements that this article “advocate(s) the three-office view”. Then he turned around and imposed his deduction upon the article as if it explicitly declared that. Then he rejoined that the article therefore doesn’t really agree with the Westminster Assembly’s *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* because that document is not “three-office”, but is instead “four-office” or “three and a half office.” But this rejoinder completely misses the mark. The article nowhere affirms how many offices its author thinks there are, for that wasn’t its goal.

Why did the article distinguish between ministers and ruling elders?

At the same time, our brother *is* correct in observing that the article, with the Westminster Assembly, does distinguish between ministers and ruling elders. There is a good reason why it does so. The reason is that this section of the article attempts to educate the Church about the biblical warrant and historical precedent for her doing what she does. Since it is very unhealthy for a church to do things merely out of habit without considering whether there is biblical sanction for it, it endeavored to educate the Church in regard to the question, “*what is a ‘general assembly’ and why do we have it?*”

Regarding what a “general assembly” is, the OPC *Form of*

Government (FG) unambiguously says, “The whole church consists of all the members of its regional churches. The general assembly, which is the governing body of the whole church, shall consist of . . . such *ministers and ruling elders* as are commissioned by the respective presbyteries in accordance with proportions determined by a previous general assembly. In the event that the general assembly fails to establish such proportions, the next general assembly shall consist of *every minister* and of *one ruling elder* from every local church” (XV:1-2). The OPC has a General Assembly consisting of “ministers and ruling elders.”

Thus, the letter is mistaken in its assumption that the OPC does not yet have an “enforceable consensus” on this issue. *That* the OPC has such an assembly consisting of “ministers *and* ruling elders” already is in fact the “enforceable consensus” of the Church, embodied in her Standards. Moreover, this distinction between “ministers and ruling elders” is woven throughout our Standards and is not found merely in this one place.¹ In the *FG* alone, for example, you’ll note that the preparation and ordination for ministers is very different in several respects than the preparation and ordination for ruling elders (compare *FG* XXIII and *FG* XXV). The duties of ministers and ruling elders also differ (compare *FG* VIII and *FG* X:3). Furthermore, the *FG* explicitly says: “Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, *beside the ministers of the Word*, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by the people from among their number, are to join *with the ministers* in the government of the

church, and are properly called ruling elders” (*FG* X:1). And so, the OPC has a General Assembly consisting of “ministers and ruling elders.” But *why* does the OPC do this? The goal of this section of the article was to educate the Church on the warrant for our practice. One can hope that this is not a blameworthy goal.

The historical presbyterian understanding

The letter further contends that this article and the Westminster Assembly err because they affirm “a ministerial continuity between the Levitical priesthood and the Gospel ministry, and thus . . . make an official distinction between elders and ministers, (while) Hebrews 7 seems to indicate that the Levitical order was set aside and replaced by a Melchizedekian one, held by Christ alone.” I join our brother in rejoicing that our Lord Jesus Christ not only fulfils all that the Levitical priesthood foreshadowed, he exceeds it and has brought those shadows to an end. A close reading of the article in question, however, will show that it never says that ministers *are* priests or Levites. Rather, it says “the Assembly’s *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* identifies ministers . . . as the New Testament *analogue* to priests and Levites . . .” (p. 3). We have a similar situation in regard to circumcision. Old Testament circumcision is done away in Christ, who has fulfilled and exceeded it, but we still have a New Testament analogue in baptism. Ministers are to the New Testament what priests and Levites were to the Old Testament, much as baptism is to the New Testament what circumcision was to the Old Testament.

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You see, historical presbyterianism, represented by the Westminster Assembly, saw the *Old Testament* as indispensable for correctly understanding the New Testament. It saw the Old Testament backdrop as just as crucial to understanding New Testament church government as it is to other important topics (such as household baptism). It noted, first, that “elders” (sometimes called “judges”) joined with the priestly Levites in governing the people (cf. Deut. 17:9; 19:17; 21:1-9). Second, it noted that in the Bible the term “elder” is elastic enough to embrace both groups without confusing them. For example, Acts 5:21 calls the Sanhedrin “the *elders* of the people” even though, in fact, it included both lay rulers and priests. In other words, in the Old Testament, every priest was an elder, but not every elder was a priest. This divinely inspired use of “elder” carries over into the New Testament. For example, every apostle was an elder, but that did not make every elder an apostle. In the same way, every minister of the Word is an elder, but not every elder is a minister of the Word. This background sheds light on the distinction we find in 1 Timothy 5:17 (“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, *especially* those whose work is preaching and teaching”). We embrace this biblical distinction and sometimes express it by speaking of “teaching elders” and “ruling elders.”

While the New Testament “ruling elders” compare to the Old Testament elders or judges, the New Testament “teaching elders” compare instead to the Old Testament priests and Levites. This becomes somewhat more clear when we consider that in essence the Levitical ministry

was a ministry of Word and sacrament. “The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is a messenger of the Lord Almighty” (Mal. 2:7; cf. Lev. 10:11; Jer. 18:18; Hos. 4:4-9). (Some of these were the “scribes” of which we read in the New Testament, cf. Neh. 8:1-2.) “The Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name...” (Deut. 10:8). The Levitical ministry was a ministry of Word and sacrament that pointed *forward* to the Christ who was yet to come.

Presbyterianism—in its very warp and woof—considers it essential, even in this age of New Testament fulfillment, that there be a continuing ministry of Word and sacrament that points *heavenward* to the living, exalted Christ who has come, who has accomplished the redemption of his people, and who is now applying it. The Westminster Assembly noted that when God predicted the (then) future New Testament age in which the Messiah would gather his people from all the nations, he said through the prophet Isaiah, “And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites” (Isa. 66:21). It noted that our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes” (Mt. 23:34, ESV). The Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, felt free to apply this analogy: “Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? *In the same way*, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor.

9:13-14). He saw no incongruity with New Testament fulfillment to speak of “the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:15-16). This was the historical presbyterian understanding of Scripture’s teaching on this topic. In his commentary on the Larger Catechism, J. G. Vos affirmed this historical view: “While there is of course a true sense in which every Christian is a priest of God, yet so far as official responsibility for the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments is concerned, the ministers of Christ are the New Testament counterpart of the priests and Levites of the Old Testament” (*The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* [P&R, 2002], p. 486).

Why does this sound so bizarre?

If this is the historical presbyterian understanding, then why does it sound so bizarre to us? Could it be because so much of the biblical warrant for the things we do has been forgotten for over a century by sins of omission? We remember only bits and pieces of the “what,” and we’ve forgotten even more of the “why.” Our nineteenth century fathers sowed the wind with “new measures” and the like, and we reaped the whirlwind with the full-blown theological liberalism of the twentieth century. And now that—by his sheer, amazing grace—God has plucked us from the flames of apostasy, we’re trying to pick up the pieces. We’re trying to recover lost ground. We’re trying to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem. This is

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why I am by no means faulting the letter writer for raising objections. I have previously shared these very objections. I thank him for his willingness to ask good questions. For, whatever we do, we must never merely plod along clinging to hollow tradition for tradition's sake. We need freshly to relearn from the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture the many elements of biblical faith and life that have long been neglected and forgotten.

