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The SWORD AND TRUMPET monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a board representing various constituencies of Conservative Anabaptism. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Julian Stoltzfus, EDITOR IN CHIEF

What is *The Sword and Trumpet*?

Part 9

OUR MISSION STATEMENT DESCRIBES OUR commitment to defend, promote, and proclaim the gospel. So far, we've mostly talked about our approach: How do we defend the gospel? How do we promote the gospel? How do we proclaim the gospel? Now I want us to notice that this approach is focused on a specific set of truth claims. We are not defending, promoting, or proclaiming our own ideas, nor current trends or cutting-edge theories. Rather, we work to advance the gospel.

But what is the gospel? I'm thankful that the men who started this ministry were careful to describe the gospel it is dedicated to. We are committed to "the whole Gospel of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures."

There's a lot of spiritual gold packed into this phrase.

1. The whole gospel, as opposed to the easy-believism of their day which promised Christ's blessings to those who profess love for Christ but disregard His commands.
2. The gospel, which is the good news (euangelion) that every person, though born a willful sinner in rebellion against God's law, can be saved from hell and reconciled to God through Christ.
3. Christ is both Savior and Lord. As Savior, He died to save us from our sins and was resurrected as the firstfruits of all who believe in Him. As Lord, He is the sovereign ruler over all kingdoms, and especially of His church and every believer included therein. This twin emphasis was especially

necessary given the teaching of a century ago (that has continued in various forms since) that a person can be saved through Christ without submitting to Him.

4. This is the gospel of Jesus. The historic figure, truly God yet born as a man in space and time, who was a true son of Adam, yet perfectly obeyed the Father, by His obedience winning God's favor for all who are united to Him by faith, by His death atoning for our sins, and by His resurrection declaring that sin and death have been conquered.
5. This is the gospel of Christ, the Jewish Messiah who came to fulfill "all things...which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning [Himself]" (Luke 24:44). Redemptive history did not begin in the first century. God had been planning, preparing, and prophesying of Christ for millenia beforehand. The title "Christ" invokes not only His law-fulfilling life and justice-satisfying death but also the entire unfolding of redemptive history from the earliest chapters of Genesis onward.
6. This gospel is not something we have discovered for ourselves or something that we get to define, but rather it comes through divine revelation. This is the gospel that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We are unapologetically committed to the inspired, inerrant, authoritative word of God as the only means by which we can know the gospel. We hold close to Scripture, knowing that only the true gospel gives hope for eternal life. It is

the gospel of Scripture, or no gospel.

These distinctions form a framework that we have sought to hold to through nearly 100 years of ministry. I aim to continue that trajectory of faithfulness as long as I have the privilege of serving as editor. Gospel-faithfulness and gospel-clarity are the heart of why we exist.

I think the emphasis of our mission statement remains relevant. I doubt I'm the only one who's noticing the many challenges facing the conservative Anabaptist church today, both from the outside and from within. I would like to suggest one reason which I believe is at the bottom of these issues. It spins out of the last point enumerated above: our total dependance on divine revelation. Scripture is necessary for us to understand any of the truths of the gospel, and thus our understanding of it (or lack thereof) has seismic effects through the rest of our lives.

Too often, we are weak in our understanding of the gospel because we have neglected robust Bible study. We are content with trite, shallow views of God, sin, Christ, propitiation, justification, faith, sanctification, and so forth. As a result, many of our people (and pastors) have a fragile theology that is ill-suited to bear the weighty issues of life. I'm not saying we don't use the Bible regularly, nor that we are unfamiliar with many of its verses. Rather, I'm saying that we don't know how the various truths of the Bible fit together to build something much greater. We have not dug deep in order to build on the rock.

We are weak in a couple of areas: (1) knowing how the various concepts of Scripture fit together into one cohesive whole, and (2) knowing how that body of truth makes a difference in our daily lives. Behind the first weakness is the tendency to read the Bible in isolated segments, cherry-picking verses without realizing the big picture the author is intending to communicate. We treat the Bible like a collection of disconnected pithy maxims, nice nuggets that we try to appropriate without seeing the reality the biblical author intends us to see. Sometimes I think it would be good if we tried reading the Bible like a normal book,

reading sequentially and in big enough sections that we can see the main point.

Behind the second weakness is, in part, a tendency to read the Bible merely to extract principles and commands, and not to see and know God. Or we could say, we read the Bible experientially (with our perspective and lives at the center) rather than theologically (with God and His glory at the center). We think reading the Bible "practically" means dismissing theological complexities and paying attention only to portions that tell us what we must do to live a better life today. As a result, we often miss those "impractical" portions which, in truth, are necessary to reorient us at the most fundamental level.

We need to ask questions like, "Why did God make me?" We can answer this in a variety of ways. Are we here to have a good time? To make a lot of money so we can be as comfortable as possible? To be good people and leave the world a better place? The Bible helps us understand that, most fundamentally, we exist to know God, enjoy Him, and glorify Him.

How we answer this question is important! Every decision you make today will be affected by what you believe is God's purpose for you. This is not peripheral or optional. This will fundamentally change how you live in every area of your life. How can you live for Him if you don't know true things about Him? How will you please Him if you don't know what He loves and what He hates? If we don't know who we are in our vertical relationship with God, we will waste our time trying to please Him horizontally in our daily lives. We need a vision of Christ—His goodness, His grace, His glory—before we can rightly work out the practical sections as He intends us to.

A right understanding of God is not a mere appendix. It is the main argument of the book, and everything else hangs on it.

My point is this. When we read the Bible merely to know God's will, and not to know God, we miss God's central purpose in revealing Himself to us. Too often the Bible is treated as a rulebook which must be followed if we want to stay out of hell. But God *(cont'd on p. 21)*

A World View of Religion

Aaron Lapp

THIS PAPER WILL NOT consider original Christianity as a religion. It will acknowledge real and actual Christianity on the basis of both accepting and promoting the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. That comprises all of the New Testament with its history, its record of transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, along with its future prophecies.

Religion is man's way to God, construed by the means that satisfies man to be accepted by such a deity, either real or supposed. In some cases, it can go from a person's original supposition to what can develop through the centuries to mystical evolution of human ideas. That can be what happens either through add-on concepts or by religious reductions for more favorable approaches, the former more frequent than the latter.

The "flash" for this article was given rise by John Robson in *Epoch Times*. He quotes Tom Holland in his book, *How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. He says the non-Christian heathen have varying degrees of callousness toward "the poor or the weak [which] might not have the slightest intrinsic value." He goes on to say "that only from Christianity come values such as compassion for our fellows."

Here is my extension to his comments along this line, which in a general worldview concept has been enlarged and appreciated by yours truly. It surely is one of the larger Bible principles, O.T. and N.T., as a layman's scope of the whole world.

The world scope can be divided between the West and the East as the most simple and basic division. Eastern religions might give a basic recognition to Jehovah God while numerous

others do not. Western religions have a high view of the God of heaven and earth, Creator, Sustainer, Sovereign, Divine Judge with a due regard for His final judgeship. Some refer to a Higher Power or "the man upstairs." In my taxi work with the Amish, some men have referred to "da gute Mann" (the Good Man). The Jews felt it to be sacrilegious to speak forth the name of Jehovah God from their lips. Why should we as God's children have any problem speaking His name? Or our own preachers announce a greeting to the church in the name of "the Man from Galilee." Why not be joyous to speak forth the mighty name of Jesus?

The Bible often speaks of giving praise and glory to God's name, as in, "Know that the Lord, He is God" and "Bless the Lord, O my soul." The apostles spoke with great power, often glorying in the name of Jesus!

Our world's population has passed the eight billion mark, which is said to be increasing at the rate of around 83 million per year. That can gradually increase exponentially from this current base figure so that every 12 years or less, the world population increases by another billion. There are so many people currently that there could be split-offs to bring about new religions.

One of the dominant religions in the East is Hinduism, notably in India, which recently has surpassed China as the world's most populated country. China is a close second, where Buddhism is dominant. Both Hindu and Buddhist religions are widespread in the neighboring regions of eastern countries. Islam is listed as non-Christian in the World Book encyclopedia, along with lesser known religions, such as Confucianism and Shintoism. Judaism is also listed as being non-Christian, with the

lowest number of adherents of the ones mentioned so far.

The major religion of the West is Christianity with all its various forms and sects.

Atheism is not mentioned in my World Book as being a recognized religion. Or, as Webster states, "A person [atheist] who believes there is no God," and therefore has no religion. Foreign students who visited our church as a group would be asked to stand, say their name, country, and religion. Those from Eastern countries would most often say, "I have no religion."

In years past, people would identify as being of a given religion, or as being a Catholic if they had Catholic parents. They were not members of the Catholic church, did not attend and pay their dues, and so were said to be "non-practicing" Catholics. In the same way a Jew, being considered a "non-practicing" Jew, yet counted as being a Jew. When Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Products sent their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, our newspaper referred to them as "practicing Christians." Very interesting; I relished it!

The Western world can trace its religious roots to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman, "For salvation is of the Jews." And so it is. Or as Paul said, "For the Jew first, and also for the Greek" (Gentiles).

The Christian church was born in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). That salvation Gospel was soon heading on a decidedly western march, beginning in the continent of Asia in Jerusalem. In only a partial generation, it had entered eastern Europe with local churches being established as it continued on its western trek.

However, it could not or did not perpetuate itself, let alone be able to maintain itself, even where it began with great success and spiritual enthusiasm. Eventually, after several centuries passed, a faithful minority kept the Christ-saving flame alive. The advent of the printing press enlivened peasant and priest, commoner and elite to the call of the Gospel. Wherever it did so in larger Europe, it tended to go westward.

Religious freedom was one of the main drivers

for a large migration to North America. Wide swaths of Christianity shone everywhere as it moved ever westward. Europeans, especially Catholics, also took it to Central America and on to South America. Christianity also moved on to Australia and the isles.

By 1900, it largely stalled in its western advance. Meanwhile, the heathen of the Eastern World had many gods: their main gods, then more intermediate gods, and lesser gods. The evolution of these gods was poised to exert more of a grip on everyone in their regions. That domination was often driven by fear. Adherents multiplied, and as they grew, they also solidified in their domination.

Some of these gods were given much adulation, besides reverence and worship accordingly. The Gospel clashed with these multiple gods at Athens in Greece in Paul's day. In Galatians, Acts, and I Corinthians, Paul's writings remonstrate against the gods of the Gentiles. There also were many gods named in the Old Testament.

The Gospel being taken westward into Europe provided a seedbed for its advance by its people-movement into the Americas. The defining identification of the Western world from the Eastern world is principally an allowable recognition of Jehovah God, precisely clarified by His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. The belief in God cannot be theologically nor academically granted unless there is some allowance that Jesus Christ is God, as Jesus clearly said in John 17:11, 21-23. The understanding cannot grasp this glorious fact, but faith joyfully embraces that pyramidal truth!

The testing of values becomes quite remarkable and astounding in these 2000 years since the establishment of the first believer's church in Jerusalem. We have these surface differences as notable comparisons.

- Wars are more frequent in the Eastern World (East).
- The Western World (West) has consistently been more prosperous.
- Dictators usurp more power and dominance in the East.

- Eastern religion and governments are given to suppressing the poor.
- Western churches and governments have done much to relieve the poor, not only in their own countries, but also in countries all over the world.
- World migration of peoples is strongly to the West, as it becomes possible.
- The West allows all religions in their midst, the East does not.
- The West permits a broad representation of people in schools and government; the East tends to not do so.
- Historically, God has been recognized in the West as Creator and Sustainer, being eternal, where the Gospel of Christ can be freely preached, while also allowing freedom of the press.
- The West has numerous holidays to remember facets of God and Jesus Christ.
- Historically, the West has honored the God-ordered Ten Commandments, not only by their governments, but also largely as conscience-guided people.
- The West has a higher sense of godly-based justice than the East.
- Eastern governments have more often aspired to rule the whole world.
- Western governments have more often recognized the creation principle of fairness in regard to borders and national dominance.

Granted, there have been exceptions to the foregoing, with pockets of wholesale violations, i.e. Nazism and some movements in Central and South American countries. The tenets of democracy have been given to forward the better values of humanity. Some religions and political ideologies have been given room in the West that tend to undermine the values and worth of godliness, Christianity in particular. Some of these appear to be a growing threat to historical Christianity.

