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# ORDAINED SERVANT

## Statement Of Purpose

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

## Editorial Policy

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

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

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## EDITORIAL

My purpose in this editorial is to argue *for* the one *and* the many. I refer to our view of the church and the churches. I do this because I have heard some argue that one or the other of these—either the one or the many—is more fundamental and basic than the other. It is my contention, in contrast to such arguments, that neither is more basic but that both are equally important and essential to a proper and balanced view.

It is certainly true that we read of the churches (plural) many times in the New Testament. But I maintain that it is also true that we constantly read of the church (singular), and this is not only in the sense of the whole body of those who are redeemed in Christ (although this sense is certainly prominent). In the book of Acts, for instance, we are informed that "*a great persecution arose against the church*" with the result

that “they”—that is, the members of the church—“were all scattered...” Because of this scattering “Saul...made havoc of the church” by “entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:1,3). And he did this not only in Jerusalem, but in places as far from Jerusalem as Damascus. So, over an extended geographical area there was one church and it was that one church that was forced to scatter as a result of persecution. And then, when the persecution ended, “the church<sup>1</sup> had rest throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria.”

There is nothing strange, then, in the fact that the apostles speak of ‘the church’ in its unity, just as they do of its multiplicity. They are careful to ordain elders in every church (Acts 14:23). But they also speak of office-bearers as given “to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). It is true, of course, that these office-bearers are given to particular churches. But it is just as true that they are given “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). It is in the interests of “the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” that these gifts are given, and it is by means of “every part” doing its share that there is “growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (v. 16). What is this but to say that the two are interdependent—the one and the many.

Is this not exactly what we see in Acts 15? There was trouble in Antioch. Efforts to settle it were to no avail. What then? The particular church of Antioch “determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem—to the apostles

and elders—about this question” (Acts 15:2). Immediately after this we read that they were “sent on their way by the church” (in Antioch) and “received by the church” (in Jerusalem). In other words, both churches could be called “the church!” And the reason is plain: there are many churches and yet—at the same time—one church. Therefore both of these churches can be properly called *the church* because neither exists without the other—the one and the many, and the one in the many. And it is our conviction that we must always resist any attempt to make either one of these two dominant at the expense of the other.

This, in our humble opinion, is what congregationalism does. It places such undo emphasis upon the many—the particular congregations—that it loses the biblical balance between the one and the many. This is seen in the attempt to make the aspect of church government revealed in Acts 15 an elective—something we can have if we want to, but something that is not essential to the well-being of the churches. We are fully persuaded, however, that this event (recorded in Acts 15) was no mere accident, or historical curiosity. It took place under the sovereign direction of Christ, the risen head of the church, and it is written for our admonition. It is there to show us what we ought to do in similar circumstances. True, there is no mandate in Acts 15 for yearly Synods or Assemblies. We know of sound churches that only convene their Synods every third year, instead of annually. Frequency is not the issue. The issue is whether there ought to be such assemblies (as our Westminster Confession affirms), not *how often* they should meet..

It is certainly true, however, that there is also something to be learned from the fact that such assemblies were *not* frequent in the apostolic period. It is our opinion that it might be a good thing for the modern church to reconsider this matter. It would seem to us that there might have been more reason for frequent assemblies in ancient times than there is today because of the difficulty they had in communicating with each other—a difficulty largely overcome today. On the other side, of course, it could be argued that with

<sup>1</sup> “The range and age of the witnesses which read the singular number are superior to those that read the plural. The singular can hardly be a scribal modification in the interest of expressing the idea of the unity of the church, for in that case we should have expected similar modifications in 15:41 and 16:5, where there is no doubt that the plural number (ἐκκλησία) is the original text. More probably the singular number here has been altered to the plural in order to conform to the two later passages.” From *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, by Bruce M. Metzger, p. 367.

the increasing tempo and complexity of modern life we face such an array of problems that we can hardly escape the need for frequent assemblies. Be this as it may, one thing is certain: we need to be on our guard against the other danger—the danger of an over-emphasis upon the one at the expense of the many.

Our Confession says ***“it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church”*** (XXXI, 1, my emphasis). What is this but to say that General Assemblies should never be looked upon as inevitable, annual events? Who is to say that we Orthodox Presbyterians must meet, every year, as we have done in the past? The officers of the previous Assembly? The members of standing committees? The general secretaries, or the stated clerk? No, not according to our confession. There should

be a General Assembly only when and if it is honestly the conviction of the teaching and ruling elders of the “particular churches” that such an Assembly is needed, and that they believe it will serve to promote the upbuilding of the church to convene it.

There are some, today, who keep saying Presbyterian church polity is inherently hierarchical—and that Reformed church polity is inherently anti-hierarchical. We think the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over the past six decades—as contrasted with that of such churches as the Gereformeerde Kerken in Holland, and the Christian Reformed Church in America—is a sufficient refutation of this erroneous allegation. But that does not at all deny that the danger of hierarchy is real. There is no automatic guarantee that such a calamity will not overtake us merely because we have “committees” instead of “boards.”

It is my hope that the concern expressed here will spark your interest, and perhaps your contribution to *Ordained Servant*.

**“The local congregation is indeed the church of Christ, but so are all the assemblies of God’s people... That each congregation should be entirely independent in its government is incompatible with the oneness of the body of Christ. ‘There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye were called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all’ (Eph. 4:4-6). The co-ordination and subordination exemplified in presbyterian churches are the expression in the sphere of government of this unity. In any case, there must be some way of bringing this unity to expression. And the only feasible way is that the whole church should be governed by a presbuterion that will be as widely representative as the church itself. All that is absolutely essential in terms of the New Testament is that government be as inclusive as the whole body. The particular ways of applying this ecumenity of government are but the expedients of Christian prudence in accord with the general principles of the word.” — Professor John Murray**

# “Theonomy: What have we learned?”

by

**Rev. John Haverland**

Theological controversy can bring out the best and the worst in the Church. If handled correctly it will sharpen our understanding of the message of the Scriptures and its application to our contemporary world. The Church can emerge from a period of theological discussion and debate with a much greater clarity on the issue at hand. However, if badly handled, contention over a point of doctrine can be destructive and harmful for the Church. It can lead to unnecessary division and ill-feeling between brothers and sisters in both blood families and the family of God.

## INTRODUCTION

In New Zealand the debate over theonomy has seen both of the above. When the issue first arose there was polarization and misunderstanding. But as the denomination settled down to make a thorough study of the matter the air cleared and there was a greater measure of clarity and unity.

The German philosopher Hegel spoke scathingly of our ability to learn from the past when he said, ‘The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history’. Unfortunately that is too often true. Many of us are not familiar enough with the past to learn the lessons of history. We are usually so busy with the present and so concerned about the future that we don’t have the time (or should we say, we don’t make the time) to look back at what has happened.

Yet there are important lessons to be gained from a study of history. This is why I have entitled this essay: Theonomy: What Have We Learned? For it is my hope and prayer that as Churches we may have learned and grown through our discussion of this issue, not only about the Scriptures, but also about how to handle points of disagreement. This has certainly been so for me and I know for many others in the Church.

This chapter traces the general origins of the theonomy movement, how these ideas came to New Zealand and a general definition of ‘theonomy’. I then examine some of the issues this raises: Biblical, theological and confessional. A key element of theonomy is the application of Biblical law by the civil magistrate. In view of this we also need to look

at the relationship between the Church and the State. I conclude with some general observations.