I would urge our readers to study again what our Confession and Catechisms (especially the Larger Catechism)—with their Scripture proofs—say about this. Look especially at their discussion of “the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.” One great resource is a new book published by P&R, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* by J. G. Vos, which was reviewed in the October 2002 issues of *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant*. And if you are interested in the Westminster Assembly's “original intent” in regard to these matters, see *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government* and *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*—with their Scripture proofs. Another resource that is valuable for trying to recover lost ground is a very old (1753 and 1765) book newly republished by Wipf and Stock, *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained By Way of Question and Answer* by James Fisher *et. al.*

Why is this so important?

To my mind, here are the crux issues in this discussion:

(1) *How does our exalted King Jesus apply himself and his benefits to the elect?* Does he or does he not use the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God to gather and

perfect the saints (see *Confession of Faith* XXV:3)? How desperately we need a faithful ministry of the Word and sacraments! Both the being and the well-being of Christ's church depends upon it. Therefore, we must guard its necessity, distinctiveness, and importance. We must promote its fidelity and diligence. How we need to recover a high view of the office of the minister of the Word and sacraments!

(2) *How does our Great Shepherd provide pastoral care for his flock?* Does he not provide a multitude of counselors for his people by making provision for godly men to serve alongside the minister in caring for his sheep? How desperately we need such godly counselors! Therefore, we must guard against disqualifying faithful men who lack the gifts, training, or calling to publicly proclaim the Word from serving as ruling elders. How we need to recover a high view of the office of the ruling elder!

(3) *How does our Righteous Judge provide safeguards to protect his flock, since we are all sinners?* God's Word forbids any of his people to try to lord it over the others. How we need checks and balances to avoid tyranny in the church! Therefore, we must guard the parity (equal authority and joint rule) of the ministers and ruling elders in *governing* the church. How we need to recover a practicing, biblical government in the church!

This is exactly what historical presbyterianism provides! How our church today needs to recover it, no matter which “how-many-office” label we prefer to attach! As G. I. Williamson once wrote, “More important than the way we *classify* the offices is the way we *define* them.” How *do* we define the offices? Do we agree that the

ministry of the Word and sacraments is necessary, distinct, and vital to both the being and well-being of the church? Do we agree that godly men who are not gifted and trained and called to publicly administer the Word can nevertheless be called to serve as ruling elders? Do we agree that the governing authority of ministers and ruling elders is equal and is to be jointly exercised? And do we agree that, therefore, ministers may not lord it over elders and elders may not lord it over ministers? If we disagree with these things, then shouldn't we honestly admit that we disagree with presbyterianism? But if we do agree on these things, then what is the debate about?

For further study, see the pamphlet *Biblical Eldership Revisited* by Leonard J. Coppes, ThD [available for \$2 from the author—9161 Vine St., Thornton, CO 80229].

Larry Wilson currently serves the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as General Secretary of its Committee on Christian Education. This article responds to questions regarding an article in *New Horizons*. We thought *Ordained Servant* a more appropriate periodical in which to give an answer because of space requirements. We are grateful to Larry for this contribution to *Ordained Servant*.

¹ See www.evertek.net/~giwopc ...



THE TWO- AND THREE-OFFICE ISSUE RECONSIDERED

by

G.I. Williamson

I want to begin this article by frankly admitting that I've long hesitated on this issue. The fact that Paul only speaks of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 has always seemed to me to have some weight in favor of the two-office view. At the same time, however, I've always thought that 1 Timothy 5:17 clearly proves that—in the established churches of the Apostolic age—there was a marked division of labor among those who were called elders. All elders ruled, but there were some elders who, in addition to ruling, were especially marked out to “labor in word and doctrine” and this undeniable fact always seemed to me to lend some weight to the arguments of those in favor of the three-office view.

I've read just about everything that I could put my hands on to resolve my hesitation, but never seemed to quite get beyond a two-and-a-half-office view. But then one day it ‘hit’ me. Now I wonder why I never thought of it before. I'm even more astonished that no one else seems to have thought of it either (at least I am not aware of any, and I've been looking into this issue for the past 40 years). So here I am

tentatively setting forth what seems to me to be the amazingly simple solution to this difficulty.

I now see that it is not really correct to say that Paul only lists the qualifications for two offices: the elders and the deacons. No, it is more accurate to say that he lists the qualifications for three offices: (1) the deacons, (2) the elders who rule but do not labor in the word and in doctrine, and (3) the elders who not only rule but also labor in word and doctrine as their vocation. What I mean is that the qualifications for (1) and (2) are clearly set down in chapter three of First Timothy. and in the first chapter of Titus. But the qualifications for category (3) are not only to be found in the portion of these passages that speaks of the general qualifications for elders, but also in the entire content of First and Second Timothy and Titus.

It is very clear that Titus and Timothy were men who preached the gospel. And it is equally clear that the Apostle Paul—for this reason—gives many specific instructions to these men that pertain precisely to their “labor in word and doctrine?” In 1 Timothy

Paul charges Timothy to be particularly vigilant to refute unsound doctrine (1:3-11). He gives a special charge to him (1:18). He urges him to “*instruct the brethren in these things*” as “*a good minister of Jesus Christ*” (4:6). He is urged to give himself “*to reading, exhortation and doctrine*” (4:13). He is exhorted to “*preach the word...in season and out of season*” (2 Tim. 4:2). And other specifics could easily be added—things *not* required of those other elders who did not *labor* in word and doctrine. These specifics are such as to clearly mark out the *teaching* elder—the *preaching* elder—as a man charged with specific duties that are above and beyond the call of the ruling elders. I take this to be the reason why Paul speaks of such men (in 1 Tim. 5:17) as *especially* worthy of double honor *if they are faithful*.

Why, then—it might be asked—does he use one word (presbyter or elder) as a name for both in 1 Tim. 5:17? Why does he insist on speaking of both those who do and those who do not labor in word and in doctrine as elders? I think the reason is simply this: to avoid even the slightest tendency toward

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hierarchical thinking. The apostle John wrote of a certain man named Diotrophes who loved “*to have the preeminence*” (3 John 9). We also know from the New Testament account that the Apostles themselves were not immune to this temptation (Luke 22:24-26). One of the great principles clearly stated in the Dordt Church Order is that no office-bearer is to be allowed to Lord it over any other office-bearers (Art. 84). I suggest that it was because of this constant tendency in our sinful nature that Paul did not give any higher sounding title to the preaching elder than to the elders that only rule. And we do well to take this lesson to heart. Yet this should in no way diminish our ability to recognize that which *is* special in defining this office.

With respect to those who labor among us Paul says that we should “*esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (1 Thess. 5:13). This is especially true of the minister of the word *if* he really does labor in the word and in doctrine. In my own ministry I’ve tried to discourage both ministers and so-called lay-people from too much concern about titles (Dominee, Reverend, Doctor etc.). It is also my observation that emphasis on such titles is counter-productive. God’s people are usually quite willing to esteem those who *do* faithfully preach the gospel to them. So there is no need for some artificial status elevation for ministers, as if the mere pos-

session of a title qualifies them to a position or status above others.

The need of the hour is not status, but a generation of men who can truly say “*woe be unto me if I preach not the gospel.*” Ministers who lust after status and titles will do nothing for the advancement of the true church. Those who humbly *labor* in the word of God with diligence and perseverance, and then preach it with power will neither need nor desire these artificial things.