This, brothers and sisters, is an ascending and universal fact of great dominion and power, solely derived by divine origin and revealed to

mankind. It was in place in the mind of God before the creation of the world. It was put in place at the creation of time, the earth, and all living things with the seed within itself. Its continuity underscores and attests to the Supremacy of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, King and Sovereign over the nations. Jehovah God is the Benefiter and Supplier to all mankind, and in His lovingkindness and mercy graces the world additionally by having sent His Son to be the Savior of all who will call upon Him to be saved from their sins.

Finally, at the end of the world, God will be the Judge of all the earth, judging the world in righteousness. All wrongs will be set right, bringing holy vengeance and punishment to the ungodly. In His time, He will reward those who believed on His Son Jesus Christ, whose fear was relieved by God's proposition to repent of their sins, and who then live as "practicing Christians," according to the test of true Christianity. That test is to repent of our sins, deny self in daily practical terms, witness for Christ according to the divine nature in our hearts and mind, and give glory to God as a routine thought and verbal response.

The Bottom Line is that we greatly rejoice that all this was given for all the world to know. It has been recorded by history since the origin of the world. That history, very importantly, has no time gaps that are not covered by the record in the Bible. It is connected to God by various genealogies, overlapping events where multiple authors concur with each other. It is applicable to our time, and the "present time" of every generation. It is additionally covered by future prophecy, in which even those prophecies blend and are in tandem with each other at numerous places.

We are assured of all this by the profound revelation from God, who spoke at various times and places to prophets chosen by Him (cf. Heb 1:1).

The heathens continue to fear; "Practicing Christians" continue to believe! **S**

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PERSON OF THE MONTH

Daniel Zimmerman

John S. Coffman

1848-1899

John Samuel Coffman emerged as the leading Mennonite evangelist in the late 1800s. His evangelistic efforts and fervent support of missions, religious education, and congregational singing led most Mennonites to accept these things by the year 1900.

John was born on October 16, 1848, near Mount Crawford in Rockingham County, Virginia, to Samuel Coffman and Frances Weaver. John was the first child in a family that grew to twelve children. While still a small child, John's family moved to a farm near Dale Enterprise, where he grew up, learning to farm from his father. When John was about four years old, the congregation to which his family belonged called his father Samuel to be a minister. The community offered very few educational opportunities, so John's mother Frances taught him to read and write. John was a fast learner and loved to read. His formal education was scant, but he did attend some classes held at night during the winter.

In the spring of 1861, when John was twelve years old, the Civil War erupted. Virginia seceded from the Union in April and drafted men into the military to fight off the Union attackers. As conscientious objectors to warfare, Mennonite men experienced a challenging situation. Some of them managed to escape being drafted by hiding or leaving for other states. John's father Samuel, who was ordained as a bishop in 1861, strongly encouraged his congregation to be firm in their refusal to serve in the army. Eventually the Virginia legislature allowed conscientious objectors to pay a fine in lieu of military duty.

John chose to be baptized on July 4, 1864, at the age of fifteen (which was considered unusually young at that time). By then, Virginia was clearly on the losing side, and the officers drafted every man they could find, conscientious objections or not. When Union forces occupied his home area, John and several other young men fled north with Union assistance. John found his way to Shiremanstown in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, where he worked as a farm hand for a Mennonite family until after the war ended in the spring of 1865. He then returned home to help his family rebuild their devastated farm.

On November 11, 1869, John S. Coffman married Elizabeth (Bettie) Heatwole, a neighbor girl about four years older than he. They rented a farm until 1873, when they bought a farm of thirty acres on Gravelly Hill. John and Bettie eventually had seven children: William, Samuel Frederick, Jacob, Ansel, Fannie, Daniel, and Anna Barbara. Because of his interest in education, John gained certification to teach and taught in winter schools from 1874 to 1877. Because of his love for singing, he also conducted singing schools.

On July 18, 1875, when John was twenty-six years old, the Bank Mennonite congregation called him to be a minister. His father Samuel ordained him. John gained a reputation as a good speaker, and he preached in Mennonite congregations in both Virginia and West Virginia, where there were some mission outposts. He continued conducting singing schools as well, to improve congregational singing in four-part harmony.

While on a trip that took him to Elkhart, Indiana, John S. Coffman met John F. Funk, the owner of the Mennonite Publishing Company and editor of the *Herald of Truth* periodical. Funk invited John Coffman to move to Elkhart and to work for him as an assistant editor. John and Bettie Coffman decided to accept the offer, moving to the Elkhart area in June 1879. John transferred his ministerial credentials to the Prairie Street congregation and attended the Indiana Mennonite Conference. As an assistant editor, John wrote articles and prepared Sunday School materials, eventually editing the Sunday School lesson helps for teachers.

While John enjoyed his work, he soon began receiving calls from congregations to preach evangelistic sermons in a series of “protracted” meetings. John first conducted evangelistic meetings for the Bowne congregation in Michigan in June 1881. Thereafter, invitations to preach came from congregations across the Midwest. With his employer’s agreement, John accepted many of the invitations. Within several years, he gained a reputation as an effective evangelist among the Mennonites and Amish.

John’s effectiveness was due to several factors. He preached earnestly but was soft-spoken. When he preached a series of meetings, he began with sermons about repentance (aimed at the youth and young adults who attended church but had not made commitments to Christ) but then moved to sermons about Christian living and the church’s ordinances (aimed at edifying church members). John was careful to respect and support Mennonite traditions such as plain attire, and if the congregation opposed protracted meetings, he was willing to preach only one sermon. John’s preaching met with great response among the young people who attended Mennonite churches, and many of them requested baptism after his meetings. After years of preaching in the Midwest, John received invitations to preach in Virginia and then Pennsylvania, where opposition to protracted meetings was still strong. He received invitations to preach in the Lancaster and Franconia areas only in 1896. John referred to those who opposed revival meetings as “dear brethren” despite their disapproval, but he also strongly desired to see them change their minds. And many of them did change their minds when they saw his earnest desire to build up their churches.

In addition to preaching and writing, John Coffman involved himself in other ways to encourage spiritual growth. Because of his love for singing, he served on a committee that produced a songbook called *Hymns and Tunes* in 1890, the first Mennonite hymnal to include printed music for some of the songs. He and John F. Funk published a *Confession of Faith and Minister’s Manual* in 1891. He helped to organize the first Mennonite Sunday School convention, held in Indiana, in 1892, the first Mennonite General Conference in 1898, and supported the first Mennonite missions in Chicago (1893) and India (1898). He spoke at “Bible Conferences,” special church services featuring topical messages about Bible doctrines. John became the public face of the “quickenings” among the Mennonites and Amish Mennonites.

Despite this widespread approval, John encountered difficulties in the 1890s. He accepted the responsibility of chairman of the newly formed Mennonite Book and Tract Society in 1889, which aimed to distribute free printed materials, especially to Mennonite ministers. However, co-workers at the Mennonite Publishing Company saw the new organization as competition and gradually grew hostile over it. They sidelined John at the *Herald of Truth*.

In 1895, John led a group of men to form the Elkhart Institute Association, which took over the Elkhart Institute, an educational facility which had been established a year earlier by Dr. Henry Mumaw, a fellow church-member. The Elkhart Institute took a great deal of John’s time and energy because he had to make decisions about staff, curricula, student admissions, and fundraising. John’s goal for the Institute was to create a Mennonite school where students would have Bible classes as well as the usual academic subjects. He soon discovered that some Mennonites saw the Institute as unnecessary, even dangerous, and that raising funds for it required a great

deal of tact.

Sadly, the tensions related to John's leadership in the Mennonite Book and Tract Society and the Elkhart Institute Association boiled over into church life at Prairie Street Mennonite Church. John F. Funk, who had been ordained bishop in 1892, tried to quell the tensions, but his efforts felt heavy-handed and made things worse. John Coffman tried his best to keep good relations with everyone in his congregation, but he was subjected to gossip and rumors that never quite turned into real accusations. He prayed about it much and sought reconciliation whenever he could. Finally, in June 1899, he saw a measure of peace restored in the congregation.

By this time, John was a very sick man. He had been afflicted with stomach problems for several years, and they grew increasingly worse throughout the 1890s. John tried to get relief from medical doctors, herbalists, and even a stay at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan, but nothing helped. Doubtless the stress associated with the Elkhart Institute and the turmoil in his congregation worsened his condition, as did his busy schedule of traveling and preaching. John grew rapidly weaker in the year of 1899, unable to eat and in constant pain. Finally, on July 22, 1899, at the age of fifty years, he died at his home. He was survived by his wife Bettie, his mother Frances, and his seven children.

Despite a relatively short life, John Coffman had a significant influence on the Mennonite Church. Due to his tactful approach, most Mennonites accepted protracted evangelistic revival meetings. His many sermons and meetings led many people to commit their lives to Christ. Sunday Schools, missions, and Christian education grew with his support and guidance. His labors for the Lord to whom he committed his life as a young man made a lasting impact. **S**

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS . . . *cont'd from p. 12*

the Lord. So also as Christians we should offer the best of our time, money, and mind to the Lord. Too often our service and offerings to Him are more of an afterthought than a priority. We stay up late on Saturday night, exhausting ourselves instead of resting so that we can give the best of our minds and voices to the praise of our Lord. We spend significant amounts of money on ourselves, but cringe to drop a hundred dollar bill in the offering plate. We invest time in our hobbies, but simply cannot set aside time to visit the sick and elderly. Dear friends, we should evaluate ourselves to see if our priorities are in order.

As previously noted, the primary motivation for keeping the Word of the Lord should be our love for Him. We, like Israel, have been delivered and reconciled to God. Through Christ we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). Every aspect of our salvation has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. The story is told of a man who was on his way to a revival meeting when his car broke down. By the time

he arrived, the sermon was over and volunteers were cleaning up. Frantically he approached a volunteer and said, "What do I need to do to be saved?" With a twinkle in his eye the volunteer said, "I'm sorry sir, but you're too late. Everything that needs to be done has already been accomplished by Christ. You need only believe on Him and you will be saved." The Lord's kindness in sending His Son to atone for our sins should be our motivation for faithfully serving Him.

For Reflection and Further Study:

1. Examine your heart and life. Are you giving your best to the Lord or are you giving whatever is left over? Humble yourself, ask others to evaluate your life and honestly tell you if you are giving your best to the Lord.
2. What is your motivation for serving the Lord: duty or love? Why is it important that we live out of love rather than duty?
3. Take time to thank the Lord for the privilege of serving in His kingdom and pray that the Holy Spirit would empower you to serve well. **S**



Unit 2: Serving Our Savior

May 4

David Numbers the People
1 Chronicles 21:1-30

David's numbering of the people in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 has been the subject of debate among scholars. In one passage we read that Satan incited David to number the people (2 Sam 24:1), but in the other it says that the Lord "moved" David to do so (1 Chron 21:1). This mystery will not be resolved in this lesson. Suffice it to say that the Lord was sovereign in this event, yet David was clearly responsible for the choice he made.

Another question that arises is, why was it such a grievous sin for David to number the people? Though there is no explicit answer, we get a clue at the end of verse 5. "All Israel had one million one hundred thousand men who drew the sword, and Judah had four hundred and seventy thousand men who *drew the sword*" (emphasis added). One commentator explains David's sin this way, "In the ancient world, rulers would take a census either to levy taxes or to draft an army, and the counting of men "who drew the sword" indicates that David had the latter purpose in mind. Joab warned David that such a census would be sinful, most likely because it reflected a reliance on human strength in the form of a large standing army."¹ Support for this view is seen in the Lord's subsequent judgement. David, apparently trusting in the might of his military,

watches as seventy thousand of his people fall by the hand of the Lord.

This is a seemingly harsh judgement, yet it serves as a reminder of the grievous nature of sin. The Lord had promised to go before His people and fight their battles. Yet here is David, failing to believe that promise. Most of us are not all that different from David. We may not put our trust in military might, but how many of us have found security and pride in money, friendship or some other safety net? As Christians we are to rest in the Lord and the Lord alone for help and hope in the day of trouble.

This passage also carries a solemn warning for leaders. David's sin affected more than just himself. His decision brought about the death of fathers, brothers, sons and husbands. It is hard to imagine the guilt that David felt as he witnessed sons burying their fathers, fathers burying their sons and widows weeping over the graves of their husbands. Let us never think that our sin only affects us. A father has a profound impact on his family both for good and evil. A pastor has a profound impact on the flock he is given to shepherd. In fact everyone, to some extent, has an influence on those around them. So let us be careful in our Christian walk and seek the good of our brothers and sisters.