## BACKGROUND

The father of the theonomy movement is Rousas John Rushdoony. He was raised in a minister’s family, his father serving in the Presbyterian Church in Armenia. The family fled to the United States during World War I to escape from the Turks who had turned on the Armenians. Rousas Rushdoony was born in the US and as a child read the Old Testament constantly. Following in his father’s footsteps he too became a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He led mission work among the Chinese-Americans and the American Indians. Very influential on his thinking were the writings of Cornelius Van Til, as was reflected in the publication of *By What Standard* a defense of Van Til’s philosophy.

About this time he led some of the members of his Church out of the Presbyterian Church into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He stepped up his lecturing around the country and also began to write more. Later he left the pastoral ministry to spend more time on these areas. In October 1965 he sent out the first issue of the Chalcidon Report a newsletter which was designed to promote the Christian Reconstruction of society according to Biblical law. In 1970 he left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup>

Rushdoony’s thinking greatly influenced two men who have become leading proponents of theonomy. One was Gary North who completed a doctorate in economics and has written prolifically on a Christian approach to that subject. The other was Greg Bahnsen, who studied at Westminster Theological Seminary and then completed a doctorate in philosophy. In 1976 Bahnsen took up a position lecturing in apologetics and ethics at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He rewrote and expanded his Westminster Masters thesis into his main work, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* which was published in 1977.

While teaching at the Reformed Theological Seminary Bahnsen strongly influenced the thinking of a number of students. They included David Chilton and James Jordan, both of whom later became

part of the Chalcedon organization.

Bahnsen's tenure at the Reformed Theological Seminary was marked by controversy over his theonomic views. Some sided with him as ardent supporters, others opposed him. During 1978 this debate became intense among both students and faculty. In view of this tension the Seminary Board offered Bahnsen a year's paid leave, at the end of which his contract expired. No grounds were cited for this decision.<sup>2</sup>

#### THEONOMY IN NEW ZEALAND

Among the students studying at the Reformed Theological Seminary at this time were Richard Flinn, Bruce Hoyt, Jack Sawyer and Dick VanderVecht. A native New Zealander with a Baptist and Navigator background, Richard Flinn was attending the Reformed Theological Seminary to gain a theological training for the ministry. While there he 'converted' to a Calvinist and paedo-Baptist position. On returning to New Zealand he sought entry into the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, served a vicariate in Tokoroa/Kerepehi and was then appointed as a Home Missionary on the North Shore in 1979. The Church was instituted in April of 1980.

Bruce Hoyt was a pastor in an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Tennessee, and was then brought to New Zealand in 1981 by the Reformed Church of the North Shore. He was subsequently called by the Silverstream Congregation to work as a Home Missionary in Masterton.

Dick VanderVecht completed his study at the Reformed Theological Seminary and was then called by the Reformed Church of Penguin, Tasmania, Australia. After serving there six years he was called to be the pastor of the Reformed Church of Avondale in 1983.

Jack Sawyer left the Reformed Theological Seminary following Bahnsen's departure, and continued his study at Westminster Seminary. He was called to serve the Reformed Church of Silverstream in 1984 following the departure of Rev. G. I. Williamson. So these four men, who had some familiarity with the theonomy debate in America, found themselves in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

In his ministry on the North Shore Richard Flinn devoted himself to preaching, church planting and the promotion of the Reformed faith. He did all this with great energy, zeal and ability. Through his study at the Reformed Theological Seminary and his own reading he had become a convinced adher-

ent of the theonomic position. In the course of his ministry he presented his views on this matter in an articulate and forceful manner through sermons, writings and lectures in camps and conferences. Many in the North Shore congregation became sympathetic to his views.

Two of his major goals were to challenge thoughtful Christians to think more deeply and to apply the Christian faith to all of life. The North Shore congregation sought to pursue these goals by means of an extensive tape library (Issacharian Tapes), by importing and selling serious Christian books (Issacharian Books) and through a monthly newsletter entitled the Issacharian Report.<sup>3</sup> Prominent among the many topics covered in these Issacharian Ministries were the ideas of theonomy

Bruce Hoyt and Jack Sawyer also held to some of the basic tenets of theonomy but it was primarily Richard Flinn's speaking ministry and the various Issacharian ventures of the North Shore that disseminated the theonomy viewpoint through the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

As it had done in the USA the issue began to generate a great deal of discussion and some controversy in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Many in the Church felt threatened and uncomfortable with these new ideas. However, debate centered in the Auckland presbytery where the most enthusiastic exponents of theonomy were.

By 1983 there was so much tension over this issue in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand that the Synod meeting that year decided that the matter should be looked at more closely. Synod agreed 'that a committee be instituted to study the ethical teaching commonly known as theonomy in order to: (a) attempt to define what it is and, (b) determine whether such views are consistent with Scripture and Confessions'.<sup>4</sup>

This committee did not meet in the inter-synodical period and so could not present a report to the next Synod. Instead the Synod meeting in 1986 in Mangere received three papers by the members of the committee (i.e. Rev. Richard Flinn, Mr. Martin Kuitert, Rev. Hone Phillips) giving their own personal views on the issue. Synod decided 'to receive the information as an interim study and to appoint a committee with a similar mandate to carry on the work'.<sup>5</sup>

That committee was made up of Rev. John Haverland (Bucklands Beach - Convener and Reporter), Rev. Dick VanderVecht (Avondale - Reporter), Rev. Richard Flinn (North Shore), Mr. Martin Kuitert (Avondale). Due to various circumstances

Richard Flinn and Martin Kuitert could not continue on the committee. Their places were taken by Rev. Michael Flinn (Pukekohe) and Rev. William Wiersma (Hamilton). Rev. John Steenhof (North Shore) also served on the committee for a brief time. This meant that the committee included most of the ministers in the Auckland Presbytery (allowing for the coming and goings that took place during the inter-synodical period). This allowed for a good representation of viewpoint, a broad basis for discussion and so a greater possibility of achieving a consensus in the Church. Rev. Neil Benfell (Wellington) and Rev. Dirk Van Garderen (Bishopdale) served as correspondence members in the Wellington and Christchurch Presbyteries respectively.

The whole process of preparing the report proved to be very time consuming. A lot of time was spent in discussion. Yet those involved found the time well spent. The discussion and study deepened their own grasp of the Scriptures and also drew them closer together as pastors. The clarity and understanding that came out of these meetings took much of the heat out of the debate and brought about a greater unity both within the committee and in the wider Church.

When the report was presented to the 1989 Synod meeting in Silverstream, Synod decided to 'endorse the hermeneutical principles and conclusions of the report, to publish the report separately from the Acts of Synod and circulate it to the Churches for information and as pastoral guidance on this issue, and to dismiss the committee with heartfelt thanks for their work'.<sup>6</sup>

### WHAT IS THEONOMY?<sup>7</sup>

The term theonomy is difficult to define because it means so many things to so many different people. The word simply means God's/law (Theos = God, nomos = law). All Reformed believers could be described as being theonomists in a broad sense in that all Reformed believers believe that God's law is authoritative for all of life.

Yet in the debate outlined above, the word has taken on a narrower reference. In this technical sense theonomy holds that God's word is authoritative over all areas of life, that within Scripture we should presume continuity between Old and New Testament principles and regulations until God's revelation tells us otherwise, and that therefore the Old Testament law offers us a mode for sociopolitical reconstruction in our day, and that this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate.<sup>8</sup> One of the key features of this definition is the presumed continu-

ity of all of Old Testament law unless the New Testament specifically abrogates that law. The other significant emphasis is that the Old Testament law provides us with a model for social and political structures today. This conviction prompts theonomists to seek the reconstruction of the family, church and state. They seek to bring these structures into conformity to God's law. In the US this goal is promoted through various organizations such as the Christian Chalcedon Foundation, The Institute for Christian Economics and Geneva Ministries. The Reconstruction Movement includes such men as Rousas J. Rushdoony, Gary North, Greg Bahnsen, David Chilton, James Jordan, George Grant and Ray Sutton.