I’m not saying that labels have no importance at all. I am only saying that what really matters is what is under the labels. The apostle Paul put it like this: “*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.*” (1 Tim. 4:6).

It is enough to be—and to be called—a *minister* of the Word of God (that is, a faithful minister after the pattern of Timothy and Titus). For, as our Lord himself put it, that makes the minister the *bottom* man on the totem pole (to speak in colloquial terms), not the man on the top if it. “*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'* But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who gov-

erns as he who serves.” (Luke 22:25,26)

Paul put the issue precisely when he wrote this to Timothy: “*Let no one despise your youth*”—but then immediately added—“*but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in charity.*” So we have every right to defend the intrinsic importance of our office, but we should not try to do it by artificial demands based on mere titles. Rather must it arise from credible evidence of our own faithfulness as we *labor* in word and in doctrine.

So I am finally driven to the conclusion that the three-office view is really what the Scriptures teach. But I also see that recognition of this in no way implies—in the slightest degree—any hierarchical status for ministers. As John Murray points out in his Commentary on the Book of Romans, Paul “*considered himself 'less than the least of all saints' (Eph. 3:8) but he did not allow this estimate of himself to keep him from asserting his high prerogatives as an apostle and minister of Christ. Among believers he is the noblest example of what he here (Rom. 12:10,11) commends and of the sobriety of judgment to be exercised 'according as God hath dealt to each a measure of faith.'*” (p. 130).

Blessed indeed is the minister of the Word who can keep these two things in proper order *and* balance.



REFLECTIONS ON A LONG-TERM PASTORATE

by

William Shishko

In February, 2003, DV, I will complete 22 years of ministry in one pastorate, situated on Long Island, and just in the shadow of the five boroughs of New York City. During that time I have been privileged to see the church oversee the formation and particularization of two mission churches, complete with the purchase and full payment of buildings. Currently the church is composed of about 100 family units. The congregation members live in busy suburban or metropolitan areas. We are a veritable mission field in this melting pot of nationalities and socioeconomic groups, and the church somewhat represents that cultural mix of our area.

Over these years of ministry we have “cleaned up the rolls” (a painstaking process that took us several years), developed and implemented a more systematic method of preparing people for communicant church membership in the OPC, trained many new officers, and added staff elders who have been able to assist the other session members and me in the administration and pastoral oversight of the flock. I have had the freedom to develop my own pulpit ministry, and especially to grow in the disciplines necessary for an expository preaching ministry.

Our challenges (I refuse to use the word “problems”!) abound. Many of the congregation members (most of whom are first generation Christians) have a long way to go in their apprecia-

tion for and use of the corporate means of grace. We grapple with how to implement legitimate and useful church “activities” in a culture that is already far too busy. We have a long way to go in effective outreach to the community in which the church is located. And how I wish (after the addition of a piano, and the renovation of the auditorium to improve the sound) that our singing better befit the glorious Lord whom we worship week by week! Nevertheless, I was called to serve as the pastor of this flock, and I hope to remain here unless the Lord clearly calls me elsewhere through the Church, His return, or my death. In my low times (which are relatively few), I feel like Jonah wanting to flee from a call to serve a modern Nineveh. In my best times (which, thankfully, are far more common), I remain passionately committed to spend the remainder of my years (now, I am at age 50) ministering to a flock that has become as dear to my heart as my own family.

The editor of *Ordained Servant* asked me to write some reflections on a long-term pastorate. In considering the best way to make this useful to the readers of this publication, I thought it best to present these reflections in three parts: challenges, benefits, and practical advice. I hope this will spur pastors and aspiring pastors who read the article to give serious consideration to the unique joys of shepherding a flock in one location for more than the common American pattern of only 3 – 5 years.

CHALLENGES

1. Complacency. The apostle Paul told minister Timothy to let his progress be evident to all (I Timothy 4:15). While this bustling area and the challenges of a diverse congregation in the midst of this area keep me from boredom, it is easy to slip into a kind of ministerial automatic pilot when a man has been in one pastorate for more than a decade. Frequently I have prayed, “Lord, deliver me from carnal complacency.” Usually the Lord answers by giving us a flurry of cases of church discipline! You must be constantly growing, keeping yourself fresh, and challenging yourself and the congregation, or you will soon become a stalled pastor in a stalled church. Unfortunately, that has given long-term pastorate a bad image. “Don’t you think it’s time you moved on?” usually really means “You’re in a rut, and the congregation is, too.” Beware of complacency!

2. Too Much Dependence on One Man. As anyone in this congregation will tell you, I abominate the phrase “my church.” My usual retort when people ask about “my church” is to say that “It is Christ’s church, and I am only one of its pastors.” As persnickety as that sounds, I regard it as a fearful thing if people identify any expression of Christ’s body, the Church, with one man. “We do it that way because of Pastor Shishko” is another no-no. You must constantly

develop and use the gifts of others, cultivate your elders and deacons to serve as fully as they are able, and let yourself decrease while the gifts and graces of Christ increase in the flock. Otherwise you will become a little pastoral idol. And God dashes idols.

3. Blind Spots. Even as a body becomes nutritionally imbalanced and weakened because of the ingestion of only one thing, so a church can become stilted under the long-term pastorate of one man. It is a sobering thing to realize that the individual weaknesses of a pastor can all too easily become the corporate weaknesses of a congregation. (Perhaps this is one reason why so many churches under studious but isolated pastors become small groups of Bible students rather than living, functioning communities of evangelizing disciples). Thankfully, because of our area and the proximity to airports, we have been blessed to have many guest speakers who challenge us (including me) and help us see our blind spots. The session and the congregation have been generous in allowing me time away to learn from others and to be challenged even as I minister to others. Nevertheless, blind spots regarding our church weaknesses are a real problem when the pastor becomes a cataract rather than a clear lens for the congregation he serves.

BENEFITS

1. The Opportunity to Build on the Victories of Early Battles. Every pastor coming to an established church will soon work on elements of biblical reformation that he believes are necessary for the church's growth in maturity and service. A new broom does sweep clean, but usually there is

much dust in the process! One of the reasons I have no interest in moving to another established congregation is because I would rather fight our current battles than the ones that marked my first few years in ministry here (Not a few of which were because of my own immaturity as a young pastor). Our move to permanent eldership (in which the congregation sees each of its elders as a pastor, cf. Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2), the equipping of all officers so that elders really "eld" and deacons really "deac", by-laws revision to make the church more presbyterian than congregational, and the implementation of disciplinary practices that truly carry the conscience of the congregation, were among the elements of biblical change that we wrestled through in the 1980's. Having labored for that reformation, it is a joy to begin to see the fruits of God's blessing on those labors, and to build even further on what was begun so painstakingly.

2. People of the Community SEE a Long-term Ministry. The picture of ministers coming and going gives those in the community who look on (and make no mistake about it, they do look on!) an image of a church's ministry even if they have never stepped into the church, e.g. "That church can't even keep a pastor. They get a new one every 2 or 3 years." Similarly, ministers who fall and are dismissed give another image to those in the community, e.g. "The pastor of that church was no different than anybody else." Conversely, a godly pastor who has been a fixture in a community for many years commands a respect even from those who have not personally benefited from his ministry. Opportunities to counsel, advise, assist, and minister on occasions

of joy or sorrow abound for a man who has given himself to one congregation in one area for a lengthy period of time. In a time of unparalleled transience in many communities, the long-term pastor becomes a metaphor of stability and faithfulness.