But what of those who have fallen into sin? Is there any hope for forgiveness? The answer in Scripture is a resounding yes! As Christians we know that our hope of forgiveness and salvation comes through the shed

1. <https://learn.ligonier.org/devotionals/davids-census>

blood of Christ. David offered burnt offerings on the threshing floor and “the angel returned his sword to its sheath.” So also through the atoning blood of Christ the Lord’s wrath has been turned away, there is no longer any condemnation. This does not mean we no longer grieve over sin, nor does it mean that there will not be consequences, but we can rest in the Lord’s forgiveness through Christ.

For Reflection and Further Study:

1. David sinned grievously by relying on physical forces rather than God. Examine your own heart and life, are you relying on the Lord alone or do you find security in the things of this world?
2. Our lesson carries a particularly solemn warning for leaders. Discuss practical ways you can encourage the leaders in your life to stay the course.
3. Take time to thank the Lord that through Christ, there is forgiveness for the fallen sinner.

May 11

Continual Joyful Service

2 Chronicles 7:1-11

Some time back we examined Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple built in Jerusalem (See the September 2024 issue of the *Sword and Trumpet*). One of the primary themes in that prayer was for the Lord to dwell in the temple among His people. In our passage this week, God responds to that request.

In verse 1 it says that as soon as Solomon had finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven, consumed the offerings and sacrifices that had been prepared and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. It is significant that the coming of the Lord’s glory is accompanied by fire. In Scripture, fire is often associated with the judgement of God. When the time came for the Lord to judge Egypt, He appeared to Moses in the form of a burning

bush (see Exodus 3). In Leviticus 10, when Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, we read that “fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” There is also the account of God’s judgment against the enemies of Elijah by fire (2 Kings 1:9-12). In Hebrews 12 the writer describes God as a “consuming fire,” and encourages his readers to receive the grace of Christ and serve the Lord with reverence and fear, lest they also be consumed.

So then the Lord’s consuming of the sacrifices presented by Solomon and all Israel in 2 Chronicles 7 indicates that the Lord accepted their sacrificial worship. If God had deemed it unacceptable, fire would likely have fallen on Israel. This is a sobering, yet comforting, picture of the gospel. One commentator puts it this way, “The Lord is holy, high and lifted up. He is a consuming fire. And if not for His grace, we would be consumed. This is still true for us today: if not for the covering of Christ’s righteousness, if not for the purging of our filthiness, we would be consumed. But God in His grace has condescended to make it possible for us to stand in His presence through Christ and live.”² Put another way, if Jesus had not emptied the cup of God’s wrath on our behalf, we would have been consumed. But Jesus did come as an acceptable sacrifice and the Lord is therefore pleased to dwell among us, because His justice has been satisfied.

When we meditate on these glorious truths our response should be the same as Israel in verse 3: “When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever.” When we come face to face with the glory, goodness and mercy of the Lord given to us through the gospel, the proper response is worship and reverence.

2. <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/consuming-fire>

It is also noteworthy that even after the Lord took up residence among His people, their worship and sacrifices continued as an expression of their joy and gratitude. This illustrates again how we ought to respond when the Lord takes up residence in our hearts. The gospel should move us to continued joyful service of our Lord. In verse 7 we read that the “bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive [all] the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat.” As Christians we are called to continually pour ourselves out as living sacrifices to the Lord out of joy and gratitude for His glorious grace.

Verses 10-11 present a beautiful scene of Israel departing to their houses after celebrating the Lord’s marvelous grace toward them. They went to their houses with glad hearts. As Christians we should surely have that gladness of heart. Our sins have been forgiven, our redemption and adoption is sure and we look forward to an eternal inheritance prepared for us in heaven.

For Reflection and Further Study:

1. In our lesson we noted that if Israel’s sacrificial worship had been unacceptable to God, fire would likely have fallen on them. Does the Lord’s severity toward improper worship have any impact on how you worship today?
2. Examine your own heart, are you continually rejoicing over the Lord’s presence in your heart?
3. Take time to thank the Lord for coming to dwell within His people and giving us a deep-rooted joy through the gospel.

May 18

Priorities

Ezra 3:1-13

In Ezra chapter 1 we read of the Lord stirring up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he issued a proclamation not only allowing but encouraging the Jewish exiles to

return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. We also find in chapter 1 that it was God who moved in the hearts of His people to return to their homeland. Remember, Israel had been in exile for around 70 years: homes had been built, families established and friendships made. Some within Israel had likely risen to high standing in the land of their exile (consider Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). From a human perspective, it would have made a lot of sense to remain in this land of stability rather than return to a land that was desolate and unstable. But the Lord caused His people to remember and long for the promised restoration. So they packed their bags, gathered their families, and departed for Jerusalem.

One expositor has pointed out that Israel had their priorities in order as they returned to the promised land. At the end of chapter one we find that Israel was given a significant amount of gold, silver, livestock, and other precious items. Human wisdom would say that the first order of business is rebuilding the walls and securing the city. Instead they began with rebuilding the temple and re-establishing proper worship of the Lord.³ In verse 3 we read that they continued the work despite the surrounding countries that threatened them. This priority demonstrated not only their devotion to the Lord, but also their trust in His providential care even in the face of threats from those around them. This is surely an example for us. As Christians we are to be wise, but not according to earthly wisdom. The most important priority in our lives should not be some kind of worldly security, but our relationship with the Lord. Before Israel lifted a hand to build the walls of Jerusalem, they bowed their knees in worship. Too often we foolishly mix up our priorities and live according to worldly wisdom. In doing so we are in essence saying, I trust myself more than the Lord. But as Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, we must seek first the kingdom of God and His

3. <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/first-things-first-priorities/>

righteousness, and rely on the Lord to care for our physical needs.

I live in a small town located in southern Indiana; it is not quite a ghost town but close. For years the only noteworthy place of business was the local saloon. However, if you take time to converse with the “old timers” they will tell you about the glory days with a theater, several grocery stores, no less than three gas stations, a bank and a hardware store. In fact, in its heyday, this now mostly desolate town was known as “little Chicago.” Several years ago our town was blessed with a Dollar General. Most of us were delighted with this development, but I wonder if the older generation felt a tinge of sadness as they remembered the glory days of their stomping grounds. This was certainly the case for the elderly in Israel. We read in verse 12 that, as the younger generation rejoiced over the completion of the temple in Jerusalem, “many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes.”

The elders of Israel seem to weep because the glory of the new temple was far inferior to the old. As Christians we rejoice because what we have in Christ is far superior to everything offered in the Old Testament. In fact we no longer even need a temple, for Jesus has made His home within us. And one day, after enduring the pain and grief of death, we will experience the ultimate joy of eternity in the presence of Christ.

For Reflection and Further Study:

1. In our passage we noted that God stirred up king Cyrus to issue a proclamation. Discuss how we can reconcile God's sovereign “stirring” and man's freewill.
2. Examine your own heart and life, what is your first priority? Is it Christ and His kingdom or you and yours?
3. Take time to pray that the Lord would empower you by His Spirit to keep Him first.

May 25

The Lord Loved Us, Therefore We Love Him

Nehemiah 10:28-39

Over the past few months we have examined various aspects of the Old Testament sacrifices and how they have been fulfilled through Christ. In the Old Testament Israel could not draw near to the Lord without the shedding of blood as a covering for sin. Israel was to come before the Lord in humble recognition of their need for mercy and, having received that mercy, they were to be wholly devoted to the Lord.

Here in Nehemiah 10 we see the returned exiles' desire to live according to the Word of the Lord because of His mercy and grace. The Lord had been faithful in keeping His promises in bringing them back to the land of their inheritance, so they responded with the desire to be faithful. Verse 29 emphasises the keeping of the Lord's commandments in their entirety. The people of God are called to live by the whole counsel of Scripture.

Verse 30 highlights Israel's desire to maintain purity in the face of cultural pressure. To this end they swore not to give their daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for their sons. They also refused to buy from the surrounding nations on the Sabbath day. Throughout Israel's history, great trouble came when foreign wives were taken by the men of Israel. This was especially true in Solomon's case. 1 Kings 11 gives the haunting account of Solomon's devastating failure at the end of his life in being led into idolatry by his many wives, which in turn led to the land being greatly polluted. As Christians we should see to it that we are not unequally yoked with unbelievers, but the greater warning is to maintain the purity of the church. If we allow the sinful practices of the world to infiltrate the congregation, it is only a matter of time before the entire assembly will be contaminated with sin.

Verses 35-37 remind us that the Lord is deserving of our best. Israel offered the first-fruits of their goods to

(cont'd on p. 8)

What Does the Bible Mean by “the Heart”?

A. Craig Troxel

WE CALL THOSE WHITE FLAKES THAT appear in the winter *snow*. Whether the texture is flaky or crusted, thin or deep, fine or wet, soft or heavy, it’s simply *snow*. But the tribal Yup’ik people in northern Alaska and Canada employ many words to describe these different kinds of snow. Snow is one simple thing in English, and yet snow has different qualities (no matter what language you speak). The same is true of the word *heart* in Scripture. The heart reflects both the simplicity and the complexity of our inner self. It is one, and yet it has different functions.

Our Inner Unity

Put simply, the heart in Scripture conveys the totality of our inner self. We are governed from this one point of unity. From it “flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). It is the control center—the source of every thought, the seat of every passion, and the arbiter of every decision. All of it is generated from and governed by this one point of undivided unity. That is why everything vital to the Christian life—your speech, repentance, faith, service, obedience, worship, walk, and love—must be done with “all your heart” (Deut. 10:12; 30:2; 1 Sam. 7:3; Ps. 86:12; 119:34; Prov. 3:5–6; 4:23; Isa. 38:3; Jer. 24:7; Matt. 22:37). The heart is the helm of the ship. It takes a bearing and then sets the course of your life. As goes the heart, so goes the person.

Our Inner Complexity

Put comprehensively, the heart encompasses various functions, including the mind, the desires, and the will. The *mind* of the heart

includes what we know: our thinking, ideas, memories, and imagination. The *desires* of the heart include what we love: what we want, seek, yearn for, and thus feel. The *will* of the heart refers to what we choose: whether we will resist or submit, whether we will say “yes” or “no,” and whether we are weak or strong in our resolve.

Mind. Although we moderns tend to think of the heart primarily in terms of our emotions, the Bible associates the heart with our ability to think. For example, Paul prayed “May [God] give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” (Eph. 1:17–18). Jesus said, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts” (Matt. 15:19).¹ Psalm 139:23 draws the parallel:

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!

Often, English versions of the Bible will translate *heart* with words like *understanding*, *sense*, or, most often, *mind*, which shows how strong the connection is between the heart and thinking (Ex. 14:5; 1 Kings. 3:9; Ps. 26:2; Prov. 19:21; Jer. 17:10; Matt. 22:37).

Desires. For good or for ill, the heart desires satisfaction, security, comfort, happiness, and so much else. Desires can be for sinful things (like fleshly passions) or for good things (like Jesus’ desire to eat the Passover with His disciples) (Deut. 12:15; Ps. 45:11; Isa. 26:9; Matt. 5:28; Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:24; 1 Tim. 6:9; 1 John 2:16). The word Paul uses for the desires of the flesh is the same one he uses for the desires

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this article are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–17). In essence, desires reveal what we crave and ultimately love, or what Christ calls our treasure (Matt. 6:21; see also Ps. 63:1; Isa. 55:2; Matt. 5:6; John 4:10; Heb. 5:14; 1 Peter 2:2). Depending on whether our desires are satisfied or denied, our heart feels anger, joy, envy, rage, anxious fear, sorrow, lovesickness, anguish, despair, and many other emotions. Our emotions bring out what lies at the core of who we are, not just what we feel.

Will. As the seat of volition, the heart decides whether we submit to or resist what we desire and think. It will either say “yes” or “no.” Here is where the battle for control of the heart is fought. How it goes will depend upon the will’s strength or weakness, its callousness or brokenness, its hardening by sin or renewal by grace. The heart of sinful unbelief is stubborn and unyielding to God, and yet it is weak and unable to resist temptation (Ex. 4:21; Deut. 1:28; Rom. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:14). In direct contrast, the heart made new by the Spirit bows before God in humility but is also resolved to obey the Lord by dying to sin, the world, and the devil (1 Sam. 2:1; Dan. 1:8; Acts 4:13; 2 Cor. 7:10–12; James 4:7; 1 Peter

5:9).

Our Inner Unity and Complexity

Our mind, desires, and will are distinct but inseparable as they work together as a cooperative network. Our thinking always has an agenda. The heart dwells upon what it holds most dearly. Its choices are motivated by and reflect how it is emotionally invested.