Yet we should not assume that those holding to theonomy and pursuing the reconstruction of society form a unified body. Theonomists are not agreed on the precise interpretation of Old Testament law, nor on some other matters, notably ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church. These often significant differences of interpretation amongst the proponents of theonomy make the movement difficult to define and evaluate.

### MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

A real difficulty in understanding the whole movement arises from the tendency of some theonomists to overstate their case in order to make a point. The movement has also been accused of a 'censorious mind-set'<sup>9</sup> and some proponents have certainly used extreme and even harsh language.

On the other side of the fence some opponents of theonomy have been too quick to jump to conclusions about what theonomy does or does not mean. For instance, some have thought that a concern for the detail of the law would lead to a works righteousness, a conclusion that does not necessarily follow. In others the fear of new ideas has prompted a kneejerk reaction rather than a carefully thought-out response. And for still others the lack of a considered alternative to the theonomy position made them feel vulnerable and therefore defensive.

In an attempt to clear away misunderstandings and misconceptions, the study committee discussed and defined areas of agreement with respect to the law. These may be summarized as follows:

1. We are saved by grace through faith and not by works of the law.
2. There is no conflict between law and love.
3. There is no conflict between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law.
4. All believers should be concerned to know and

obey the law of God.

5. All believers should have a concern to study the details of God's law, both in the Old and New Testament.

6. All believers should seek to apply God's law in their own lives and in society.

7. The ceremonial and sacrificial laws were fulfilled in Christ and no longer need to be practiced by the New Testament believer.

### CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES

Having said this we now turn our attention to the question that lies at the heart of the theonomy debate: The relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Much of the discussion in relation to theonomy centers on the continuities and discontinuities between the Testaments. Reformed theology has always assumed a continuity between the Old and New Covenants. This is the heart of covenant theology over against a dispensational understanding of the Bible. The real issue in relation to theonomy is how this works out in terms of Old Testament law.

Bahnsen argues for 'the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail'. Yet this puts his case too strongly. This type of overstatement has muddied the waters and hampered a proper understanding of the issues. A close reading of his book reveals that many of the details of the law do not carry through. His statement, therefore, needs careful qualification.

In defining the way the Old Testament law carries through we should 'presume continuity between the ethical principles of the Old Testament and those of the New'.<sup>10</sup> The key word here is the word principles. While the principles continue through, many of the details do not.

The Committee spent a lot of time trying to define just which details did not continue and eventually agreed that most of the aspects of the Old Covenant which are not authoritative for today could be covered under the following:

1. Localized Imperative: These are the commands God gave to Israel for specified use in a concrete situation. For instance, the command to go to war and gain the land of Canaan by the sword.

2. Cultural Details: Cultural details are mentioned in many of God's laws so as to illustrate the moral principle it required. What is of permanent authority is the principle and not the cultural detail used to illustrate it. This means that we are not bound to the literal wording of the Old Testament case laws.

3. Administrative Details: Certain administra-

tive details are not normative for today. For instance, the type of government, the method of tax collection, the location of the capital.

4. Typology: These Old Testament types were fulfilled by being replaced with the realities they typified. The laws God gave Israel included ceremonies and symbols that prefigured the graces, actions, suffering and benefits of Christ, as well as containing various moral instructions. These ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament 'so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians; yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion'.<sup>11</sup>

5. Geographical Changes: Israel as a nation was promised the land of Canaan and they lived as a political body within the borders of their land. However, the people of God in the Church inherit the whole world as it is redeemed by Christ. This means that laws relating to the political and geographical organization and administration of Israel, are no longer applicable to the Church. For instance, the division of the land according to tribal and family groups; cities of refuge; the levirate institution.

The committee felt comfortable affirming the continuity of the principles of Old Testament law while laying aside the details described above. Yet they were conscious that to interpret the Old Testament law, distill the principles out of all the detail and then make a modern day application is not a simple matter. Much careful exegetical and interpretative work needs to take place if we are to understand the central principles of God's law and their application to our situation.

### THEONOMY AND THE CONFESSIONS

Of the four Confessions and Catechisms of the Church it is the Westminster Confession that deals most explicitly with the issue of Old Testament law. Chapter XIX makes various statements about the Law of God, distinguishing between the moral law which was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in ten commandments (Art ii) and the ceremonial laws which God gave to the people of Israel, all of which are now abrogated under the New Testament (Art iii).

Article iv goes on to say: 'To them also (i.e. Israel), as a body politick, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require'.

Here the Westminster Confession is upholding the continuity of the general principle of Old Testament law (the general equity). Yet it also recognizes

that there are significant discontinuities in that 'sundry judicial laws' have 'expired together with the state of that people'. These specific judicial details no longer bind the New Testament believer.

In adopting the report on theonomy the Reformed Churches of New Zealand agreed that to speak of the continuity of the principles of Old Testament law was entirely scriptural and that this was in harmony with the confessions of the Churches. However, this does not endorse the views of all theonomists as being in harmony with the confessions. As stated earlier there are significant differences of interpretation and emphasis among those espousing theonomy. Not all would agree with the formulation arrived at in the report, nor do all agree with the formulation of the Westminster assembly. For instance R. J. Rushdoony accused the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chap XIX, Art iv, of being 'nonsense'.<sup>12</sup>

In view of this divergence of viewpoint among theonomists the committee concluded that it was 'not possible to make a blanket endorsement or denial of theonomy with respect to the confessions'.<sup>13</sup> We believed the conclusions reached in the report to be in harmony with both Scripture and Confessions yet we could not say this of all the various shades of theonomic opinion.

### THEONOMY, CHURCH AND STATE

One of the important issues in a discussion of theonomy concerns the relationship between church and state and the responsibility of the civil magistrate with respect to God's law.

Bahnsen regards Old Testament Israel as a theocracy in the sense that Israel was a country under the moral rule of God. He contends that all nations today should be under the moral rule of God except that in the New Testament this has become the moral rule of Christ—a Christocracy. He speaks of 'the Older Testament Theocracy becoming in the New Testament a Christocracy with international boundaries'.<sup>14</sup>

He then argues that the magistrate today 'is required by God's abiding law to enforce justice and righteousness in social affairs'.<sup>15</sup> In line with his general thesis he says: 'Every detail of God's law has abiding validity from the time of Christ's advent to the time of his return... Just as the magistrate of the Old Testament has divine imperatives which he was responsible to carry out, so also magistrates in the era of the New Testament are under obligation to those commands in the Book of the Law which apply to civil affairs and social penology... Because the penal sanctions of God's law are imperatives deliv-

ered with divine authority and approval the follower of Christ should teach that the civil magistrate is yet under moral obligation to enforce the law of God in its social aspect'.<sup>16</sup>

In light of the complexity of this subject it is important to review the major views that have been held in history regarding the relationship between the Church and the State.

Historically the Roman Catholic Church has held that the State should be subordinate to the Church. This view, which was dominant throughout the Middle Ages, maintained that the Church was the supreme power and that the civil ruler is the servant of the Church. The Church, and especially the Pope as head of the Church, should have authority and control in civil matters.

The Erastian view holds that the Church ought to be subordinate to the State. The Church is regarded as being part of the State with ministers of the Church being officials of the State. Under this view the Church has no right to bar people from the Lord's Table nor any right to excommunicate anyone. This view began to be influential following the establishment of a state religion by the Emperor Constantine. It gained ground in England and Scotland following the Reformation and is held today by Anglicans in Britain and the Lutherans in Scandinavia.