3. The Ability to Deal More Freely and Intimately With a Congregation. The apostle Paul described his ministry to the Thessalonians as "affectionately longing for you, (so that) we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." (1 Thess. 2:8). Paul was able to cultivate this depth of love in a relatively brief period of time. For most of us such pastoral affection takes much longer. It does not come with a call to serve a congregation, nor does it come after one visit by a pastor. A long-term pastor who has truly given himself to the congregation he has been called to serve does become a spiritual father to his parishioners, cf. 1 Cor. 4:15. He has a hold on their hearts that has been earned by his labors of love over a long period of time and by faithful ministry in many circumstances. Unlike the feigned emotion of a stage actor, his pleas, entreaties, and expressions of love and concern are the genuine article. What power that gives to a man's ministry! How refreshing such a ministry is in a day of ephemeral relationships and ties that often mean little more than business contacts.

4. The Joy of Seeing Covenant Blessings. Related to the above is the benefit of seeing the promises of God realized in the upcoming generation. I can think of fewer pastoral joys greater than that of baptizing a child, watching his or her growth under careful

covenant nurture, building a tie with the child through time at church, pastoral visits, and catechism classes, dealing with the maturing child concerning his or her faithfully following Christ, witnessing his or her profession of faith, later doing pre-marital counseling as the person prepares to marry “in the Lord”, then baptizing that couple’s children in the years ahead, thus beginning the cycle again. Of course, not all such dealings with covenant children bring such gratification, but many do, and the delight is incomparable. A long-term pastor sees beautiful examples of God’s faithfulness over time to believers and their children!

5. A Superb Climate for Working with Church Officers. Close to the joy of the previous benefit is the privilege of training church officers and then working with them as they are called out by the congregation. What a delight to work as a team with men who really know what makes you tick, and whom you know as special brothers and fellow laborers! I train our officers so that they will not be “yes men”, but also so that they will work helpfully with the ministry God has put before us. I also train them with a view toward their serving faithfully and effectively should the Lord take my life suddenly. They know that their pastor has a long-term outlook on his work, and they have the same.

6. A Long-term Pastorate is the Best for My Holiness. After 22 years, the congregation in Franklin Square knows me almost as well as my family does! They know my faults (and they still want me to be their pastor!), my needs, my strengths, and my weaknesses. That helps me to serve them more honestly. It also

enables me to function with the kind of transparency that I also must have before the God whom I serve. I want to grow for their sake as well as for my own sake, and I must grow or my ministry will stagnate. Also, I do not want to let them down. I want the congregation I serve to see, by the grace of God, a model of perseverance in faithful life and service. A long-term pastorate, when it is not taken for granted, becomes an incomparable stimulus to “let your progress be evident to all.” (1 Tim. 4:15)

7. The Love of the Congregation. The congregation in Franklin Square has quite literally become second family to me and to my entire biological family as well. I have seen the wonderful fruits of this genuine Christian love over an extended period in my own children’s lives. They have witnessed elders who truly love them. (I account the yearly elder visits to our family as contributing in no small measure to our children’s seriousness about the Christian life and the importance of the Church). We have learned something of the privilege of the benefits of “houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children”, cf. Mark 10:30, which are promised to those who serve Christ. Such reciprocal love is developed only with time and effort. It is easier to fill a slot as a pastor. It is far more rewarding to develop an extended family as the fruit of pastoral labor over an extended period of time.

8. The Benefit of Expanded Spheres of Service. As the church, my family, and I have developed over more than two decades, our opportunities for service have expanded as well. Interns have become a part of the church family and ministry here, and the subse-

quent ministries of the interns have a special place in the corporate heart of this church. Having worked through issues under a continuity of leadership over many years we have learned invaluable lessons which have been incorporated in our local way of doing things. This has become a help to many others who are looking for models of church ministry which have been forged by long-term practice rather than by fits and starts. And simply because, by God’s grace, I have been in one place for so long and have been privileged to see the blessing of God on the work here, others have asked for counsel as they long for similar blessings in their own local spheres of service. I have no secrets to share, but it is a joy to draw from twenty plus years of experience in one place rather than five years of experience multiplied by four places as I work to help others labor for the long haul in the places where Christ has put them.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

I readily admit that a long-term pastorate in one place is not for everyone. The Lord of the Church uses some men to plant a church and then move to another area to do the same. He uses others to do the work of biblical reformation necessary in a local charge, then to do the same elsewhere. In other cases, because “synods and councils may err... and many have erred” (WCF 31:4), a man may be called to a place that, humanly speaking, is not right for either him or the congregation. No doubt there are many other reasons why some ministers have a succession of shorter pastorates rather than one longer one. Nevertheless, I am convinced from both church history and practical experience that

long-term pastorates under conscientious laborers bring distinct advantages to pastor and congregation alike.

Increasingly younger men have asked for some “practical pointers” for effective long-term pastorates. Keeping in mind that I have enjoyed a combination of factors that have made it “easy” for me to remain and labor here effectively, I offer the following as the most basic elements necessary for such a ministry:

1. Take Your Call with the Same Seriousness That You Give to Your Marriage Vows. Another local, regional, or denominational expression of Christ’s Church may, at some point, call you to service, and you may be given the freedom to accept such a call, but, otherwise, stick things out through thick and thin, just as you do in your marriage! At this point, for me to take a call elsewhere without being freed to do that by my fellow elders and the congregation would, for me, be the equivalent of going after another spouse! I believe that you must take your call that seriously if you are to have an effective long-term pastorate.

2. Love The Congregation Christ Has Given You. I cannot

overstate this! Love is giving yourself for the good of another, cf. Jn. 3:16. If you would build an effective long-term pastorate you must not see your work as a career, but as a commitment of love to a growing, ever changing body of people in a particular field of service. This will cement your tie to your congregation and make even the thought of something other than long-term ministry with them unimaginable. This will also put a check on the temptation to abuse the privileges you have earned over years of service. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.” (1 Cor. 13:7) Without such love no man can have a long-term pastorate (or any pastorate!) that truly reflects the persevering love of Christ.

3. Work Hard! The ministry is no place for lazy men! How frequently does the Apostle Paul use the terms for working hard, e.g. 1 Cor. 4:12, 15:58, Col. 1:29, etc. and output of work, e.g. 2 Tim 2:21, 3:17, etc to describe the life of the minister and the work of the ministry. This is especially true for an effective long-term pastorate. Without such labor, you will get complacent and both you and the church you “serve” will get in a rut. Any reasonably sensitive congregation sees the

work that a conscientious minister does. The respect for that grows over time, especially as the congregation sees a minister being such a dedicated laborer year in and year out. You must work to let your progress be evident to all (1 Tim 4:15) regardless of where you serve, but there is a special challenge in showing that progress in a situation in which such ministerial improvement becomes evident over a long period of time.

Ministers need to do all three of these things wherever they are called to serve, but I would much rather do them in one long run in a congregation in one place rather than in several short runs in many places. There is a need of sprinters in the ministry, but we are also in need of some marathon runners!