This alliance of mind, desires, and will reveals itself in its deep entanglement with sin. As Paul says, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God and cannot submit to God’s law (Rom. 8:7). But it is also true of a Christian’s “new heart,” which he or she gains when born again by the Holy Spirit. There is nothing in the Christian’s heart—whether in the mind, desires, or will—that is untouched by God’s grace. Our hearts are enlightened, made pure, and established in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know God truly, love Him sincerely, and follow Him resolutely. We are more and more able to believe, serve, obey, worship, walk and love our God with *all* our heart. **S**

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THEOLOGICAL TOUCHPOINTS

Julian Stoltzfus

Why Every Preacher Needs Systematic Theology

Part 1

MUCH OF THE WEAKNESS of today's preaching can be traced back to the individual preacher's failure to understand God's truths as revealed in the whole of Scripture, and particularly how those truths fit together in a cohesive system of truths. He may preach an idea boldly from his given text, not realizing that he is in fact contradicting a truth clearly revealed in other areas of Scripture. He lacks the synthesis of biblical truths which is necessary to protect against misguided, faulty, or outright errant preaching.

Or perhaps his preaching isn't outright wrong, but it's foggy. He is not clear, not manifesting the truth (cf. 2 Cor. 5), and as a result his hearers aren't built up in the truth. Perhaps more dangerous than outright error is the kind of preaching that fails to instruct its hearers in the truth. The preacher's arguments are illogical, the structure is hard to follow, and no one is quite sure what he intends to communicate. This too results when the preacher does not understand fundamental biblical truths as they are taught throughout Scripture.

If we want to preach the Bible clearly and faithfully, we need robust systematic theology. Without it, we leave ourselves to the errors introduced above. A preacher's effectiveness rises and falls with his comprehension of the key truths of Scripture and how they fit together. Every preacher needs systematic theology.

What is Systematic Theology?

The first order of business is to explain what I mean by systematic theology. Simply put,

systematic theology is the practice of ordering biblical truths by subject or by theme. This is neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Systematic theology can be an asset or a barrier to right interpretation, depending on whether it represents the actual teachings of Scripture. For our purposes at this point, I want us to understand what systematic theology *is*. It is the systematic—often rational, often logical—ordering of biblical truths around certain headings to help us understand and remember them.

Unhealthy Systematic Theology

As mentioned above, it's possible for systematic theology to be a barrier to the right interpretation of a given text. There is an unhealthy kind of system which stands above the text of Scripture and reinterprets it to fit a preconceived system. It de-emphasizes or distorts certain truths to fit them into an extrabiblical framework, or jettisons them altogether. Typically, certain biblical teachings are enlarged until they eclipse other teachings altogether. We think for example of heresies which emphasize Christ's deity to the rejection of His humanity, or vice versa. It is rightly said that most heresies result when someone takes a particular biblical teaching to the extreme, at the expense of other essential teachings. This is unhealthy systematic theology, and it masks aspects of God's truth rather than making them plain.

There's another way to think about this which will strike closer to home for our readers. When I say "systematic theology," you may think of large volumes put forward by

theologians throughout church history. You may assume that you do not have a system of your own, and that this discussion only applies to brainy theologians who have over-philosophized the Bible. But we all need to look at our own lives to see if our preconceptions are distorting our interpretation of Scripture. Every person operates from a set of assumptions that seem rational, and every person interprets Scripture in light of these assumptions. We all need to check if these assumptions are blurring our interpretation of what God has actually said in His word.

This often happens without us realizing it. That's why I'm calling these ideas *assumptions*. We assume ideas without considering whether they come from the Bible.

I think a brief illustration will help show what this looks like. I wear glasses. And I work in a furniture shop. Between sawing, sanding, and finishing, my glasses are almost constantly covered with a film of sawdust and oils. It's nearly impossible to keep them clean. In fact, my glasses are so often dirty that most of the time I don't notice. I am accustomed to seeing the world through a light haze, and I can easily forget that my lenses are keeping me from seeing reality clearly.

It's not until I clean my glasses that I realize how much the dust and grease are affecting my ability to see.

We often read Scripture this way. Like wearing smudgy glasses, we can't see what is in front of us because dirt and grease are blurring our view. We are all guilty at times of missing what God wants to say to us through Scripture because our preconceptions—our systems—dim our view. We miss the main point because these assumptions are blurring our vision. We explain away the plain meaning because “it can't mean that.” We exclude certain conclusions because they don't fit with our presuppositions. Our system of thinking prevents us from getting the meaning of the passage right.

When that happens in sermon preparation, the final delivery also misses the mark. The preacher has missed the point of the passage

because his assumptions blurred his view. Bad systematic theology diminishes the preacher's faithfulness to the text, and therefore his effectiveness in the lives of his people.

Healthy Systematic Theology

While a system or a set of assumptions can keep us from seeing the Bible correctly, there is a kind of systematic theology which is essential to clear-sighted Bible study, a healthy kind of system which stands underneath the text and helps us understand it better. This kind does not blur our view. Rather, like a clean pair of glasses, it corrects our natural deficiencies so we can see things more clearly. This system is not imposed on Scripture, nor is it an exaggeration of certain truths at the expense of others, but is a balanced, thoughtful synthesis of the whole body of biblical revelation.

We sometimes think that any kind of system is a de-facto distortion of biblical truth. While it is true that extra-biblical systems can hinder our understanding, we need to be careful not to reject the system which Scripture itself gives us. We serve a rational God who does not contradict Himself. The Bible is not just a collection of disconnected doctrinal maxims or moral nuggets. It is unified because it comes from one source: God. It is good—and even necessary—for us to understand individual doctrines from Scripture, and to try to fit those together the way the Bible encourages us to. We ought to draw out the systematic aspects of Scripture, not content with extracting isolated ideas but comparing Scripture with Scripture, truth with truth, trying to understand the entire theological structure God has given us in His word.

Of course, we need to do this in a way that helps our understanding of the truth rather than hindering it. The difference between a healthy system and an unhealthy one is its relationship to the Bible. Unhealthy systems keep us from understanding the Bible correctly. They stand above the Bible, only accepting those ideas which are compatible

with the system. But a healthy system is subordinate to the Bible, embracing only what the Bible itself teaches and then synthesizing those truths into a system. It is primarily concerned with fitting together the various aspects of the Bible in order to understand it as a whole. It is entirely subject to Scripture. A healthy systematic theology is a great aid to any preacher.

In either case, we can't avoid systematizing, not if we are serious about understanding the Bible. Anytime we come to the Bible looking for answers to particular questions, we are doing a form of systematic theology. We can ask questions such as:

- What does the Bible say about Jesus' person, mission, work, etc?
- What does the Bible say about the nature of God? His oneness? His trinity?
- What does the Bible say about righteousness, sin, and judgment?
- What does the Bible say about redemption? Why is it necessary, how is it accomplished, and how is it applied?

As we look for answers to any of these questions, we are doing systematic theology. And I believe that this form of systematic theology is helpful—and even essential—for those who want to understand the Bible correctly. Even more so for those who want to preach with faithfulness and power.

So this is not a question of whether or not any of us has a system. We all do. The question is, is our system biblical? Any system which stands above the text and inhibits our ability to understand the Bible clearly is an obstacle to the truth. But a system which is drawn from Scripture can be a great aid to our understanding of the truth. I would even argue that it is essential. Every preacher needs systematic theology.

When we come to Scripture with a good grasp of the central themes of Scripture, we are prepared to understand any given passage in its context. Systematic theology helps us get the right meaning of any text, because we can understand it within the whole scope of

Scripture.

Developing a healthy system does not come easily. The Bible is clear that we cannot understand the Bible the way God intends us to understand it without God's help. "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). And the Apostle Paul specifically prays for the Ephesian church that they would be *given* the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." That is to say, spiritual sight (including "knowledge" and "understanding") are God-given. Otherwise, Paul would not need to pray for them.

We cannot clean our own lenses. We need God's help to clean our smudgy lenses so we can see more clearly. More light. More light. More light. We should always be asking the Spirit to illuminate our minds so we can see and believe Scripture more clearly. Through a steady practice of reading the Bible with the Spirit's help, we will begin to develop a healthier and more faithful system which is drawn out of Scripture rather than imposed upon it. Continual saturation in the word of God—all of it—is essential for us to get any particular portion right.

Principle Applied

Let's tease this out with a biblical example. How does soteriology (the area of systematic theology dealing with the doctrines of salvation) help us understand Old Testament narratives? In 2 Kings 5 we read of Naaman, a great Syrian commander, an enemy of Israel, a Gentile, and a leper. At the advice of his slave girl—an Israelite captive—he went to Samaria to look for God's prophet Elisha and to ask him to heal him of his leprosy. Elisha gave a simple test of faith: go wash in the Jordan river seven times. At first Naaman left "in a rage," but his servants convinced him to heed Elisha's instructions. After dipping seven

times in the Jordan river, Naaman was healed.

Now comes the heart of the story. Naaman returns to Elisha and offers Elisha a gift. Elisha's response is the key to understanding the gospel implications of the whole story. "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing" (v. 16). Elisha refused to receive any contribution from Naaman to pay for his healing. Even after Naaman urged him, he refused to take any payment for the healing.

If we are familiar with primary biblical themes, the gospel implications here are obvious. Naaman—an enemy of God's people and outside the covenant—needed divine cleansing. He had no right to ask for God's grace, no grounds to appeal for it, but he came asking in faith and he was miraculously healed. When he wanted to contribute something from his own resources to settle his accounts, Elisha refused. Naaman could not purchase God's grace. Above all else, this is a story of God's grace to undeserving sinners.

Though we think of Elisha as a thundering prophet, it's obvious that he understood and valued God's grace. He knew that God's grace is given freely and is not earned. He would have agreed with the Apostle Paul that for God's grace to be true grace, it must be given freely. If salvation comes "by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom. 11:6). God gives grace freely. He cannot be compelled by human works (or by Naaman's gifts). Elisha refused Naaman's gift so Naaman would understand what grace is. It is not something that can be bought or bartered for. God already stands willing and ready to give it. All we need to do is ask.

This is clearly the main point, as underscored by the rest of the story. After Naaman left, Elisha's servant Gehazi, who coveted the gift which Naaman had offered Elisha, ran after Naaman to get some of his wealth for himself. He returns with two changes of garments and two talents of silver. But Elisha uncovers his sin and declares that as a result

"the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever" (v. 27).

This seems like an overly harsh sentence. Leprosy was a contagious disease, so anyone who had it was isolated from normal society. Gehazi would suffer the rest of his life because he accepted these gifts. Why was his judgment this severe?

Elisha points us in the right direction with his rhetorical question in verse 26. "Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?" In other words, now is not the time to receive payment! Elisha was teaching Naaman about God's nature—and particularly God's grace—and Gehazi distorted the message by accepting Naaman's contribution. He implied that God's grace could be procured by payment when Elisha's central concern was to show that God's grace comes to those who ask for it in faith. This account is here to teach us something about God—He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Ps. 103:8).

There are a number of ways to preach this passage and miss the entire point. You could focus on the political conflict between the king of Syria and the king of Israel. Or do an exhaustive study of the number seven because Naaman dipped in the river seven times. Or give a simple synopsis of the progression of events. Any of these topics are in the text but they don't help people understand what was going on and what we are to learn from it as New Testament Christians.

As you think about this example, realize how a broad, biblically-grounded understanding of the gospel helps us get the main point of this passage right. That is to say, every preacher needs systematic theology.

In the next article we will explore some particular reasons why every pastor needs systematic theology. **S**

To be continued

— If you have feedback on this or any other article, email me at julian@swordandtrumpet.org. To access all Theological Touchpoints articles, visit theologicaltouchpoints.com.

Getting Better at Getting to the Heart

Part 1

Brad Brandt

YOU'RE INTERESTED IN ministering to the heart. The purpose of this session is to help counselors grow in their ability to address heart issues rather than just settling for behavior modification. In what we call our Track 3 training at Wheelersburg Baptist, we've tried to move beyond just talking about the theory of counseling (getting the content) to how we do this. The key elements of counseling include gathering data, discerning the problem, giving homework, and so forth. One of the key elements is getting to the heart issue, not just settling for behavior modification. In this session, we're going to talk about that slice of the pie. There's certainly a spill over into the other elements, but we're focusing on that, realizing that it's not isolated as we counsel. These are not pick-and-choose elements. Each is vital in the process of helping counselees, but to be more effective, it is sometimes helpful to break it apart and then put it back together again. As a result, we're breaking the counseling process apart and talking about this slice: How do you get to the heart when you're dealing with people?