Those holding the Voluntary view believe that the Church and State should be entirely separate. Civil rulers should not use their influence or power to interfere in religious matters, nor should they use their position to promote the cause of the Church or kingdom of Christ. This was the view of the Anabaptists after the Reformation. It is advocated today under the concept of pluralism; i.e. we live in a pluralistic world with many different opinions. The State should not promote any one view or religion. This view of the relationship of Church and State has until recently dominated the evangelical Church in the West.

None of these views do justice to the Biblical teaching regarding the relationship between the Church and State. In placing the State under the power of the Church the Roman Catholic view does not give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but rather takes away from the civil authorities what rightfully belongs to them. In subordinating the Church to the state the Erastian view does not give to God what is God's. The Voluntary view denies the sovereignty of God over the affairs of all people in the world.

Historically Reformed and Presbyterian people have argued that the Church and State are essentially different and rightfully independent authorities. They should be kept distinct and separate from

each other. Yet ‘it is both possible and right for the Church and State to meet in amicable alliance, for the purpose of friendly co-operation’.<sup>17</sup> Most Reformed and Presbyterian theologians have held that civil rulers have an obligation ‘to aim at the promotion of the honor of God, the welfare of true religion, and the prosperity of the church of Christ’.<sup>18</sup> This is the view of the Reformed Confessions.<sup>19</sup>

This view ‘gives to God what is God’s in the Church, and to Caesar what is Caesar’s in the State, while also acknowledging the supreme sovereignty of God over all the affairs of men and the obligation of all men to keep his law’.<sup>20</sup>

Comparing Bahnsen’s views with the historic Reformed view it is clear that there is a basic agreement about the relationship between Church and State. ‘The debate does not centre around whether or not the magistrate should apply God’s law, but to what extent God’s law applies in its detail’.<sup>21</sup>

The committee believed it was both beyond their mandate and their ability, to offer a definitive solution to a problem that has exercised the minds of able Reformed theologians and thinkers through the centuries. Instead they formulated statements regarding the Church, the State and God’s law which they could all agree with. The areas of agreement are as follows.

1. That the Church and State are separate and distinct authorities both instituted by God.

2. That the authority of the Church is spiritual (i.e. the keys of the kingdom. Cf Heidelberg Catechism Q 84 & 85), being confined to the exercise of spiritual discipline. The ultimate exercise of that discipline is excommunication.

3. That the authority of the State is physical (i.e. the power of the sword, Rom. 13:4). The State may use physical means to enforce obedience to the law. Its ultimate exercise of that authority is the use of capital punishment. The sphere of its authority is that of justice. It must punish social violations of God’s law. The State is not an agent of evangelism and must not use its power to that end.

4. That civil authorities are set up by God and are responsible to Him. To oppose them is to oppose God (Rom. 13:2). They have a duty to rule according to the law of God. God’s law is the ultimate standard for all mankind.

5. That all societies should honor God and obey His law, and that we ought to pray and work towards this as a salt and light in society irrespective of how far we expect to see this realized before the return of Christ.

6. That the means the Church must use in promoting godliness and righteousness in the nation is the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Only

through the working of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ will people begin to live according to His laws (Rom. 8:1-14). The Church should speak prophetically to our nation about injustices and evils in society. Christians should seek to persuade men and women in society from Scripture by reason and argument of the value and good sense of God’s laws.

These statements did not answer all the questions regarding the relationship between Church and State and the application of God’s law to our present society. Yet it was hoped that these statements would draw the Church together on this issue and give us sufficient common ground as a Church to interact with the world and the State concerning God’s law.

### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter the study of history can be extremely valuable. There are lessons to be learned from what has happened in the past.

Having looked at the theonomy issue in New Zealand one of the first observations we could make is that there is nothing new under the sun. Long ago the writer of Ecclesiastes reminded us of this (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Through all the centuries of Church history and theological debate Christians have discussed the relationship between the Testaments, the respective roles of the Church and State, and the application of God’s law to society at large. In the 17th century in particular the English puritans invested a great deal of time and energy unto discussions on God’s law. Our own study in New Zealand in the 20th century is but a small and humble contribution to the ongoing work of the Church in coming to understand God’s word and its application to the contemporary world.

We also need to say that even after all this discussion the last word has not been said. As we came to the conclusion of our report we had to confess that areas of disagreement still remained. The two principal matters were those of the penal sanctions of the Old Testament law and eschatology (between the a-millennial and post-millennial positions).

Perhaps it is a good thing to have points of theology that need further discussion. It will keep us from pride—from the conceit that we have mastered everything. It should also keep us from complacency—from sitting back as though there was nothing more to think about. Differences of opinion will force us to continue to study and search the Scriptures.

This theological debate reinforced some lessons in basic principles of communication. In any conver-

sation, including theological discussion, there are the dangers of jumping to conclusions; of being defensive; and of labeling our opponents and so dismissing them. No one was completely free of these errors in the discussions on theonomy. Yet thankfully, as we continued to reflect on the issues we were able to sit down together in meaningful conversations, listening carefully, making every effort to understand what the other person was saying.

A further lesson to be learned concerns the sufficiency of the Scriptures. In the Bible God has given us all we need for doctrine and life. This is one of the great foundation stones of Reformed belief *Sola Scriptura*—the Scriptures Alone. The Reformed Churches of New Zealand have expressed that belief in their motto: ‘Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Ps. 119:105). It is our conviction that in the Scriptures God has revealed all we need to know in order to live with Him and with each other in this world.

A final lesson concerns these Scriptures and the way we read them. The Reformation established the principle that all believers ought to be able to read the Bible for themselves and be able to understand its basic message. However this does not mean that Christians are to interpret the Bible in isolation from each other. No, it is ‘together with all the saints’ that we are to grasp the full extent of its message about the love of Christ. This is why God has put us together in the Church and linked us together as Churches—so that together we may explore the meaning of God’s word and its relevance to our lives, our society and our world.

The Church’s discussion regarding theonomy is part of this exploration. It is a discussion that needs to go on as we sit together around an open Bible with listening ears, alert minds and hearts of faith.

**Footnotes:**

1. The above information on Rushdoony was taken from David K. Watson, *The Christian Reconstruction/Theonomy Movement* (Part 1,) *The Outlook*, September 1988, pp. 14-15.
2. David K. Watson, *The Christian Reconstruction/Theonomy Movement* (Part 2,) *The Outlook*, October 1988, p. 11.
3. The term *Issacharian* comes from the description of warriors from the tribe of Issachar who joined David after he had become King: Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. 1 Chronicles 12:32
4. Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, August 1989, Minutes, Art. 128.

5. *Ibid.*, Art. 82.
6. *Ibid.*, Art. 36.
7. Most of the material in the rest of this chapter follows the substance of the Report on Theonomy to the 1989 Synod, Acts of Synod, Report 1, section 4-1 and 4-12.
8. G. Bahnsen, *Chantry on Law and Reconstruction*, A mimeographed essay.
9. David K. Watson, *The Christian Reconstruction/Theonomy Movement*, *The Outlook*, November, 1988. p. 12.
10. Report, *ibid.*, section 4-4.
11. *Belgic Confession*, Art. 25.
12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 551.
13. Report, *ibid.*, section 4-11.
14. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, New Jersey, The Craig Press, 1979, p. 432.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 432.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318. This emphasis on the relevance of penal sanctions for a post-millennial society has been the most controversial point of theonomy and has aroused the strongest feelings against the movement.
17. Bannerman, James, *The Church of Christ*, Vol. 1, London, Banner of Truth, 1980, p. 96.
18. Cunningham, William, *Historical Theology*, Vol. 2, London, Banner of Truth, 1960, p. 560.
19. See *Belgic Confession*, Art. 36; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 23, Art. iii.
20. Report, *ibid.*, section 4-9.
21. *Ibid.*, section 4-10.