For a pastor, there are few things more satisfying than to look out over a congregation he has served for many years, recollecting the highs and the lows of his ministry to them, and concluding his reverie by saying from the heart, “For what *is* (my) hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy!” (1Thess. 2:19ff.).

There is no position in this world that is without its disadvantages. We may be perpetually on the move to our continual disquiet, and each move may bring us under the same, or even greater, disadvantages. We remember a Scotch story of an unlucky family who attributed all their misfortunes to their house being haunted by mischievous spirits, known to our northern countrymen as ‘brownies’. These superstitious individuals became at length desperate; nothing prospered in house or field, they would therefore pack up all and be gone from a spot so mysteriously infested. All the household goods were loaded up, and the husband and the ‘gude wife’ and the bairns were all flitting, when one of them cried out, ‘Brownie is in the churn. Brownie is flitting, too.’ Just so, the matters which hinder a man’s success are generally in himself; and will move with him; and wherein it is not so, he may yet be sure that if by change of place he avoids one set of brownies, he will find another awaiting him. There is bran in all meal, and there are dregs in all wine. All roads must at times be rough, and all seas must be tossed with tempest To fly from trouble will need long wings, and to escape discomfort will require more than a magician’s skill.

– Charles H. Spurgeon

Ministry of the Word

According to the Westminster Standards

by
Larry Wilson

Synopsis:

- (I) The exalted King Jesus applies himself and his benefits to the elect through his Spirit working by and with his Word
- (II) King Jesus ordinarily does so *by means of* the ministry (the administration) of the Word and sacraments (this is so under both the Old and New Testaments)
- (III) Therefore, the ministry of the word and sacraments is a distinct, necessary, and important calling, one that no one should take upon himself. Only those who are lawfully called and ordained to such should take up this yoke.
- (IV) Therefore, in order to be consistent, those who avow allegiance to the Westminster Standards must affirm either that all ruling elders are ministers of the Word or that no ruling elders are ministers of the Word.

(I) The exalted King Jesus applies himself and his benefits to the elect by his Spirit working through and with his Word.

WCF I:5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from **the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word** in our hearts.

WCF I:6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things neces-

sary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge **the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word:** and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

WCF VIII:8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, **in**

and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts **by his Word and Spirit;** overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

WCF X:1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, **by his Word and Spirit,** out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

WCF XIII:1. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, **by his Word and Spirit** dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

LC. Q. 2. How doth it appear that there is a God? A. The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; but **his Word and Spirit** only do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.

LC. Q. 67. What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, **by his Word and Spirit**; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

LC. Q. 72. What is justifying faith? A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner **by the Spirit and Word of God**, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth

to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

LC. Q. 76. What is repentance unto life? 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.

SC. Q. 24. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet? A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, **by his Word and Spirit**, the will of God for our salvation.

(II) King Jesus ordinarily does so by means of the ministry (the administration) of the Word and Sacraments (this is so under both the Old and New Testaments)

LC. Q. 154. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?

A. **The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer**; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

WCF VII:5-6. This covenant was differently **administered** in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was

administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and **administered** with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

WCF X:3. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by **the ministry of the Word**.

WCF X:4. Others, not elected, although they may be called by **the ministry of the Word**, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives

according to the light of nature, and the laws of that religion they do profess. And, to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested.

WCF XIV:1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by **the ministry of the Word**, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

WCF XV:1. Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every **minister of the gospel**, as well as that of faith in Christ.

WCF XXV:3. Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given **the ministry**, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

WCF XXV:4. This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, **ordinances administered**, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

WCF XXVII:3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth

the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth **administer** it: but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

WCF XXVII:4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by **a minister of the Word lawfully ordained**.

WCF XXVIII:2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by **a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto**.

WCF XXVIII:3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly **administered** by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.

WCF XXVIII:6. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is **administered**; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

WCF XXVIII:7. The sacrament of baptism is but once to be **administered** unto any person.

WCF XXIX:3. The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed **his ministers** to declare his word of institution to the people; to

pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but to none who are not then present in the congregation.

WCF XX:2. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by **the ministry of the gospel**; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

LC. Q. 33. Was the covenant of grace always administered after one and the same manner? A. The covenant of grace was not always **administered** after the same manner, but the **administrations** of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.

LC. Q. 34. How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament? A. The covenant of grace was **administered** under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.

LC. Q. 35. How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament? A. Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is

to be **administered** in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.

LC. Q. 54. How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God?

A. Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and doth gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his **ministers** and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them.

LC. Q. 63. What are the special privileges of the visible church?

A. The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government; of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies; and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in **the ministry of the gospel**, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

LC. Q. 68. Are the elect only effectually called? A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by **the ministry of the word**, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

LC. Q. 108. What are the duties required in the second command-

ment? A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, **all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him:** as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

LC. Q. 112. What is required in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment requires, that the name of God, his titles, attributes, **ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer**, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.

LC. Q. 154. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

LC. Q. 159. How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

A. They that are called to labor in **the ministry of the word**, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and

out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

LC. Q. 161. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are **administered**, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.

LC. Q. 166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be **administered** to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

LC. Q. 169. How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

A. Christ hath appointed **the ministers of his word**, in the **administration** of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the

bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them.

LC. Q. 176. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper agree? A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper agree, in that the author of both is God; the spiritual part of both is Christ and his benefits; both are seals of the same covenant, are to be dispensed by **ministers of the gospel**, and by none other; and to be continued in the church of Christ until his second coming.

LC. Q. 177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ? A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be **administered** but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's Supper is to be **administered** often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.

LC. Q. 183. For whom are we to pray? A. We are to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth; for magistrates, and **ministers**; for ourselves, our brethren, yea, our enemies; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.

SC. Q. 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that

doth **administer** them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

SC. Q. 95. To whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be **administered** to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.

(III) Therefore, the ministry of the word and sacraments is a distinct, necessary, and important calling, one that no one should take upon himself. Only those who are lawfully called and ordained to such should take up this yoke.

LC. Q. 155. How is the Word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but **especially the preaching of the Word**, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; or building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

LC. Q. 156. Is the Word of God to be read by all? A. Although **all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation**, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy Scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages.

LC. Q. 158. By whom is the Word of God to be preached? A. **The word of God is to be preached**

only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.

LC. Q. 159. How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto? A. **They that are called to labor in the ministry of the Word**, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

LC. Q. 161. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of **him by whom they are administered**, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.

LC. Q. 166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered? A. Baptism is not to be **administered** to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

LC. Q. 169. How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? A. **Christ hath appointed the ministers of his**

Word, in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the Word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them.

LC. Q. 176. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper agree? A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper agree, in that the author of both is God; the spiritual part of both is Christ and his benefits; both are seals of the same covenant, **are to be dispensed by ministers of the gospel, and by none other;** and to be continued in the church of Christ until his second coming.

(IV) Those who avow allegiance to the secondary standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, then, must—to be consistent—affirm either that all ruling elders are ministers of the Word and sacraments or that no ruling elders are ministers of the Word and sacraments. If they affirm that every ruling elder *is* a minister of

the Word and sacraments, then in order to be consistent they must require the same training, testing, ordination, and obligations for everyone who enters this office. They must permit none to hold the office who cannot meet the requirements or undertake the duties of the office. Moreover, they must require those godly, mature, wise, faithful men who presently serve very effectively as ruling elders—if they cannot acquire the requisite training, testing, and ordination for the office of ministry of the Word, and if they are unable to assume the obligations of the office—to demit the office of ruling elder, for only in this way can they be consistent with their affirmation that every ruling elder is a minister of the Word and sacraments.