In a sense, counselors face the same challenge that I faced raising children. I have two daughters who are grown and out of the nest now. When a behavior problem confronted me as a dad, I could easily become preoccupied with identifying the behavior and going after the behavior because that's what was most pressing and that's what I could see. Of course, I would be very negligent as a dad if that's what I did. The behavior problem has to be addressed, but Jesus said it well in Matthew 15:19: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,

murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." If I'm going to be a good dad, I'm concerned about behavior, but I'm concerned about what's going on in the heart that produced the behavior. As a biblical counselor, that's critical for us. We see presentation problems and we usually see behavior. We are concerned about that, but as a good shepherd of the souls of people, I'm interested in what's going on in the part that I can't see.

Now, let's clarify some questions first of all.

Due to space constraints, we will not be addressing some important questions such as the relationship between the biblical terms *heart*, *soul*, *mind*, *intellect*, and *will*. For our purposes, when I talk about heart and heart issues, I'm using it in the rather broad sense just to refer to the unseen, immaterial aspect of the counselee for whom you're seeking to care. I want us to turn together to Ezekiel 14 to see an example of this.

I want to read the first 11 verses of this text. It's actually a counseling situation. Let's listen to God's word.

Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?"

"Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from

Me by their idols.”

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

“And if the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. And they shall bear their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired, that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God,” says the Lord God.”

I suggest to you that this is a counseling situation. Some of the leaders of Israel come to Ezekiel and they sit down and they want to talk to him about a problem or problems. God tells Ezekiel, “This is what you are to say to these counselees.” [I understand the sufficiency of Scripture, but I wish that the Lord would say to me, “Okay, with your counselees, this is what you need to say to them: ‘Do this.’” My common prayer is, “Lord, I love Jehoshaphat. I don’t know what to do, but my eyes are on you. What do I do with this situation?”]

I’m intrigued that, according to the Lord, the counselees had two problems. Did you notice this? One: they put up wicked stumbling blocks before their eyes; they manufactured idols. That’s a behavior problem, and it’s going to need to be addressed, but this behavior is rooted in a second problem: these men have set up—the phrase is repeated—“idols in their hearts.” The Lord mentions that in verses 3, 4, 5, and 7. The Lord confronts both matters. So did Ezekiel. So must we as we seek to counsel people. We are interested in behavior, but we must give attention to what’s going on in the

heart.

We’re not going to do an extensive study of this important subject of the idols of the heart. Others have thankfully provided a lot of helpful guidance for us in that. We want to focus on the application of this concept. If idols of the heart exist, and they do, then we, as counselors, need to help our counselees, and of course ourselves, deal with these idols of the heart. In this workshop, we’re going to focus on how to identify and address heart idols related to behavioral problems and how we obtain understanding of what these idols are through questions, through biblical instruction, through homework, etc. Just some recommended reading and tools that you might want to think about:

- Paul Tripp’s excellent book *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands*.
- Chapter 4 is entitled “The Heart is the Target.” Chapter 5 is entitled “Understanding your Heart Struggle.”
- C.J. Mahaney’s three-part series of messages called “The Idol Factory.” You can Google and find that.
- Ed Welch’s *Motives: Why do I do the things I do?*
- The Y-chart that’s been used a lot in biblical counseling circles. I find that chart very helpful, and I use it a lot in helping discern what’s going on in a person’s heart.

Now, what do we mean by heart issues? I mean that there are things in the counselee’s life, things that are not pleasing to the Lord because they’re not Christ-like and are contrary to Scripture—issues that need to be addressed nouthetically or biblically. These issues are not simply behavioral in nature, but pertaining to the thinking, the desires, the aspirations, the matters of the heart. This is our concern as biblical counselors: to help counselees change in ways that will be lasting, put off heart idols, and put on the kinds of heart aspirations and thoughts, and so forth, that are Christ-like and pleasing to our God. We’re interested in addressing the needs of the whole person.

Some important heart texts:

- Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”
- Ezekiel 14. We just looked at this passage.
- Luke 6:43-45: “...for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.”
- James 4:1-3: This passage doesn't use the term heart, but it certainly speaks of the dynamics of the heart when it says, “What causes fights...” and talks about the desires within you that are battling. Every good biblical counselor dealing with marriage conflict understands that we just can't teach the four rules of communication; we need to address what's going on in the desires of the heart when a couple is struggling.
- Psalm 19:14: “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight.” We'll come back to this text a little later.
- Psalm 139:23: “Search me, O God, and know my heart.”

What are some examples of heart issues? Calvin said it well: “The heart is an idol factory. The issues of the heart are boundless and abundant.” We all have issues in our heart, things we're wanting, things we're thinking. Let me give you an example that we'll work on and then we'll come to our case study.

Three different 30-year-old men are involved in pornography. They commit the same action: they sit down at their desk, they take their mouse, they click, and they look at pornography. It's the same action. But there are a host of different heart motivations and heart issues that could affect this particular same action. For instance, let me give you three idols that could cause a man to sin sexually via pornography. Keeping in mind—this is a whole different subject—that according to Romans 1 and Ephesians 5:3-4, sexual sin is at its root idolatry. He's worshipping the creature rather than the Creator.

Why is the first man doing this? If you could talk to him, you'd find out that he just wants the sheer sexual thrill. He wants that.

That's what it's all about for him.

1. If you talked to the second man, he would say, “That's not it at all for me, although to be honest, there's some of that. But my life is full of pressure and tension. I've got a dead-end job and a bad marriage. The reason I do this is as an escape from reality for me. What I want is an escape from reality.” I always find it helpful to just finish the sentence, “What I want is...” Then you find out what's going on in the heart. That's very important for me to know as I'm trying to help this man.
2. The third man is feeling great guilt for a bad relationship that he can't fix. He feels like life is out of control and it goes back to all kinds of things related to guilt, maybe things in his past. What he wants is: “I want something I can control, and when I click on that mouse, I have control of this situation.”

If all we do is disconnect the internet and set up accountability partners for what this person does with his eyes, we're not going to see lasting change because there are motivations and heart issues affecting this behavior. That gives us a picture of the relationship between heart and behavior. **S**

— Originally published at biblicalcounseling.com. Taken from the 2015 ACBC Annual Conference entitled *Homosexuality: Compassion, Care, and Counsel*. Used by permission.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK . . . *cont'd from p. 2*

intends to communicate Himself to us through it. Yes, that includes commands, but those are God's directions for how we can display our love for Him, not for how we earn it. Ultimately, He desires to be known. How can we know Him if we ignore what He says about who He is?

The gospel is known through the Bible. And that gospel is, above all else, about lost sinners being reconciled to God so that they can enjoy fellowship with Him and thereby glorify Him. In the gospel, we get God. Let's not settle to know only what He wants us to do. Let's dig deep into the word so we can know Him, and by knowing Him, can enjoy Him. **S**

The Foundation and Origin of the Church

Ron J. Bigalke

Although there are similarities (e.g. Lev 20:7; 1 Pet 1:16), a fundamental doctrine of Scripture is that the specific plan and purpose of God for the church is to be distinguished from regenerate national Israel. The church is exclusive and unique to this age. The origin of the church was still future during Christ's earthly ministry, and did not come into existence until His resurrection (cf. Matt 16:18; Acts 1:4-5; 2:32-33; 11:15-17; 1 Cor 12:13). The holy calling of the church as distinct from that of Israel is evident from an understanding of both the foundation and origin of the church.

Foundation of the Church

The first use of the word church (Gk. *ekklēsia*) in the New Testament is found in Matthew 16:16-19. In response to Peter's statement that He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said to him, "flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Speaking to Peter (Gk. *petros*, "stone"), Jesus promised, "on this rock [Gk. *petra*, "rock"] I will build my church." In regard to the foundation of the church, one needs to understand the "rock" upon which Jesus promised to build His church. Roman Catholicism identifies the "rock" as Peter, who is believed to have been the foundation for and ultimate authority of the church. Based on the doctrine of apostolic succession, Roman Catholicism teaches that final authority and infallibility reside in the pope.

Suggested Foundations

There are many interpretive views regarding the meaning of Matthew 16:16-19, but all focus upon two persons: Christ and Peter. Some Protestants believe Peter is the "rock" upon which the church is built. The prevailing

evangelical view is that Christ is the one, essential foundation upon which the church is built. The Roman Catholic teaching regarding Peter is that he was the "rock" upon which the church is built, and therefore both the exclusive and ultimate authority for the church; consequently, Roman Catholicism affirms apostolic succession and the authority of the pope.

Some Protestants believe Peter is the "rock," but only in the sense that he was given the apostolic privilege to extend the universality of the church to Gentiles (Acts 15:17), which is evident by the extension of the church as recorded in Acts 2, 8, & 10. Most evangelicals are uncomfortable with this view, not for lack of biblical support but due to apprehension that it may lend support to the conservative Roman Catholic understanding. However, if it were not for the extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it would be difficult to understand the "rock" as anyone or anything other than Peter. To regard Peter as the foundation of the church does not necessitate one to affirm the Roman Catholic teaching of papal succession and infallibility, nor the priority of Peter. The church has been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), of which Peter may be regarded as the first among equals.

Another prominent evangelical view is that the "rock" upon which the church was built is Peter's confession of Christ (Matt 16:16), which is a mediating position between Peter himself as an apostle and Christ as the essential and unique foundation stone. The majority of evangelicals believe that the "rock" is Christ Himself, upon which the church is built; *however*, this creates disjunction between the two rocks, contrary to the biblical context.

The Origin of the Church

Matthew 18:17 is within the context of church discipline. Following a specific order for discipline, Jesus said the final procedure is to bring the matter “to the church.” Matthew’s reference to the church invoked the natural Jewish mindset of an “assembly”; it is even possible (although not likely) that Matthew was referring to a Jewish “assembly,” i.e. the synagogue in 18:17. Yet in both Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, the designation of “church” is in reference to a new entity, of which Christ Jesus is the Founder.

Although Peter may be identified as the rock who used the keys of the kingdom in proclaiming the truth about Christ to Jews and Gentiles, Ephesians 2:11-3:11 is plain in communicating that Christ is indeed the Founder of His church. Scripture declares:

Therefore, remember... you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise...that in Himself He might make the two into one new man...fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery...which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God...This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹

Christ is the Founder of His Church

Much discussion has occurred regarding the distinction between *petros* (stone) and *petra* (rock). Many evangelicals believe that the rock upon which the church is built is not Peter, who is a mere stone, but Jesus Himself, the rock of foundation (cf. 1 Pet 2:5-8). To affirm

that Peter is the rock (Matt 16:16-19) does not deny that Jesus is the Builder of the church and that other passages, such as 1 Corinthians 3:11, teach Christ as the cornerstone. Peter was the first among equal apostles who also contributed to the church’s one foundation. For instance, all the apostles had the same authority of binding and loosing (John 20:23), as does the church universally (Matt 18:18).

Peter never claimed a position of infallibility or ultimate authority for himself (Acts 10:25-26; 1 Pet 1:1; 5:1-3). Indeed, Peter denied being the source or authority upon which the church is founded (Acts 2:21; 10:43). The teaching of Peter’s final authority and infallibility is contrary to his ministry. Immediately following his confession of faith and subsequent declaration by Christ, Peter was censured severely by the Lord (Matt 16:22-23). Furthermore, it was essential for Paul to confront Peter for hypocrisy and confusing the truth of the Gospel (Gal 2:11-14). Peter never exerted a controlling authority in the early church. He was not the exclusive authority involved in choosing a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26), the selecting of deacons (6:1-7), or leading the council at Jerusalem (15:1-33).

Moreover, the specific teaching of Scripture in other passages declares Christ as the foundation of the church (1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-7). Ephesians 2:20 refers to the church as a building, and all the New Testament apostles and prophets are identified as components of the foundation. The authority given to Peter by Jesus (Matt 16:18-19) was given to all the Apostles (Matt 18:18; John 20:23). Peter did extend the gospel message through his proclamation of Christ, and thereby incorporated Gentiles into the church at Pentecost (Acts 2), in addition to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and other Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter’s binding and loosing were related to his proclamation of the gospel message. When he proclaimed that truth, the people were loosed from their sins. If they did not hear and believe, they remained bound in their sin.