**This material was originally written as a chapter for a book entitled *Trust and Obey: A forty year history of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*, which was published recently, and is used by permission. Rev. John Haverland is a son of the original Christchurch congregation of the Reformed Churches. He studied at the Reformed Theological College in Australia and has served two congregations in New Zealand: Bucklands Beach, a suburb of Auckland, and Bishopdale, in the city of Christchurch.**

# “An Open Letter to a New Pastor in His First Charge”

by

Rev. Arthur Fox

My Dear Brother,

May the Lord of the Church bless and keep you as you begin your service to him! You have indeed been given the greatest privilege ever granted to mortal man, the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world and the whole counsel of God to his Church. It is my privilege to call you a fellow-labourer for the Lord.

I hope you do not find it too bold for me to write you as I do. After all, as of this date I am only in my sixth year of ministry and only my fifth year of active service in the Pastorate. But perhaps my experience can be of some help to you, as I share what little insight I have. What I hope to accomplish is to give you some suggestions that I wish I had followed in my first charge. I lay them before you, not as one who knows it all but as one who has learned these things through trial and much error. Some things will seem painfully obvious, but don't dismiss them! I would have, and in some cases did to my own hurt and that of the dear people of God in that first charge. But God is kind and able to use man's foolishness to his own glory and the good of his people. So I give you the following counsels:

**1. Study the Scriptures to see what your job actually is:** Look up in a concordance and then study each passage that uses the terms shepherd, pastor, preach, teach, elder, overseer, bishop, prophet. If you do you will find, I think, that your first task is to feed God's people the Word of God. Yes, you are to preach the Gospel and seek the salvation of the lost, but if you do not feed the saved they will not remain healthy sheep for long. You must do both. That is why Paul says, in 2 Timothy 4:1-3, *“I charge [thee] therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.”* Paul means for his young colleague to preach the Word. In fact you

could not do better than to set aside a whole day early in the first month of your work in which you will fast and prayerfully study the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus and *take notes!!!* You need a good eyeful of what God expects you to do. That will set the tone for the rest of your ministry.

The second thing you will find your job entails is prayer (Acts 6.4): prayer for yourself, your family, your fellow elders, your deacons, your trustees, the congregation, the direction of the Church, the work of the Holy Spirit as you preach, and you get the idea! Set up a prayer list containing every member of the congregation, your family, and every other concern of the Church. Pray especially for your fellow officers and their families.

In point of fact, your whole ministry, your whole job is defined by these two activities—the ministry of the Word of God and Prayer. “What about Session meetings and Presbytery and visitation and.....?” Listen, dear brother, these are all things that flow out of the ministry of the Word of God and Prayer, and if they don't you aren't doing them right!! How can you serve Christ without knowing what he has to say (The Word) and how can you preach or teach or lead your elders without the Word of God and Prayer? I urge you to set aside all day Tuesday and every morning you can in your work week as time in the study for these two items.

And please remember that you have no apology to give for preaching the Word with authority. You are Christ's mouthpiece, his prophet, not in the sense that you receive direct revelation, but in the sense that you are telling God's people what God says and they are responsible to hear you and obey what God says through you! You speak for Christ.

**2. Develop an unbreakable bond with your fellow elders:** You are part of a session and if you don't know what that means just ask the other members of the session. Make it a rule from the very start that you will not do anything with regard to the Church, not even re-arrange your office, without at least discussing it with one elder if not the whole session. Don't

allow anything to leave your typewriter/printer to the public (except for sermons) without the session at least approving it in advance, better yet give each man a copy and sit on the letter till you get feedback! Ask permission to attend conferences, ask permission for vacation dates and don't hide the fact that you will be absent during that yearly Church groundhog day marathon if you are on vacation at that time! Most Session members are too gracious to say no to some of your desires, so tell them what the pros and cons of their saying yes will be. Learn to protect yourself by having the ability to say, "The Session agrees with what I am doing."

Be sure to ask the Session on a regular basis how you are doing. Ask them to be critical of your preaching and pastoral work. Ask for suggestions as to how you can preach more effectively, what people need to hear, if they have heard any criticisms from the congregation—no matter how slight! You may need to encourage them to speak up, for the godly ruling elder loves his pastor too much to hurt his feelings—tell them you want your feelings hurt!!! Tell them not to spare you, for in being hard on you in the Session meeting, they will be extending your time of useful service to the Church. And then, use whatever they tell you if you can possibly do so, no matter if it seems as trivial as changing the way you pronounce a Biblical name. If once they see you are open to constructive criticism they will be very willing to continue helping you and you will find your burden much lighter.

Above all else, rid yourself of the notion, here and now, that you are in charge and the success of your pastorate is on your shoulders alone. It is not. You are part of a Session—act like a part of your Session. Tell them often how much you appreciate them. Send them notes saying so, and don't forget to regularly verbalize appreciation to their wives who sit alone while their husband does the work of an elder.

**3. Preach the Word:** Pretty obvious, right? Well what I mean is this: major in preaching extended portions of Scripture. Take a Psalm or two, or an epistle, or the Sermon on the Mount, or an historical book of the Bible and preach it from start to finish. It doesn't matter if you go verse by verse or chapter by chapter—just be sure you go thought by thought! Do this for one service. At the other service (if you have one) use the Westminster Shorter Catechism as

your schedule of preaching and preach it doctrine by doctrine—don't preach the Catechism but use the proof texts the Catechism gives or related texts and feed your people the whole counsel of God for as long as it takes to get through it all. I have just completed one year here at this Church and I am up to question 30. Obviously I took important things, like God's attributes, one at a time. Other questions can be combined.

What is the point of all of this? Point one is that in our day many are biblically illiterate and if you don't show them how to study the Bible accurately and carefully, one book at a time, one doctrine at a time, they will never learn or worse yet, they will do a faulty job on their own or learn faulty doctrine from someone else and fall into serious error and possibly into sin. It is that serious. Point two is that you don't know as much about the Bible and Reformed Doctrine as you think you do and this will ensure you stay a few steps ahead of most of your people. Will they get bored? Only if they have no love for God's Word!!! And that will give you a counseling ministry—do you see how this sets up visitation opportunities? It should also save you some counseling time as the Holy Spirit applies the Word to their lives and they see they have business to do with God.

**4. Apply the Word with Grace:** Don't just tell them what the Word says, what the doctrine teaches, tell them how to use it! Don't tell them to forgive, tell them how to do it—step by step. Don't tell them to have daily devotions, tell them to read the Bible every day and pray about what they read. Don't tell them they need to be saved, tell them they must trust Christ's death for sinners alone in order to be saved, that they have to ask Christ to save them.

And please, please, follow the advice a godly elder gave me: assume the people of God are intelligent and willing to obey God. Tell them you know they love Christ and want to do the right thing. Tell them you struggle with the same sins you are decrying, that you and they are all in the same battle together. Tell them you love them, and mean it! Prepare them verbally for hard words from the Bible, tell them you would rather have something cheerful to say, but also tell them that you need the same word and you love them too much to keep any part of God's Word from them. Love Christ's sheep with his Word.

**5. Find a Mentor:** Become friends with a fellow pastor whose opinion and counsel you trust and value. Ask him to be your counselor and tell him that you will listen carefully to what he says, though you may not always do as he says. And call or write to him on a regular basis for prayer and feedback. You don't have to be alone when the world seems to be caving in. But be sure your Session knows you will be doing this, and be sure you violate no trusts.