But if they do become consistent, then they will create one of two deleterious effects. Either they will undermine the ministry of the Word and sacraments, the ordinances by which King Jesus especially applies himself and his benefits to the elect, and thus eclipse the means of grace to the great hurt of the church. Or they will undermine the office of ruling elder, taking away that multitude of counselors who Christ has gifted and called to come alongside the ministers in order to help

them in their work for the good of the people of God. Either way they will do great harm to the church and either way they will run very counter to the Westminster Standards, to which they have avowed allegiance.

If, on the other hand, they affirm that not every ruling elder is a minister of the Word and sacrament, then they must answer the further question as to whether the Lord calls *any* ruling elder to minister the Word and sacraments. If they deny that the Lord calls *any* to preach the Word and administer the sacraments, then they greatly obscure the ordinances by which King Jesus especially applies himself and his benefits to the elect. They thus eclipse the means of grace to the great harm of the church.

If, however, they affirm both that the Lord does not call and authorize every ruling elder to minister the Word and sacraments and that the Lord does call and authorize some men to minister the Word and sacraments, then they *do* in fact agree with the Standards of the Church. If they do agree with the standards of the Church, then they should speak and act in a manner that is consistent with the Standards of the Church.

"...let the ministers of the Church be called and chosen by a lawful and ecclesiastical election and vocation...such men as are fit and have sufficient learning—especially in the Scriptures— and godly eloquence, and wise simplicity...such men as are of good report for modesty and honesty of life, according to that Apostolic rule which St. Paul gives in the 1st Epistle to Timothy 3:2-7, and to Titus 1:7-9. And those that are chosen let them be ordained by the elders with public prayer, and laying on of hands. We do here, therefore, condemn all those who run of their own accord, being neither chosen, sent, nor ordained. We do also utterly disallow unfit ministers, and such as are not furnished with gifts requisite for a pastor."



A Scandal to the Church?

The Question of Titus 1:6 and the Children of Elders

by

Stephen D. Doe

Introduction

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church seeks to be a biblically faithful denomination. All that is done should subject to the teachings of the Bible. Recently questions have arisen, however, about whether individual congregations and the denomination in general deal with ordained officers whose children are either delinquent or unbelieving in a biblically faithful way.

There are few issues so difficult to discuss openly and clearly as the question of unbelieving or disobedient children of officers, and especially, the prodigal children of pastors. Jokes are made about the behavior of 'the preacher's kids', stories are whispered, heads are shaken, and tears are shed. Pastors, ruling elders, and deacons feel privately ashamed, and perhaps publicly defensive. Men may believe secretly that they are failures in their calling because one or more of their children are prodigals and may struggle with whether they should resign from office. If a man is not an example to the flock in the area of parenting (1 Peter 5:3, cf. James 3:1), should he remain in office? If the session or presbytery does nothing is it a sign of an 'old boys network' where men ignore the failures of others because they don't want their own failures examined?

To be sure allowance may be made for the special pressures on leadership families. They are on public display. Often there are high levels of stress. But these explanations have the feel of excuse-making, and many men are uncomfortable with even talking about their private struggles. There is both envy and shame when the families of other officers seem to do so well with few or

minor problems arising with the children. A general weakness in ministry may be laid at the feet of the man who has 'failed' with his children because they are not Christians or are disobedient. There is often much emotion, but very little light thrown on this topic. It is difficult to discuss this without sounding either judgmental or self-serving, depending on the position taken. This topic demands biblical treatment.

Just as important as personal struggles are, equally important is the question of a disjunction between belief and practice. As we will see, most translations render Titus 1:6 this way: "**An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.**" (NIV) The vast majority of commentators leave no doubt that Paul means an elder's children are to be Christians. Yet, in effect, that understanding does not function as a norm in actual practice. Ordained men with prodigal children are rarely approached, admonished, or encouraged. Does this mean that the church is failing to obey the clear teaching of Scripture? If there are officers whose children are living in disobedience to the gospel, why is not more being done? Can we claim

to be those who live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord if we selectively obey God's commands because we do not want to seem heartless?

There is another possibility. Perhaps we have failed to understand Paul's words in Titus 1:6, clear though we believe them to be, in light of the fuller teaching of Scripture about the church and about the covenant. This is what we will set out to discover.

The Standard OPC Position?

Many in the OPC would say that they agree with the position taken by veteran OP pastor, Lawrence Eyres on the Timothy and Titus passages: "It is sadly true that the children of some very godly men grow to an adulthood of unbelief and rebellion against God. Is a man to be disqualified because his children have not been born again? I think not. . . . All that Paul requires is that these children, while in the home, are to be in submission to their father, and that they do not behave in the community so as to be a scandal against the name of Christ."¹

¹Eyres, Lawrence R. *The Elders of the Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975, pp.35-36.

This understanding is being challenged by teaching circulating on the Internet and in print. And the truth is that once a man has completed his trials for licensure or for ordination, presbyteries—or in the case of ruling elders and deacons, sessions—rarely continue to exercise concern for the families of officers. Anecdotal evidence is arrayed about such and such a man whose impeccable character is marred by disobedient children, or of a prodigal child finally returned to the church thus vindicating the church's reluctance to act against the perceived failure, but increasingly voices are raised that are the plain meaning of Titus 1:6 is being ignored.

In the context of Reformed theology there are standard responses. 'The salvation of anyone is a work of the Spirit of God.' 'There were apparently non-elect children born into covenant families in the Bible, like Ishmael, Esau, and Absalom. It is a matter of sovereign election.' This retreat into the doctrine of election is unsatisfying to many, and once appeal is made to Titus 1:6, arguments that make room for prodigal children sound like special pleading. No one can be completely objective when there are real-life situations of bewildered and sorrowing mothers and fathers, be the father an officer or not. Let us try, however, to see this problem in light of our theology of the covenant and of baptism and apply it to the dilemmas that confront both churches and individuals when the children of officers fail to believe in Christ.

Looking at Titus 1:6

The underlying goal of Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy has to do with the question of establishing and maintaining order in

the church (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul warns many times about *false* teachers but he also gives instruction about selecting *true* teachers and leaders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. When we look at the context we should notice that Paul is giving 'front-end' instruction, that is, what should happen as men are being *considered* for the offices in the church (1 Timothy 3:1, cf. Titus 1:5). What *should* the church look at when it examines men for the ordained offices? We need to remember this when these verses are applied to questions of men *after* they are in office when problems with children appear.

First Timothy 3:4-5, 12 and Titus 1:6 all mention the family. When a man is being considered for the office in the church, the home is a natural point of reference. Notice the *measurable* quality of many of the things Paul discusses.² We are not left guessing because there are observable things upon which judgments can be based. The question of a man's home life is one of these measurable, observable criteria. It is not the only one, but it is an important one. The home is a testing ground because the church will be able to see in how he is handling his family, how he will manage the church. A man manages his house by leading his family and assuming responsibility for what goes on there. If he doesn't show care and concern for his family, how will he ever show concern and leadership for the flock of God? If a man is careless when it comes to the needs of his children and wife or if his home is chaotic,

the church will not fare any better. Paul thus argues from the lesser (the home) to the greater (the church).