1. *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Conclusion

The nature of the church as a new entity that originated at Pentecost—founded upon the New Testament apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone (Eph 2:20)—is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture. Christ's headship over the church distinguishes the relationship of the church as unique (Eph 1:22-23). Therefore, the church should not be confused with Israel, the kingdom of God, or another phase in salvation history. The church is a distinct entity in this age, which is evident from consideration of the foundation and origin of the church. Both the church and Israel have special relationships with God, but they must be distinguished. Since the church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, the church is distinct from Israel, and cannot inherit the unconditional promises that God made with Israel. Such a fundamental understanding drastically affects how one understands the fulfillment of the biblical covenants, the blessings and curses upon Israel (cf. Deut 28-30), and the Lord's future earthly purposes.

Scripture teaches that the Old Testament promises made with national Israel will be fulfilled with a future, regenerate, national Israel. Since Israel and the church are distinct

entities, there is no sense in which the latter can fulfill promises to the former (unless, of course, one *wrongly* assumes priority of the New Testament, resulting in the meaning of the promises in their original context being changed or reinterpreted, so that they were not unconditional or eternal). God has a specific purpose for the church that is to be distinguished from His plans and purposes for regenerate national Israel. Those purposes affect the relationship of Israel to the biblical covenants, and the relationship of the church to the tribulation (seventieth week of Daniel), second coming, and millennium.

The church is never designated as Israel. Although it has been common for some Christians to reference the church as the “new Israel,” a concordance study in the New Testament will demonstrate contrariwise. In each of the 66 occurrences of the word “Israel” in the New Testament, the term always refers to the Jewish people. Both the church and Israel have special relationships with God, but they must be distinguished. The distinction between Israel and the church is the natural result of interpreting the Bible historically and grammatically (i.e. literal, plain interpretation). **S**

— Originally published in the March 2025 issue of *Midnight Call*. Used by permission.

JOHN CALVIN AND THE DEATH OF MICHAEL SERVETUS . . . *cont'd from p. 55*

to defend the act of killing Servetus.

It must be mentioned here that prior to 1550, Calvin held the position that excommunication was the most severe punishment that could be inflicted on the heretic. His earlier editions of *Institutes* did not believe execution was permitted as it might injure the reputation of the Church. But in his, *On Scandals* (1550), he entertains the idea of executing, if the heretic was given to injure society. And in his later editions of *The Institutes* (the very common one our translations come from—1559), Calvin removed the earlier limitations and seems to allow for executions. Of course, his *Defense of the Orthodox Faith* . . . spoken to above, seals his latter position.

In conclusion, this famous trial and execution is a black spot in the history of the Reformation, but it provides a landmark for future civil law. The Western world, afterward, would never be quite the same; liberty lovers disdain the case with proper opprobrium, and it acts as a foil for freedom—an example of where we never wish to return.

Persecution, especially by Roman Catholics, would continue for another century and more, but for the Protestant, this execution provided enough of a problem to call more of them to at least hesitate and consider better options for dealing with heretics in their lands. **S**

— Originally published on the *Mennonite Diaspora* blog. Used by permission.

The Anabaptist Movement Begins

Part 1 of 7

Steve Sweigart

Editor's Note: *We are grateful to be able to republish this seven-part series from Pilgrim Witness commemorating the beginning of the Anabaptist movement.*

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, a monumental event in the history of the Christian church occurred. Today, the act that ignited that happening is a commonplace event that occurs regularly among our Anabaptist churches. We who are part of an Anabaptist church mostly take this regular event for granted, rarely stopping to consider how radical this practice was at its beginning, nor the price that was paid by those who began it and those who struggled in the birth pangs of that beginning. Today, it is difficult for us to comprehend the societal upheaval that this event caused.

On January 21, 1525, a small group of radical Christians quietly gathered in the home of Felix Mantz in Zürich, Switzerland. The rulers of Zürich had decreed that all those who had not had their infants baptized were to have them baptized or face expulsion from their homes. Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz and their friends were to be satisfied with the government's decisions and to cease arguing and publicly disagreeing with their rulings. Also included was a demand to stop meeting together for Scriptural studies as they had been doing. And yet, here they were, meeting together again. After prayers for guidance and commitments to serve God faithfully at any cost, the rather impetuous Georg Blaurock earnestly requested that Conrad Grebel baptize him in true Christian faith, whereupon Conrad did so. The

others then also requested baptism, and Georg then, in turn, baptized them. "And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord. They confirmed one another for the service of the Gospel and began to preach the faith and to keep it. This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways."¹

There is little doubt that the small group that gathered on that January evening five hundred years ago did not know the spiritual harvest that fraught-laden act would germinate. From that small group would spring forth a multi-generational, transnational faith that would continue for five hundred years through various times of persecution and distress, as well as peace and prosperity. Today, their spiritual descendants are spread across the globe and number in the millions. Unlike many other religions, however, this faith was not bound to the geography of its beginning. Today, the bulk of their spiritual descendants live in North America, more than four thousand miles from Switzerland, where it all began.

What were the circumstances that brought about this monumental event? Like other events of this magnitude, this event did not happen in a vacuum. Other events and influences always culminate in bringing about such an event.

One thing must be clarified before we continue any further. The name Anabaptist means "rebaptizer". The Anabaptists rejected the authenticity of the baptism of infants and instead embraced adult believer's baptism. Since most, if not all, were "baptized" as infants,

1. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, page 45.

their adult baptism was considered a second baptism by their opponents. It was a pejorative term that was applied to them by their enemies. The Anabaptists did not appreciate it, nor did they refer to themselves as such. They believed that authentic baptism must be a choice of faith by a person who understands the commitment inherent in baptism. An infant cannot possibly make an informed choice to be baptized as a personal commitment of discipleship to follow Jesus Christ. Therefore, the infant “head-wetting” they had been given as a child could not possibly constitute baptism. And so, their adult believer's baptism was their only baptism, and it was on that basis they did not consider themselves to have been re-baptized. It is somewhat ironic that the current climate has made the mantle of “Anabaptist” more desirable than that of the names by which the sub-groups that make up the spiritual descendants of the Anabaptists have come to be known. The term “Anabaptist” was technically incorrect then and still is now. However, due to the lack of a universally accepted replacement term for Anabaptism, and with the understanding that the definitions of words and terms do evolve, we will continue to use the term Anabaptism.

In 1436, a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg invented a transformative mass communication device. Although the concept of mechanical printing was not necessarily new at the time, Gutenberg advanced the idea by utilizing a moveable type to which a screw-type press applied pressure. This dramatically improved printing, and books could be printed in increasingly higher quantities. Instead of a few books only in the hands of the wealthy, the common person could now afford to buy a few books. This broke the grip on society that the learned elites had held for centuries. It also threatened the authority of the civil government and the religious leaders of the day. This single invention and its resulting effects would help fan the flames of a political and religious revolution known today as the

Protestant Reformation. The role of Gutenberg's printing press cannot be overestimated in the reshaping of European society that happened in the time of the Reformation. We can get a glimpse of this transformation of society today when we see the effects of the mass communication abilities of our electronic age.

The first books to be printed on the Gutenberg press were Bibles. The Holy Scriptures were used primarily by the religious authorities to keep the common people in ignorance, whereby they could be controlled and manipulated. When the common folks began to buy Bibles and read them, they could understand what God required and begin to think, reason, and debate for themselves what the Scriptures really meant. And by violent means in the Peasants War and by non-violent means in adult believer's baptism, they began to throw off the chains of religious oppression that had kept them in spiritual darkness.

While the Gutenberg printing press was a primary influence in the Reformation, what was the catalyst that sparked that religious and cultural upheaval?

“On a crisp October night in 1517, the thirty-first to be exact, a black-garbed Augustinian monk made his way undetected to the castle church. The place was an insignificant medieval German town named Wittenburg. With swift, determined strokes, he nailed one of the most inflammable documents of the age to the church door, which served as the village bulletin board. Within a fortnight, all of Europe was echoing the sound of that auspicious hammer. A month later, the hardly audible taps became sledgehammer blows assailing the very citadel of the Roman Catholic Church. For the Augustinian friar of that October night was Martin Luther, and the apparently innocent manuscript was his first fusillade against Rome, the Ninety-five Theses.”²

Martin Luther, as a young man, appeared to be headed toward a promising career in the practice of law, but a “thunderstorm experience”

2. *The Anabaptist Story*, page 8.

struck such terror in him that he vowed to become a monk if God spared his life. His life was spared, and he joined the Erfurt faction of the Augustinian order. A trip to Rome to appeal a papal decision was fruitless and seemed to begin his path of disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church. Then, in 1517, Johann Tetzel began traveling around selling indulgences. Tetzel promoted the indulgences by making the claim that purchasing them would actually buy forgiveness of sins. This drove Luther to write the 95 Theses and to post them in opposition to this un-Biblical practice. It would appear that Luther intended this to be the beginning of a discussion rather than the inflammatory act of rebellion that it became. With the use of the printing press, these 95 Theses spread quickly through Germany and surrounding Europe. Eventually, that led to Luther's excommunication from the Catholic Church. The spark that Luther had struck began to burn and soon became a raging inferno that spread throughout that day's religious and political world.

Martin Luther took a more serious approach to Scripture than the Roman Catholic Church at large, but eventually, he began to compromise some of his positions. In 1523, he said in a sermon that "a separation of the church from the indifferent masses was necessary."³ However, due to opposition from the state and disappointment in the lack of spirituality from the church people around him, he never fully embraced the concept of a church separate from the world and the state.

Meanwhile, in Canton Zürich, Switzerland, a young priest named Ulrich Zwingli was appointed the people's priest (head pastor) of the Grossmünster in the city of Zürich. Zwingli had been studying the New Testament for several years and embarked on several series of German-language sermons directly from the New Testament, complete with practical applications. In 1520, he secured the permission of the Zürich City Council to preach whatever

could be substantiated from Scripture but not deviate from the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Zwingli's reliance on the city council's authority and his reluctance to go against their constraints was soon to cause a significant fracture that led to the birth of the Anabaptist movement.

Zwingli soon gained a following of enthusiastic young men who were intent on reading and studying Scripture. Among this group were some of the future leaders of the Anabaptist movement. With the influence of Zwingli's leadership and preaching, Zürich eventually withdrew from the Roman Catholic Church and established a Protestant state church in its place. Other needed reforms also began to take shape.

However, as time went on, it became obvious to Zwingli's young followers *that* he was only willing to go as far and as fast as the Zurich council would permit. Cracks in the relationship between the young "radicals" and Zwingli developed and finally broke after the Disputation of 1523. This disputation was held to determine what was to be done with the practice of the Mass. Zwingli and his "radical" group of followers agreed that the Mass was not Scriptural. The Council, however, refused to permit the abolition of the Mass. At the debate, Conrad Grebel, the leader of this group of young men, stated, "The one thing necessary before all else is the abolition of the Mass."⁴ Zwingli replied that the Council would decide how the churches should proceed. Simon Stumpf, priest of nearby Höngg, famously declared, "Master Ulrich, you have not the right to leave the decision of the question to the Council. The matter is already decided; the Spirit of God decides it."⁵

The complete break between Zwingli and what was to become the Swiss Brethren did not happen at that moment, but the groups certainly embarked on a diverging course that would only widen as time went on. Was the authority of the church only from God? Or was the state to be an authority above the church

3. *Mennonites in Europe*, page 26.

4. *Ibid*, page 34.

5. *Ibid*, pages 34-35.

to act almost in the form of a priest between God and the church? At this point, Zwingli decided to accept the authority of the state over the church. Conrad Grebel and his friends continued to insist that the church is answerable to God alone.

Between the Second Disputation and the baptismal disputations in late 1524/early 1525, Grebel and his group suggested to Zwingli that the believers (Reformation supporters) should establish a separate church composed only of committed Christians (who, they were convinced, would be most of the population). They would apparently be the only ones allowed to vote, and thus they would replace the City Council with their own people who would then enforce the Zwinglian reforms.

Zwingli rejected this suggestion, saying that the church was and always would be a mixture of wheat and tares. By late 1524, Grebel and his group progressed further in their ecclesiology, realizing that only a minority of people would ever live as committed Christians, and that they would be without political power and would not wield the sword. This minority, separatist believer's church would be kept pure by the twin practices of believers' baptism (front door) and church discipline/excommunication (back door) to guard the purity of the Lord's Supper.

That was the background of their growing insistence on believer's baptism. Believer's baptism reestablished the church afresh, as a separatist minority committed to discipleship and maintaining the purity of Christian ordinances.