**6. Visit the home of every member as quickly as you can in your first year:** You are not aiming to be profound or to rebuke (unless you have to) on this visit. This is your "I am me and who are you?" visit—where you simply get to put names and faces together, not to mention find out that Anna really likes to be called Ann and no one calls Romulus by his given name—he wants to be called "Chip"!!! I cannot tell you what good will this stores up for you both! They know you care and you know more exactly how to preach to them! You will learn why the last fellow had to slip out of town at night and how to avoid his mistakes—*without even asking!!* (But don't encourage them to talk about his faults or anything negative about him—make it clear as casually and yet firmly as you can that he is a beloved fellow-labourer and that you really respect the time he spent their before you. Find out from the Session what his strong points were and focus on them with your people). Ask them what their favourite memories of the Church are and what one thing they would like to see changed (make it clear you are not promising change). Ask what they would like to hear a sermon on. Get to know them (but please get permission to visit first unless you have been told to just drop in). And make one promise, and keep it, that you will not change anything in the Church for the first year unless it is a doctrinal issue or there is sin involved. Which brings me to the last point I want to raise.

**7. Settle it in your mind this instant that there are very few emergencies in the pastorate:** What I mean is this—though there may be potential heretics residing in the pews, much of what the people of God need is careful instruction so that their thinking will be accurate. OK, so there are things that make you wince at the loose approach to Reformed Theology. Remember you once knew less than you do now. Make a point of preaching accurately and you will be amazed at how this difficulty can change in subtle ways! So the Sunday School students don't know

what reprobation is, they can't even spell it! What are you there for but to teach them? And what if it is the case that they don't know Robert's Rules of Order? Do they need to know them? Can't you run a meeting a little less formally?

Sins you will uncover, real problems there will be on occasion, funerals, divorces, serious illnesses—all of these will take more of your time than you want. But the vast majority of your challenges will be best handled following 2 Timothy 2:23-26. *"But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses [and escape] from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."* (NASB) Careful and patient instruction is what Christ used with his erring disciples for 3-3 1/2 years, and even then Paul had to confront Peter!! How much do *you* still have to learn? Can't you be patient with the things you see need straightening out? Your people will listen and they will learn if you will love them enough to be a patient instructor and see that the real enemy is the devil who has ensnared them in error. If you patiently teach them they will learn and your real enemy will be defeated. They are not stupid sheep, they are the people of God who want to learn and will be grateful if you will patiently teach them. And don't forget to pray for them to learn!!

My dear fellow-labourer, you face a future bright with promise. Don't let your hard times in the pastorate get you down. Call upon God to bless your labours and his people, reverently and humbly insist that he do so in keeping with his promise to not allow his Word to fall to the ground or return to him void. Be faithful in your labours. I close with a final word of counsel to deal with the ever pressing concern of Church Growth (numerical)—I borrowed it from Hollywood but I think it is true as I put it with regard to the Ministry of the Word and the attraction of visitors and new members: If you preach it, then if God blesses it, they will come.

May God keep you as you serve him.

Sincerely in Christ,

Arthur Fox

# A Reformed Perspective on Home Visitation

by

**Rev Mark Larson**

It is important that we as the people of God have a clear understanding concerning some of the major biblical and Reformed perspectives on the whole matter of what we often call “home visitation.” The following discussion presents several aspects of family visitation: its biblical rationale, its frequency, its types, its purpose and climate, its procedure, and its nature.

We begin by reflecting upon the reasons why a session engages in the work of home visitation. Obviously enough, elders assume this responsibility because such duty is rooted in the teaching of Scripture. The apostolic example by itself would be a significant reason for ministering in the houses of God’s people. Paul could say this concerning his three-year ministry in Ephesus: “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Clearly, in a ministry modeled after that of the apostles, there is a place for teaching the saints of God in their homes. In fact, it is significant to note that James alludes to the ministry of the church’s elders in the homes of the people when he says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). Surely, we can assume that the sick in many such cases will receive the ministry of the elders of the church in their homes. Thus, we can see that at least two biblical texts (Acts 20:20 and James 5:14) underscore the legitimacy of home visitation on the part of the rulers in Christ’s church. But it is also self-evident that such a ministry is a practical way to implement the basic purpose for which the Lord gave elders to His church: “to shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28); to “take care of the church” (1 Timothy 3:5); and to “watch out for... souls” (Hebrews 13:17).

As we have seen, there is a scriptural basis for the well-established practice of visiting

Christ’s people in their homes. Now what shall we say about the frequency of such visits? How often shall the session do this noble work? The Scripture, of course, provides no explicit mandate. Accordingly, there has been a considerable range of different practices in the Reformed community. Most modern writers in the field of pastoral theology advocate a minimum of one visit each year. This, indeed, is a realistic expectation for a session in ordinary circumstances. Of course, it goes without saying that such visits must be made with greater frequency in the presence of greater need. Situations involving serious illness, grieving widows, etc., will necessitate more frequent visitation.

We visit because it is biblical. And we visit at least once a year. Under most circumstances in a well-established local church, the annual sessional visit may be accomplished in four types of arrangements. The session may be represented in its visit by any of the following situations: the pastor alone, a ruling elder alone, the pastor and a ruling elder, or two ruling elders.

Why do members of a Presbyterian session—the pastor and/or elders—take the time and effort to visit their people? Here, we must reflect upon the purpose and climate of the home visitation. The objective of such a work is fundamentally twofold: (1.) to learn the needs of God’s people; and (2.) to seek to provide the help which they need. The purpose, here articulated, indicates that the visit of the sessional representative (be it the pastor alone, a ruling elder alone, a pastor and a ruling elder, or two ruling elders) is not a day of gloom and judgment. Rather, the climate of the visit ought to be one of love, joy, and hope.

How then does such a visit proceed in its actual practice? The key term to remember, at this point, is flexibility. There is not one standard and orthodox approach when it comes to the procedure

of sessional visitation. Such visits may be more formal (with the setting up beforehand of an appointment) or somewhat informal (with the pastor dropping by unannounced to have a word of prayer at a time of need). The conversation may progress quite naturally (handling issues as they spontaneously arise), or it may proceed by means of questions and answers (such as: Do you believe that you are growing spiritually?).

In conclusion, a final word needs to be stated concerning the nature of elder visitation. First, it is good to keep before us what such a visit is not. On the one hand, it is not merely a social visit, just another opportunity to enjoy the Christian fellowship of one another. On the other hand, the coming of the sessional representative(s) is not the arrival of the Inquisition, which has the intention of uncovering every secret sin and heresy for the purpose of measuring out harsh ecclesiastical discipline. Thus, the elders of Christ's church do not come to socialize, and they do not come bringing condemnation. But it should also be stated that such visits are not to be construed as an opportunity for the people of God to whine and grumble about one to a thousand things that they do not like. Paul warned the church in Corinth about the sin of complaining: "Nor let us...murmur, as some of them also murmured,

and were destroyed by the destroyer" (1 Corinthians 10:8-10).

If home visitation is not an occasion to socialize, to punish, or to murmur, what exactly is it, in terms of its nature? It is clear that Paul viewed it as an extension of his public ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. The apostle states that in Ephesus he "taught publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). It is in response to the questions which may be raised and the needs which may surface that the elders of Christ's church are able in family visitation to provide teaching, encouragement, comfort, and exhortation. May the Holy Spirit be pleased to bless the ministry of the Word as it goes forth both publicly and from house to house.

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• Our thanks to the Rev. Mark Larson, •  
• pastor of the Madison Wisconsin Ortho- •  
• dox Presbyterian Church, which is one of •  
• our newer churches. Before becoming pas- •  
• tor of the Madison Church Rev. Larson •  
• served the Orthodox Presbyterian con- •  
• gregation of Hamill, South Dakota. •  
•••••

**“Fencing of the Table”**  
by  
**Rev. William B. Kessler**

All Reformed churches would agree that some oversight and caution ought to be extended to those who partake of the Lord's Supper. Oversight and warning are mandated by Scripture. Paul gives a solemn warning to the Corinthians when they gather to partake of the Lord's Supper: *“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if then he does not judge*

*the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep”* (I Cor. 11:27-30).