A man's potential leadership of the church will be seen in how he is leading his children. These are children under his authority. He is 'having them in subjection' (1 Timothy 3:4, Titus 1:6). This idea of submission indicates that Paul is thinking of children who are still in the home and subject to the father's rule, not those who are grown and living apart. When considering a man for office if his home is chaotic, he would fail to qualify for ordained office. A man must rather rule over his children with dignity or seriousness. He takes his responsibilities as father seriously and carries them out in a manner in keeping with respectability. The father's behavior with his children will be visible to all.

The response of the children is not described in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 except by way of inference, that is, that they are in subjection to their father. In Titus 1:6, however, Paul does elaborate on the response of the children. There is a negative component, the children who are under the father's charge are not to be riotous in their behavior (*asotias*, cf. Ephesians 5:18, 1 Peter 4:4ff³). This is extreme wastefulness and profligacy, something very visible and very reproachable. Paul uses a second strong word, 'unruliness' (*anupotakta*, cf. 1 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:10, Hebrews 2:8ff) which means wild and untamed, like an unbroken horse. This also is very observable. The question of whether a man is managing his

²We should remember that this is a representative, not exhaustive list of qualities. All of the qualities are to be seen in terms of the patterns of a man's life and avoid the tendency to elevate one characteristic above others.

³Associated with *asotos*, cf. Luke 15:13ff; both words carry with them the sense of 'incapable of being saved coming from *sozo*.

house, then, is seen in negative terms by the behavior of his children which is dishonoring to Christ and to their father.

There is, however, a positive command in Titus 1:6 regarding the matter of ‘believing’ or ‘faithful’ (*pista*). Here questions arise. The King James and New King James both opt for the translation “having faithful children”. This translation is virtually unique among the standard English versions of the New Testament. The New American Standard’s “having children who believe” and the New International’s “whose children believe” are joined in similar language by a number of other modern versions. Simply on the basis of the preference of translators since the beginning of the twentieth century, the phrase ‘having children who believe’ dominates the field.

A similar situation obtains when commentaries are consulted.⁴ Among standard Reformed commentators some take *pistos* in the sense of ‘faithful’ like Matthew Henry and George Knight, that is, children who live, while in the home, in ways that do not dishonor their father. This is what Dr. Knight notes: “Should *pista* in this clause be understood as ‘faithful’ or as ‘believing’? The range of usage shows that either meaning is a possibility...If that [the contextual argument] is so, then *pista* here means ‘faithful’ in the sense of ‘submissive’ or ‘obedient’...”⁵

⁴Commentators do not address the question of what is to be done after a man is already in office and his children prove to be unbelieving.

⁵George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, pp.289-290. Knight has a much fuller exegetical argument. Gordon Fee in *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*

Many other commentators, like John Calvin and William Hendriksen, however, take *pista* in the sense of ‘believing’, that is, that an elder must have children who are themselves Christians. As Hendriksen puts it, “A man whose children are still pagans or behave as pagans must not be appointed elder.”⁶ It is to be noted, of course, that both Calvin and Hendriksen are addressing the ‘front-end’ criteria, but that is little comfort to those struggling with this issue. If men shouldn’t be *considered* for the office of elder if their children are not believers, should men *remain* in office if their children are not believers?

If sheer numbers determine the matter, than ‘having children who are also Christians’ holds the majority position. Again we ask, why hasn’t the church adhered to that position by removing men from office when their children appear to be prodigals? Further lexical study of *pistos* shows that it is an adjective with a broad range of meaning in the New Testament. The rules of context must be observed to accurately understand the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6. If we say that Paul uses it in the sense of ‘trustworthy’ or ‘obedient or submissive’, then the phrase “are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient”, explicates that characteristic. Thus Paul would mean that the children of the elder are viewed in terms of their outward behavior rather than their inward heart condition. Let us look at more than the single word ‘faithful’ or ‘believing’ applying our under-

(GNC). San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984, p.127, wavers back and forth between the two interpretations.

⁶William Hendriksen, *I-II Timothy, Titus* (NTC). Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1957, p.347.

standing of the covenant to the question.

Practical, Covenantal Questions

Some men either being considered for office or already in office will not be married, or not have children, or have children who are too young to express any faith. In some cases, such as having no children, the ‘test’ of Titus 1:6 would not apply. But to hope that you wouldn’t have children because of the ‘danger’ of the Titus 1:6 ‘test’ flies in the face of the biblical view that children are a blessing and gift from God (Psalm 127:3) and the Reformed view of the covenant and its promises. If we view children as a potential impediment to serving in ordained office or as a cause from removal from office, we are not thinking covenantally.

God does not call upon us to engage in supposition about what might happen in the future. The covenant is meant to lead to the anticipation of God’s blessing, not of something negative happening. God makes great promises to parents which are to be believed. To approach the office of in the church with fear of what the future will bring with children approach the covenant in a negative way.

Inherent in Paul’s words in Titus 1:6, is the double-sided character of the covenant. 1 Corinthians 7:14 speaks of the child of a believer being set apart in the covenant (and by baptism). The Bible makes very clear that some covenant children may not continue in covenant faithfulness but instead may be seen to be rebels, dissolute, untamed, covenant breakers. Their breaking of the covenant does not exempt them from the sign of the covenant,

however. That covenant breaking is a potential outcome in covenant homes is seen by the many passages in Proverbs which warn of a rejection of parental discipline.⁷ There are children who are baptized members of the congregation yet reject the claims of the covenant. The OPC acknowledges the reality of sin in the life of the child in its baptismal service.⁸ Having a child baptized into a covenant family does not automatically mean that that child, whether he is the child of an officer or of a member, will lay hold of the promise and live in faith. The new life of the covenant is not acquired by the will of man but by the supernatural act of God (John 1:13). People who are baptized may move away from the promise as well as toward it. Some may fail to embrace the promise set before them. God alone grants citizenship in His kingdom (John 3:3-8), a citizenship to which the covenant sign of baptism calls us. He is the One who gives faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The thrust of Romans 9 is that God is the administrator of covenant grace, giving to one what He withholds from another.⁹ Parents are commanded to bring their children to receive the sign of inclusion into the covenant because this is God's appointed means for fulfilling His covenant promises to be God to us and to our descendants after us. He establishes the covenant so that our faith and hope may be in Him alone, not in our performance as parents. Parents bring their children to God in faith that

God will fulfill His promise in the covenant. He, in His character of faithfulness, is the ground of our hope. We seek to diligently fulfill our duties in the covenant, yet we trust not in our performance, but in his promise.

God works out his covenant, not only through the nurture of the home, but also through the discipline of the church. All members, baptized and professing alike, are subject to the church's discipline for the covenant promise—or covenant curse—is worked out temporally in the lives of the church's members. Every session realizes, in receiving a member by profession of faith, that it is not predicting what might be the working out of the covenant promise in that individual's life. The elders, in fulfilling their function of binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19), are making a judgment that a profession of faith is credible within the limits of their knowledge.