The debate of 1525 regarding infant baptism resulted in the Council ordering the immediate baptizing of all babies that had not yet been baptized. The Council also decreed that "it is further decided that the mandate shall be executed, and henceforth the special schools that deal with such matters shall be discontinued and Conrad Grebel and Mantz shall be told henceforth to desist from their arguing and questioning and be satisfied with [the council's] judgments; for no more disputations

will be permitted hereafter."⁶

The die was cast. The crossroad lay immediately ahead. The young "radicals" could submit to the city council and abandon their beliefs regarding the church's authority. Alternatively, they could flee from Zürich or disobey the Council and accept the consequences, whatever they might be. They chose the latter, and Anabaptism was born with Blaurock's baptism of Grebel on January 21, 1525. Their ideal of a separated church with voluntary membership committed to following the Scriptures and living in holiness and righteousness had finally been realized.

Oh, but what a price would be paid for that fateful decision! Truly the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church as many gave their lives for the "crimes" of refusing to have their babies baptized, the act of adult believer's baptism, their refusal to use the sword, their missionary zeal to convert souls to the kingdom of Christ, their rejection of the authority of the state church and civil government in the affairs of the church, and even their high standard of holy living.

One of the distinct differences between the Anabaptists and the other churches of their day was their belief that a saving faith must produce a life of holy works; otherwise, it could not be a saving faith. Conrad Grebel wrote, "The teaching of the Lord has been given for the purpose of being put into practice."⁷ If they had kept their beliefs in their heads without actually practicing them, the authorities of that day would have had no problem with them.

We today have been richly blessed with the heritage that we have received from the Swiss Brethren who were derisively called Anabaptists. Their fateful decision at the crossroads has given us an example of faith and practice that we can learn from. May we not squander the heritage we have been given. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; *yea*, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6). **S**

— Originally published in the January 2025 issue of Pilgrim Witness. Used by permission.

6. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, page 336.

7. *Conrad Grebel, Son of Zurich*, page 118.

Human Reason vs. God's Word

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, many have chosen to disregard God's Word and instead place their trust in human reason alone – with disastrous consequences. One of the areas where we see this most clearly is in our relationship with our fellow man.

Human reason apart from God's Word has been (and still is) used to justify abuse and even murder. Serious issues like racism, abortion, and genocide are **natural results** of trusting in the shifting sands of man's fallible logic.

In the evolutionary worldview, for example, if man is merely an animal – more highly evolved, perhaps, but still an animal formed by chance – what argument is there for saying *anything* is objectively wrong?

But God's Word stands in sharp contrast

to this relative morality. The infallible, unchanging God has given us an **absolute standard** for right and wrong. In a biblical worldview, it's clear that all people are of incredible value because all are made in the image of God. Racism doesn't make sense because God's Word clearly states all people are related and "of one blood" (Acts 17:26, KJV) – descended from Noah and ultimately Adam. Abuses of and discrimination against our fellow man are condemned, and instead, we are commanded to love and care for one another.

S

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PREACHING THE WORD . . . cont'd from p. 32

the other without regard to some central theme or subject. He uses those ideas only which contribute to the purpose of his message.

Exclude Thoughts Unrelated to the Text

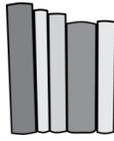
It is a very unwholesome practice to introduce into the sermon ideas, maxims, warnings, sentiments, or illustrations that are not related to the text. It tends to relegate the text to a place of secondary importance. It interferes with the progressive development of the theme. It may even incite prejudice in those hearers who feel the speaker has gone out of the way to cart in some personal pet notion.

The preacher who becomes enthusiastic over an idea remotely connected with the text is almost sure to run off on a tangent to his central theme. He is also in danger of losing sight entirely of his text. He may never get

back to his announced proposition. This tendency to expostulate on some consuming burden of the mind or on some impelling conviction of the heart imperils the total effect of the sermon. The attention of the audience may be brought to dwell on the burst of enthusiasm and miss entirely the point of the text. The congregation may be more deeply impressed with the speaker's spell of conviction than with the meaning of the Scripture.

The preaching of the Word requires the minister to hold to his text. This is not only the most logical but it is the most effective way to present the truth. If the sermon is to rise above commonplace moralizing it must remain on the high level of fidelity to the text. **S**

– Republished from the July 1946 issue of *The Sword and Trumpet*.



BOOK REVIEW

Rosalind Byler

The Art of Disagreeing

How to Keep Calm and Stay Friends in Hard Conversations

Author: Gavin Ortlund

Publisher: The Good Book Company, 2025; 95 pp.

AS GAVIN ORTLUND PROPOSES, it is possible to have profitable disagreements without being disagreeable. Yet from dinner table conversations and social media posts to political debates and church meetings, much of our ordinary dialogue exhibits contentiousness. Discussions that begin calmly and rationally can quickly disintegrate into personal insults, and more and more subjects become “off limits” between friends and family members. To our shame, Christians have by no means been exempt. *The Art of Disagreeing*, written by a pastor after a series of talks with his own congregation, provides hope for constructive disagreement.

Ortlund explains why disagreement is annoying and difficult. While all people are by nature designed for community, our natural diversity leads to differing perspectives. The consensus seems to be that we dare not discuss subjects on which we do not agree. Unfortunately, the resulting “peace” is tenuous and avoidance based. Refusing the uncomfortable process of “iron sharpening iron” (friction, contrasting textures, heat) leads to withdrawing into protective bubbles of our own incomplete perspectives.

We all like to think our positions are logical and well-reasoned. However, they often rest on subconscious emotional and social factors, making it hard to respond to disagreements in “calm, rational, dispassionate” ways; we depend rather upon “gut intuition” (15). People generally react to disagreements as “rhinos”

(aggressive, charging when threatened) or “hedgehogs” (defensive, raising prickly shields) (12-13).

Christian disagreement done poorly dishonors the gospel. It is discouraging to young believers and repellent to unbelievers. Ortlund suggests a model for healthy disagreement based on *courage* that remains steadfast without being harsh and injurious and *kindness* that shows goodwill and respect without giving way to wrong.

The next two chapters delve into *listening* and *persuasion*, techniques of beneficial disagreement. *Listening* well allows participants to identify and discuss presuppositions and worldviews underlying the surface issues. It cultivates curiosity about the other person’s experiences, social context, and possible fears or hopes. Good listeners ask clarifying questions and pay attention to details; both take energy and patience. When disagreements move to conflict, they will maintain an open, humble, merciful, and hope-filled posture toward others.

Persuasion, the more proactive element of conversation, involves winning someone over through influence rather than force of argument. It does not mean manipulation or merely imposing ideas onto others. The Apostle Paul defended himself cheerfully, respectfully, and reasonably before religious leaders and in court, managing to be diplomatic yet firm. Ortlund suggests eight persuasive principles that include five ways (cont’d on p. 37)

Preaching the Word

Hold to the Text

John R. Mumaw

IN PREVIOUS ARTICLES we have urged the importance of developing messages that are strictly biblical in content. We have come now to the consideration of problems involved in holding to the text while in the process of delivering the message. It is quite obvious, of course, that a preacher who wants his sermon to contain the Word in its delivery must hold to the text in its preparation. He must always maintain an attitude of strict fidelity to the passage of Scripture he has chosen for his text.

Be Faithful to the Text

When a preacher enters the pulpit and reads a text he has virtually promised to use it. If he has no intentions of using it as the basis of his message he ought to omit it. If such a passage is needed to introduce his subject let him say so and not pretend he is using a text when he is not. A text assumes that the sermon has evolved from it and that the message for the occasion resides in it.

There is another serious fault to be avoided. One may begin by announcing the text and with great earnestness proceed to explain its meaning. Before going very far in the delivery of the message it is possible to lose the text and to have the sermon run on with wheels taken from other sources. Worse than that the poorly assembled cart may not even carry the ideas contained in the passage. The speaker may be able to get a few “amens” to back up his contentions, but they lack the support of Scripture. A faithful preacher of the Gospel is more concerned to have his message rooted in the inspired Word than he is to have it approved by men.

To be faithful to the text requires persistent

effort to get at the heart of the passage. It is a matter of finding the distinctive element that makes it different from other portions of Scripture dealing with the same general topic. We have discussed the matter of interpretation in the foregoing article. This is mentioned to urge finding the specific theme that runs through the passage in its relation to the purpose at hand.

The preacher must be careful to use only such Scripture as expresses the conviction he entertains. That is to say, he should choose a text that has in it a message his heart wishes to give. This makes it unnecessary for him to bring into his sermon matters that are unrelated to his text.

We must always bear in mind that this kind of preaching does not ignore the importance of unity in the message. It requires a sense of progress in its development and an organization of the materials that preserves a sequence of thought. It also presupposes a definite goal, a desired outcome which must be achieved to fulfill the purpose of preaching.

Control the Sermon by the Text

To be faithful to a text is to preach what it says. We are too often caught between the jaws of inconsistency and exegetical pride by announcing what Paul “meant to say” in this text. It is not a matter of clearing up what Jesus or Peter “meant to say” but rather of communicating what they did say. We must determine what the passage does say and present that truth with divine authority.

A sermon of this kind should never be constructed apart from the text. In such messages the text degenerates into a pretext.

The outline and material are to be derived from the passage itself. When the sermon is so controlled by the text many topics are ruled out forthright. It leaves no room for discussion in the pulpit of political issues, of social reforms, of literary criticisms, of municipal projects, of national problems, of scientific discoveries, and the like. The use of a text precludes faithful adherence to the declaration of divine revelation. We must preach the Word.

In order to insure such faithfulness to the Scripture we find in the text all the essential points of the sermon. Examine the text with the view to finding the constituent parts of truth which make up the main thought. See how each part is related to the central idea and show how it finds application in conduct or belief. These essential parts of the text constitute the essential parts of the sermon.

The proper concept of the relation of the text to the sermon is essential to Bible preaching. Preaching the Word implies a unique use of Scripture in the development and delivery of a message that is definitely declaring the mind of God. Faithful adherence to the text forbids the use of a Scripture passage to enhance declarations of a national philosophy or to give Christian sanction to human opinions. When a preacher holds to the text he presents what the passage says, but it may be and should be adapted to the needs of his audience.

Develop the Text with Respect to the Audience

When we emphasize the importance of having the sermon derived from the text, we do not ignore the current needs of the people. The construction of a sermon involves two major factors, the meaning of the text and the profit to his audience. He must plan his message to meet the needs of the hour with the truth of the passage he has been led to use. The sermon is developed, therefore, in the light of both factors.

To adapt the text to the needs of the audience does not mean that we have any right to change its meaning. We are not allowed to press words

or thoughts beyond their native meaning. We are forbidden to read anything into the text. We do not want to pare down any of its meanings. It is rather drawing from the text those truths that are needed for the congregation. Certain thoughts assume special significance under given circumstances. Different emphases can be used to meet varying needs.

A text can be used to correct an evil practice if the passage deals with that problem. The truth we want to use in counteracting the wrong must rise from the text. This gives spoken admonitions and warnings the backing of Scripture. The truth then falls upon guilty hearts with the force of divine authority.

This principle of adaptation takes into consideration the specific purpose for which the text is used. The preacher looks through the text at his congregation and sees what in the passage meets the needs of his people.

Enlarge the Sermon by the Text

The suggestions offered in the preceding paragraph are not intended to invite preachers to use a mere fragment of the passage as a text. The selection of materials to meet the needs of a congregation must be made on the basis of what the text actually teaches. The sermon based upon a side thought suggested in the passage does not have the strength of exposition and interpretation. If what is in the text does not meet the need of the congregation, select another that will.

A sermon is developed from specific ideas related to broad generalities. After having discovered the general theme in the text, look for the related thoughts. It is usually best to include in the subject of the sermon some limiting or modifying element that gives a specific point to the title. That helps to unify the subsidiary points and gives more definite direction both in preparation and delivery.

The preacher should make sure that he omits nothing in the text that is of importance to the purpose of his sermon. This is not a "running" commentary, however, in which the speaker gives explanations of words and phrases, one after
(cont'd on p. 29)

John Calvin and the Death of Michael Servetus

Part 5

Christian Good

The Final Trial and Execution of Michael Servetus

The famous trial of Michael Servetus in Geneva lasted over two months. It began on August 15, 1553; it ended with the sentence of death on October 26. The trial was initiated by the Little Council of Geneva and several other officials convening in what was called the Bishop's Palace.