When Paul admonishes the Corinthians in this way, he is fencing the Lord's Supper. The fencing of the Supper is simply administering the appropriate pastoral care along with a warning towards those who have gathered at a communion service. A fence has a two-fold function. It separates in order to restrain, on the one hand, and to gather and to protect, on the other hand. When the table of the Lord is fenced,

## A Reformed Perspective on Home Visitation

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those involved in scandalous, unrepentant sin are to be restrained, while repentant sinners are invited to come and partake of the sacred meal.

The question that is often raised is, how should one administer the fencing of the table? The question becomes poignant when visitors are present and desire to partake of the Supper with our congregations. Some sessions are persuaded that a mere warning from the table is a sufficient fence. In other words, the decision to let someone commune is left up to the individual's conscience. The problem with administering the fence in this way is that the individual may have an uninformed conscience, or worse, a seared conscience.

I had a Catholic neighbor who started to attend church. I knew he was not trusting in Jesus but in his good works. He very much desired to join us in the Lord's Supper. He still viewed it as a mass. If left to his own conscience, the unrepentant condition of his heart would have been reinforced while the church would have been aware of an unholy amalgamation.

A question that needs to be wrestled with is this: are the elders fulfilling their responsibility of oversight in restraining the unrepentant and protecting the sanctity of the table and the communion of the saints merely by announcing a warning from the table?

The session at Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Newtown, Connecticut, has wrestled with this question. Here is how the session administers the fencing of the Lord's Table.

1. In the morning service we invite any visitors to speak to the minister or to one of the elders concerning how they might participate in the communion supper.

2. We celebrate the Lord's Supper during our evening service. This gives us the time in the afternoon between the services to sit down and speak with people in a less hurried way, without the pressure that would face us in the morning. We do not serve a visitor, usually, unless he has met with the session.

3. We briefly examine the visitors to determine if they have been baptized and if they can give a credible profession of faith in Christ.

4. Then we inquire about their church background. If they are not members of a Bible-believing church, one that preaches the gospel, we encourage them to do so. If they continue to visit our church, the elders make it clear that membership is imperative. We will continue to serve them the supper for six months with an understanding that after that period of time we shall inquire once again about their progress in joining a church.

5. When we celebrate the Supper we give a warning from the table that is consistent with the directory for worship.

Some may object to this way of administering the fence as being overly-prying, legalistic, and harsh. I need to respond by saying that when we fence the table the manner in which we approach our visitors is all important. For our session it is an opportunity to meet with, talk to, and show our pastoral concern for those visiting the church. Most, if not all, visitors who have met with the session before the Lord's Supper have indicated what a blessing it was for the elders to take the time and to show such pastoral concern. We have had many visitors from charismatic and Baptist churches. Several of them have expressed their gratitude for the seriousness that is shown towards the Lord's Supper, which is missing in their own congregations. The times of meeting with visitors beforehand have been times when instruction has been given and great joy felt as we hear how God has effectually called many to saving faith in Christ. I might add that God has richly blessed this congregation with growth. Our communion services are filled with a solemnity and a deep joy as we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

**This contribution to the discussion on the fencing of the Lord's Table comes from Pastor William B. Kessler, of the Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church, of Newtown, CT**

# “Is It Our Moral Obligation to Attend Church?”

by

**Dr. Greg Bahnsen**

Attending church is far from being the chosen Sunday activity for most people in our culture. This should not surprise us, of course, when those who sleep in, go to work, or find other recreations in the place of attending church are unbelievers. Unregenerate hearts do not seek God or find pleasure in worshipping Him. What is surprising (and dismaying) is that today many professing believers also neglect the corporate worship of God.

Why is this? On the one hand, some Christians see church as just one of many personal options along with Sunday brunch, the ball game, etc. On the other hand, some Christians consider informal fellowship groups or Bible studies an adequate replacement for church attendance. But all Christians must be open to the teaching of God’s holy word, and it is to this standard that we turn for an answer to our original question.

## **Old Testament Law, Piety, and Prophets**

The Mosaic law commanded God’s people to gather together for corporate worship and the hearing of God’s word (e.g., Deut. 12:5-12; 31:11-12). Indeed, the law of God required that the weekly Sabbath in particular be a “holy convocation” (Lev. 23:3). Regardless of outward circumstances (e.g., seventh-day sabbath, a localized central tabernacle), the worship required in the Old Testament law entailed the basic moral element of assembling with God’s people to hear His word and praise His name.

The religious piety of the Old Testament saint was evident in his desire to “Render unto Jehovah the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come before Him: Worship Jehovah in the beauty of Holiness” (I Chron. 16:29; cf. Ps. 96:8-9). The believer is eager to worship in the midst of the assembled people of God. David the Psalmist wrote, “I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the assembly will I praise Thee” (Ps. 22:22). “I will give Thee thanks in the great assembly: I will praise Thee among the people” (Ps. 35:18; cf. 116: 12- 17). Many of the psalms emphasize the fact that David worshiped along with a congregation of other believers (e.g., Ps. 42:4; 55:14; 122:1; 132:7).

David’s inspired testimony shows that his desire

for congregational worship is normative for all God’s people, He declared to all believers: “O come let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker” (Ps. 95:6). “Come before His presence with singing...Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Give thanks unto Him and bless His name (Ps. 100:2,4). “Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders” (Ps. 107:32). “Praise ye Jehovah. Sing unto Jehovah a new song and His praise in the assembly of the saints” (Ps. 149:1).

Old Testament prophecy likewise shows us that those who are true believers will desire of assemble with God’s people to hear His word and praise His name in congregational worship. For instance, Isaiah the prophet indicated that converts to the Lord would join themselves to the corporate worship of God’s people in “Jehovah’s house of prayer” (Is. 56:6-7: quoted by Jesus in Mark 11:17).

One of the burdens of Malachi’s prophecy was that the corrupt worship among the Jews of his day would, in the future age of God’s advent, be replaced with pure worship among the Gentiles in every place (Mal. 1:1 1: 3:3-4).

Therefore, the law, piety, and prophecy of the Old Testament all combine to point us to our moral obligation to gather together with God’s people for worship.

“But that was the Old Testament, with its Jerusalem temple and seventh-day Sabbath,” someone might complain. This complaint diminishes the full authority of God’s inspired word. Referring to the Old Testament, Paul taught “every scripture is inspired and is profitable for...instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Of course, changes from the covenantal administration and foreshadows of the Old Testament to the redemptive realities of the New Testament must be recognized (much of the book of Hebrews serves this very purpose).

Nevertheless, Jesus obliges us to submit to the continuing validity of ‘every jot and tittle’ of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17-19), and Paul teaches that “whatever was written previously in the Old Testament was written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4). In that light, we would naturally expect that the moral obligation of corporate worship which is taught in the Old Testament will continue into the New. God continues to call a people for Himself in the New Testament, and God

## "Is It Our Moral Obligation to Attend Church?"

surely continues to be worthy of their praise.

### The New Testament Normative Example

Regarding the Old Testament sabbath, New Testament believers confess that Jesus Christ is "the Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). In the New Testament age it is thus appropriately called "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). Scripture shows that since the Lord's resurrection, this day has been changed from the last to the first day of the week.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the Old Testament temple, New Testament believers confess that they themselves now constitute "the temple of God" wherein God's Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). The outward trappings of Old Covenant worship have been changed in the days of the New Covenant. The basic moral obligation or "holy convocation" has not.