Church discipline, in service to the covenant, is part of the promise parents receive when their children are baptized. They are not alone in desiring to see the covenant promise of life fulfilled in their children's lives. For the man whose children presently are not faithful (in either sense of *pistos*), the church's discipline is a comfort. God may grant the fruit of repentance as discipline is applied. If he is a man looking to church office, the discipline of the church may open the door for ordination if the Lord blesses his labors and that of the elders. On the other hand a man with young children need not fear. He is not automatically excluded from office because the congregation does not yet know whether his children will prove to be believing. The discipline of the church is at work

along with his labors as a father.

Apply this to a man who is already ordained and installed as an officer. His children are growing and some may prove to be covenant-breakers. We should not read back into his ordination a mistake on his part or the part of the ordaining body. Here we are challenged to ask, 'Should he then be removed from office?' 'Was the church wrong to ordain him in the first place?' 'Where was the mistake made?' 'Has God's providence shown that he should step down from office?' Some of those questions require a power of prediction which God has not given to the church or a reading of God's providence which is unbiblical. Rather, we must look to covenant discipline in the present. A rebellious son or daughter is a covenant member of the church and should receive the benefit of the discipline of the church. God may be pleased to grant them repentance and faith. The father is likewise subject to the discipline of the church. Here there is a tendency to focus upon the parenting choices made by the parents. Everything from having a television in the home to not home-schooling the children is seen as evidence of a man's lack of wisdom, godliness, or control in his home. This may lead to elevating personal preferences to the level of biblical principles. Should a man serve as an elder if he does *not* home-school his children and that is thought to have led to their rebellion? If he permitted his children to listen to secular music and that is thought to have led to their rejecting the faith, is he subject to discipline? If we are not careful we begin to set extra-biblical criteria for office which Scripture does not establish.

To avoid the subjectivity and

⁷10:1, 13:1, 15:5,20, 17:25, etc.

⁸*The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for Worship, IV:B.1,2.

⁹As one person puts it 'Romans 9 answers the question of why don't all members of the covenant believe?'

personal preference that abound in churches when the matter of parenting is considered, it is better to ask: Was he faithful to the vows he made when his child was baptized?¹⁰ If he neglected bringing his children to worship, praying with them, or privately instructing them, is not the case more clearly seen? Then discipline can have a salutary effect on the church, the child, and the man. He may, indeed, be removed from office voluntarily or involuntarily, or take a leave of absence to pay increased attention to questions at home, or the church may rejoice to see a covenant child live in obedience to the gospel. Such an approach leads us to focus on questions of patterns in fulfilling publicly-made vows, rather than leaving the matter to many different judgments that might be made about parenting styles or preferences. No one is completely consistent, but is the pattern of the elder's life that he tries to be faithful to his baptismal vows? The ordaining body in this way has a clear direction for action.

This approach is consistent with the approach of God himself to the covenant. God fulfills his covenant responsibilities of instructing (Psalm 32:8-9) and disciplining (Hebrews 12:5-10) his children, applying his covenantal Word for that purpose (2 Timothy 3:15-17). God is not chargeable with failing to keep his covenantal promise though some of those within the covenant reject the call to covenant faith. In a similar way the parenting of an officer of the church (or any believing parent) must be seen in terms of faithfulness to the vows

made when their child was baptized, not in terms of the response of the child, which response rests finally upon the electing grace of God.

Conclusion

The biblical material regarding children is complex. Godly parents see ungodly children arise in their homes (cf. Ezekiel 18:1-20). The Lord Himself raises sons who revolt against Him (Isaiah 1:2), but He is faithful to His promise. The covenant and its promises to parents stand. Because God is the sovereign administrator of the covenant, time is not of the essence in the administration of the covenant. A prodigal may return home in repentance while another prodigal may continue to live in the house and receive the father's call to repentance coldly (Luke 15:11ff). We are not privy to God's plan for the outworking of His covenant promises, but we act in faith upon His word that He will bring blessing within the covenant.

We live in a day when there is a subtle idolatry of the family which tends to see parents and children as abstracted from the larger covenant community. We love our children and certainly want them to love Christ that they might have life. We must, however, trust in and worship God alone, not in our parenting techniques, our home-schooling, or how we plan to 'make them believe'. "Proper child rearing" does not guarantee salvation. To believe that it does is to have a view of grace which approaches the *ex opere operato* view of the Roman church. It loses the biblical focus on grace and allows works to enter in. Covenant grace is not automatic, it is living and dynamic, because it comes from

the *living* God who is fulfilling His word in time and in the lives of those He has called. Our expectations for our children, even if they are godly expectations, can be idolatrous seeking the outcome we desire rather than God Himself. The covenant is not about us getting what we want or desire but about the Lord fulfilling His word for His glory.

Let us summarize several points:

- The church must apply the guidelines of 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6 *prior* to a man being considered for office.
- The church must treat the prodigal or rebellious child of an officer as it would any other baptized member of the congregation, as the beneficiary of ecclesiastical discipline. He or she must be called to repentance and faith in the Savior of sinners and be removed from the congregation if he or she continues stubbornly in disobedience, all the while earnestly praying for restoration.
- The session must focus on the officer's fulfillment of his baptismal vows, prayerfully bearing with him his sorrowful burden (Galatians 6:2). Asking, without a judgmental attitude, how he is doing, is gracious and encouraging. We ask if he has rebuked his child or sought the intervention of the elders. If there is a pattern of neglect or failure in fulfilling his vows then he is called to repentance and either restored to service, or removed from active service either voluntarily or involuntarily.
- No one, not parents or elders, can create or mandate faith in anyone, including our own children. Faith is a gift of God, given as he is pleased to do. We can la-

¹⁰ Cf. *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for Worship, IV:B.4.

bor to nurture faith in our children, but we always remember it is God's to give, not ours to demand. We can pray, however, in full confidence in the promise-keeping God who declares that he *will*, indeed, be God to us *and* to our children (Genesis 17:7). He is gracious to use parents as means in fulfilling his covenant promise, but he is not bound by us as his means for we are sinful, fallible instruments in his hands. Parents have good hope that God intends blessing in our families for the glory of his great name.

As the inspired Psalmist expressed it:

*Posterity will serve him.
It will be told of the Lord to
the coming generation.
They will come and will de-
clare His righteousness
To a people who will be born
that He has performed it.*
(Psalm 22:30-31 - NASB)

Summary

What is proposed is a way of understanding the question of the children of elders which is in keeping with a Reformed understanding of the covenant and of electing grace within the covenant. Titus 1:6 is taken to mean that an elder must exercise sober

and faithful rule over his covenant children, applying through the church, covenant discipline when necessary. *Pista* in Titus 1:6 is taken to mean 'faithful' in the sense of children submitting to their father's rule while living in the home. Judgment of an elder, in the case of covenantally disobedient children, is to be made on the basis of his faithfulness to the vows he made at his child's baptism. This is the basis—rather than the unbelief of his child—since the response of faith to the covenant promise, on the part of the covenant child, is ultimately a matter of sovereign grace.

All the truth it is given us to know respecting Christ is deposited for us in the apostolic witness... You may be profoundly grateful that you are to be a preacher and teacher of this witness, an infallible witness, of which the Holy Spirit is the source and the real author.

— John Murray

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