The first accuser was effectively a proxy of Calvin's, a man named Fontaine and Calvin's personal secretary. Upon the heretic, he launched thirty-eight accusations, all of which were drawn up by Calvin (Calvin admitted this). Most of these accusations were evidenced from Servetus' *Restitution of Christianity*. The main charges boiled down to a denial of the Trinity, aberrations concerning the person of Christ, and his denunciation of infant baptism. There were numerous smaller charges, many of which were dropped.

Servetus, who was not granted an advocate counsel (though he asked for one later), had to defend himself. Bainton tells us: "When Servetus asked for a lawyer, which the Inquisition would not have denied, he was told he could lie well enough without one."¹

Servetus defended himself with some capability and vigor; he also tried to protect himself in vagaries. He minced his words and gave evasive answers knowing his life was in the balance. He claimed to hold to a belief in the Trinity but understood it and the persons of the Godhead differently. He pointed toward the Apostles and ante-Nicene Fathers for his sources. Interestingly (and rightly), Servetus claimed to the court on the 23rd of August

that before Nicaea, there was no precedent for civil courts holding trials for heresy.

But Servetus boldly admitted to what he had said about infant baptism—that it was "a diabolical invention and infernal falsehood destructive of Christianity." This of course was extremely dangerous because it aligned him with the now hated Anabaptists. And the Code of Justinian, still extant law in most of Europe, condemned the rebaptized to death.

On the 17th and the 21st of August, Calvin himself brought charges against the lone defendant. Here the two figures, each the same age—around 44—somewhat similar (both students and products of Christian humanism), yet so different in so many ways went more or less tit for tat, quoting from a plethora of sources—early Apostles, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Justin Martyr. Seeking to correct one another with both charges and defenses, they argued on and on with issues of fine distinction but some of huge import. Servetus still held his ground, but without a lawyer, he was weakening.

The next stage of the trial began on the 23rd. The Council requested details from the charges of the French Catholics that had been brought against Servetus. On August 31, an official from Vienne arrived and communicated the edict of death that the court there had sentenced him to just after his escape. The official begged for the prisoner to be taken back to Vienne where his sentence could be meted out as described in the conviction. Servetus' sentence read: after paying a fine, he was "to be carried in a cart, together with his books on a market day through the principal

1. Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (Harper & Brothers, 1951), 92.

streets to the place of execution, and to be burnt alive by a slow fire.”

The Genevans refused to surrender their prisoner but promised to do him justice. Philip Schaff says something sad here.

“The communication from Vienne had probably the influence of stimulating the zeal of the Council for orthodoxy. They wished not to be behind the Roman Church in that respect.”²

During the first few days in September, at the instigation of the council, Calvin brought forth heretical statements from Servetus’ books to which Servetus responded twenty-four hours later. The stress, time, and intensity were apparently more than the defendant could take.

Servetus loses his composure. He turns bitter towards Calvin. He denounces Calvin’s part in the trial and arraigns him with making unbiblical charges. He claims that Calvin misunderstood and perverted his meaning; he calls Calvin a disciple of Simon Magus and an accuser.

Once more Calvin replies to Servetus, but this time with what appears to be a final trump card. He issues a twenty-three-page document of explanation and indictment signed by all fourteen ministers of Geneva. Here Calvin, more as a polished prosecuting attorney than a pastor, meets with all the claims and errors of Servetus. Point by point, he refutes and exposes him, quoting a mass of Church Fathers and Scripture references. He finally charges Servetus with seeking to “subvert all religion.”

Servetus receives this work while in prison. He immediately falls into a fit of unhinged rage and palpable fear. He responds in writing with a wrangle of marginal annotations. He repeats to the point of redundancy that Calvin is a liar and a Simon Magus. He slanders Calvin with a *mélange* of most acrid names: “an imposter, a miserable wretch, a hypocrite, a man-slayer, an ignorant calumniator.” He declares: “madness is in you when you persecute to death... whoever is not a Simon Magus is

considered a Pelagian by Calvin... All therefore who have been in Christendom are damned by Calvin... No one has entirely abolished free-will except Simon Magus... thou liest, thou liest, thou liest, thou miserable wretch.”

His written outburst did him no good. The document was sent to the court; when Calvin read it, he refused to comment. Silence here was his best weapon.

Four Protestant churches throughout the region (Zurch, Basel, Berne, Schaffhausen) were consulted to provide a sort of “jury.” Documents were sent which gave an account of the case. In the end, the churches and the court gave a unanimous verdict: “Guilty.” It was Oct 26. His final sentence read:

“We condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be bound, and led to the place of Champel, there to be fastened to a stake and burnt alive, together with thy book, as well as the one written by thy hand as the printed one, even till thy body be reduced to ashes; and thus shalt thou finish thy days to furnish an example to others who might wish to commit the like.”³

When Servetus was informed of his fate, he fell into a panic. He cried out in Spanish, “*Misericordia; misericordia*” (tr. “mercy, mercy”). William Farel had been called by Calvin to “pastor” him in his death and to implore him to repentance. He appealed with him up until the actual execution. Servetus, humbler at this point, still would not retract his convictions.

There is a touching scene that comes next. Servetus calls for Calvin and asks forgiveness for the contempt he had displayed toward him in the trial. Calvin reconciles (in a kind of way) as well, insisting his quarrel was not personal but only necessary for preserving the honor of God and protecting society against Servetus’ errors. He pleads: “Think rather of crying for mercy to God whom you have blasphemed.”

One can weep while imagining these two famous men together in the Genevan cell, the accuser and the accused, each so insistent on their convictions, but now softening toward

2. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* Vol. VIII (Eerdmans, 1910), 773.

3. qtd. in Schaff, 782. note: Schaff leaves out some specific details recorded in Bainton.

one another, the one facing an excruciating death, the other knowing that he had been the heretic's chief accuser, and he too would now live with his conscience. In another age, they might have at least coexisted.

When the final sentence was read at the City Hall on the way to Champel, Servetus insisted that if he had sinned, it was in ignorance; he went on and claimed: "I am not guilty; I have not merited death." Schaff tells us: "he smote his breast, invoked God for pardon, confessed Christ as his Saviour, and besought God to pardon his accusers."

From there he was led to the site, fastened to a stake with chain, and his body was ignited. In agony, as the flames consumed him, he cried out: "Jesus Christ, thou Son of the eternal God, have mercy upon me."

Farel, who had accompanied him up the hill and to the pyre, pleading with him all the way, said later, if only he had placed the "eternal" before the Son instead of only God, he might have been saved.

Calvin's Defense of Servetus' Death

Immediately after the execution, Calvin faced backlash. So much so, that he was forced to write a defense of his actions. Though not translated into English, this work has fallen into great disrepute. Since I can't read it (it was only published in Latin and French—Feb. 1554), I have to rely on those who can.

The work seems strained, defensive, and argues with unsound hermeneutics. Calvin entitled the defense: *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinotate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani: (a subtitle follows which is long and difficult to understand in Latin).*

Calvin's defense was encouraged by many Reformers in the area, some of whom had misgivings of the execution. Calvin's associate Beza urged him as did Bullinger from Zurich. After the work was completed, Melanchthon (Luther's associate) whole-heartedly approved,⁴ but Zurkendingin from Berne held

some reserve: and Bullinger offered some criticism of its haste and "perplexed style."

But if Calvin's style is perplexing to the reader, the writer is plenty sure of himself; it is dogmatic and assertive. Here is the infamous quotation that makes even Calvinists shudder (though you seldom see them quote it).

"Whoever shall now contend that it is unjust to put heretics and blasphemers to death will knowingly and willingly incur their very guilt. This is not laid down on human authority; it is God who speaks and prescribes a perpetual rule for the Church. It is not in vain that he banishes all those human affections which soften our hearts; that he commands paternal love and all the benevolent feelings between brothers, relations, and friends to cease; in a word that he almost deprives men of their nature in order that nothing may hinder their holy zeal. Why is so implacable a severity exacted but that we may know that God is defrauded of his honor, unless the piety that is due to him be preferred to all human duties, and that when his glory is to be asserted, humanity must be obliterated from our memories."⁵

In the work, Calvin, as do all persecutors who call themselves Christian, bases the main of his justification of killing heretics from the Old Testament Mosaic law. He assumes the Church to be a counterpart to Israel whose civil rules and punishments apply to the Church.

From the New Testament, Calvin employs the weak and unsound argument of Augustine who defended the persecution of the Donatists in the fifth century with the parable of the wedding banquet. The master tells his servants to compel them to come to the wedding feast. "Compel" here is interpreted as force and even execution. This fallacious eisegesis needs no refutation; it is senseless on its face.

Calvin also uses the account of Ananias and Sapphira and other unlikely, if not downright dishonest, arguments *(cont'd on p. 24)*

4. In 1562, Calvin credits Melanchthon as saying: "Posterity owes me (Calvin) a debt of gratitude for having purged the church of so pernicious a monster" (Schaff, *Ibid.*, 691).

5. Schaff, *Ibid.*, 791-792.



SONG OF THE MONTH

Douglas Byler

“Come, Thou Almighty King”

Wesley/Giardini

Lyrics: Although there is not complete agreement as to the authorship of this hymn, most sources agree that Charles Wesley was the poet. The words first appeared in a book of hymns published by George Whitefield in 1757, the *Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*.¹

Charles Wesley and his brother John probably need no introduction to most of the readers. As the main founders of the Methodist tradition, they were very careful to make clear doctrinal statements about what they believed, especially where it differed from the accepted ideas of the day. Although this hymn is clearly a song of praise, it is also a very clear affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, many of the hymns written by Charles and his brother John were intended to be more like “metrical theology” than merely pleasant pieces of poetry.² This hymn is no exception.

The version of “*Come, Thou Almighty King*” that is printed here is very clearly structured to bring out the theological ideas that Charles wanted to present. The first three verses treat the individuality of each member of the Godhead, recognizing them as distinct entities, while the fourth emphasizes the fact that these three Persons represent only one God. It is this God that we will “love and adore” through eternity.

Although this hymn does have a very strong doctrinal emphasis, it consists of more than dry theological statements. Charles weaves the theology into a prayer of invocation, inviting God to fill our lives in all His various forms. The hymn ends with a simple declaration of praise to this wonderful triune God.

Music: The composer of this tune lived at about the same time as Mozart, although he was born long before Mozart and lived until a few years after Mozart's death. Felice Giardini was primarily known in his lifetime as a violinist and a composer of chamber music, and only a couple of his hymns are still sung today. Although he was born in Italy, he spent much of his life in England, where he worked with his friend Johann Christian Bach, son of the well-known Johann Sebastian Bach. It was during his very successful time in England that he composed the tune to “*Come, Thou Almighty King*”. Later in his life, he returned to Italy, but financial difficulties forced him to return to England. While there, he could not regain the popularity that had made him so successful before, and he left for Russia. Unfortunately, his music did not seem to impress the Russians either. He died in Moscow at the age of eighty.³ **S**

— Republished from the February 2008 issue of *The Sword and Trumpet*.

1. www.cyberhymnal.org
2. <http://wesley.nnu.edu>
3. www.en.wikipedia.org

COME, THOU ALMIGHTY KING

ITALIAN HYMN 6.6.4.6.6.6.4.

Charles Wesley, 1757

Felice Giardini, 1769



1. Come, Thou Al - might - y King, Help us Thy name to sing,
2. Come, Thou In - car - nate Word, Gird on Thy might - y sword,
3. Come, Ho - ly Com - fort - er, Thy sa - cred wit - ness bear
4. To the great One in Three E - ter - nal prais - es be



Help us to praise: Fa - ther, all - glo - ri - ous, O'er all vic-
Our prayer at - tend: Come, and Thy peo - ple bless, And give Thy
In this glad hour: Thou who al - might - y art, Now rule in
Hence ev - er - more: His sov'-reign maj - es - ty May we in



to - ri - ous, Come, and reign o - ver us, An - cient of Days.
word suc - cess: Spir - it of ho - li - ness, On us de - scend.
ev - 'ry heart, And ne'er from us de - part, Spir - it of pow'r.
glo - ry see, And to e - ter - ni - ty Love and a - dore.



BOOK REVIEW ... cont'd from p. 30

to build trust, using clear arguments rather than emotional assertions, calmly identifying areas of discord, and helping the other person save face.

Christians must present the truth clearly and persuasively. Sometimes this will involve proactively leaning into disagreement rather

than merely beating a silent retreat. People around us are searching for meaning and truth, and "If they are not persuaded by good ideologies, they will be persuaded by bad ones" (87). Let this small, short, and simply-written primer prompt you to begin disagreeing, when it is needed, graciously and well. 