The early church of Jesus Christ regularly gathered together as "God's temple" for corporate worship, daily at first (Acts 2:46) and eventually weekly on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), "the Lord's day." The early church did not break with the long-standing requirement, revealed previously in God's word, for believers to participate in worship assemblies—even when they saw their New Covenant practice (outwardly changed) against the background of the Old Covenant pattern.

The priestly ritual of the temple has passed away, to be sure: yet, God's New Covenant people looked at their practice or worship in the light of it. For instance: "through Him [Christ] then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His name" (Heb. 13:15), or again "you are a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

From various indications in the New Testament we learn what constitutes the congregational worship of the New Covenant people of God. It includes at least the following items:

1. **Praise to God** (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:9 [Isa. 43:2]).
2. **Corporate prayer** (1 Tim. 2:8; cf. Phil. 4:6) with congregational amens (1 Cor. 14:16).
3. **Hymns** (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).
4. **Scripture reading** (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13).

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1 The Old Testament festivals or firstfruits and pentecost (looking forward to Christ's resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit) were celebrated on the first day of the week (Lev. 23:11, 16, 35, 39). Likewise, the new creation began on the first day of the week, having been brought about by Christ's resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:13-19).

5. **Preaching**<sup>2</sup> (1 Tim. 4:6-16; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:7-9).

6. **The Lord's Supper** (Acts 2:42; 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 11:20).

We should remember that God's word is normative for us; it is a law, even when not prefaced with a formula such as "*Thou shalt do...*" What we find in the New Testament practice of worship, accordingly, is the standard of worship to which we must adhere.

Worship is defined, not by personal whims and religious imagination, but solely by the revealed word of God (cf. Col. 2:23). Thus the second commandment forbids us to devise, use, or approve of any religious worship which is not instituted by God Himself—as well as prohibiting us from neglecting, or taking away from, that worship which God has ordained (Ex. 20:46; cf. Lev. 10:1; Deut. 4:2; 32:46; Matt. 15:9; 28:20).

Therefore, our obligation to gather with God's people for worship must be understood and measured by the elements of New Testament worship set forth above. If we are doing what God requires of His people, we engage in worship assemblies which are characterized by praise, corporate prayer, hymns, Bible reading, authoritative preaching, and the sacraments.

### Worship Assemblies are Not Just Any Gathering of Believers

In the New Testament, those assemblies which constituted the corporate worship of God were understood as something clearly distinct from informal household fellowship and eating, even though the worship assembly may have been in an actual home. Paul distinguishes between "the Lord's Supper" at the assembly and the ordinary meals in one's house (1 Cor. 1:20,22).

Being in "the church" at worship is, thus, some-

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2 That is, a time or instruction based upon God's revealed word. This entails a number of things including:

(1) "exhortation" (paraklasis: Rom. 12:8; 1 Tim. 4:3; 1 Thess. 2:3; cf. Acts 13:15; 1 Cor. 14:3; Heb. 13:22) which involves beseeching men in earnest (e.g. Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 5:20);

(2) "teaching" (didasko: Acts 18:11; 1 Tim. 4:13; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; cf. 1 Cor. 14:9). which includes authoritatively laying down the truth (1 Tim. 4:6) and delivering commands (1 Tim. 4:11); and

(3) "proclamation" (karusso)—a word which was used to cover a wide variety of discourses: the preaching of the prophets to God's people (Joel 2:1 LXX), synagogue lessons among the Jews (Acts 15:21; Rom. 2:21; cf. Lk. 4:19, 21; Mk. 1:39; Acts 9:20). evangelistic heralding to unbelievers (Matt. 4:17; 10:7, 27; Lk. 24:47; Acts 8:5; 1 Cor. 1:23), and the declarations of the full theological system to believers (Acts 20:20, 25, 27), proclamations within the Christian

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thing more than any normal gathering with other believers — even if at the gathering we engage in eating, singing, and prayer. This is evident from the way Paul speaks, for instance, in 1 Cor 14:35. He differentiates the situation of a woman asking questions at “church” from her asking them “at home.”

Moreover, despite the fact that “the church” is the body of believers (i.e. the people), Paul uses the following language: “it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.” The expression “in the church” cannot mean within any gathering of believers, or else women would be prohibited from ever speaking when other Christians are present! “In the church” obviously denotes the assembly of believers for the special purpose of ordained worship.

Worship assemblies for Christians are to be characterized by good order, not confusion (1 Cor 14:26, 33, 40). Thus New Testament congregational worship is led and governed by the overseers (elders who “take care of the Church of God,” 1 Tim. 3:-45). That this is the rule for New Testament worship is illustrated by the fact that Paul wrote to deliver instructions for the life of the church, including its corporate worship services, to pastors like Timothy (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:1,8,11; 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2).

These pastoral letters had as one of their purposes that men “may know how they ought to conduct themselves in the house of God. which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). In short, the assembling of God’s flock is under the oversight of the shepherds (1 Pet. 5:-12) who “preside” over it in all matters, including worship (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Acts 20:28) .

### **Assembling for, and Participating in, Worship is Explicitly Required**

The New Testament normative pattern, then, is

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assembly (2 Cor. 11:4), words entailing comfort and exhortation among converts (1 Thess. 2:9-14) or against heresy in the congregation (1 Cor. 15:11 ff.), and pastoral addresses to believers who are tempted to turn away from sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

The recent, novel opinion that authoritative preaching of a sermon (exhortation or lesson monologue) is inappropriate within a Christian assembly of believers has no linguistic or theological basis in Scripture, as we see above. Note the example of Paul in Acts 20:7-9. We read that he “discoursed”; according to Kittel, the Greek word refers here to “the delivering of religious lectures.” Further, we read that Paul continued his “speech” past midnight; the Greek word (*logos*) does not (especially unqualified, in the singular, and with definite article) mean dialogue or joint discussion, but an individual’s oral presentation, message, or statement (cf. Mk, 2:2; Matt, 15:12; Lk, 1:39; Jn. 4 41; Acts 10:44: 15:32).

for God’s people to gather together on the Lord’s day as “the church” for the specific purpose of worship as defined by God’s word (praise, corporate prayer, hymns, Scripture reading, authoritative preaching, and the Lord’s Supper) under the oversight of the elders. It is nothing less than the moral obligation of believers to attend these worship assemblies and not have other interests or activities take priority over them—precisely because assembling for worship is a matter of obedience to God’s word, rather than personal discretion.

The New Testament, no less than the Old, requires us to assemble for the purpose of worship. This was the apostolic pattern, as we see in these words: “If therefore the whole church be assembled together..., so he will fall down and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed” (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

The New Testament explicitly commands that we not voluntarily absent ourselves from the church’s recognized gathering for ordained worship. “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another” (Heb. 10:24-25).

When we miss attending the church’s worship service or do not participate in its activities, we are not living up to the Scriptural command for us to stand together in worship: “that with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6; cf. Eph. 5:19-21). It is expected that believers will regularly partake of the Lord’s Supper (Jn. 6:53; 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:24-26), and when it is served, the New Testament exhorts believers to (examine themselves and thereby) actually participate in the eating and drinking (1 Cor. 11:27,28).

We conclude by seeing, therefore, that congregational worship is not a matter of entertainment and personal discretion (e.g. “shall we go to church or brunch this morning?”). Nor is it an informal get-together with other Christian friends where religious activities take place (e.g. “we met at their house, sang together and prayed”). God’s holy and authoritative word says more. Scripture makes it our moral obligation not to forsake the assembling of God’s flock “as the church” for the specific purpose of corporate worship, as defined by the Lord, under the leading of the shepherds. If we profess to obey Him in all things, let us not be lax or selfwilled especially at this important point! It is the highest privilege of the Christian to stand with fellow believers as God’s redeemed people, in His presence, to render to Him the praise, adoration and worship which are due to His name. It is preparation for eternity.

# THE KIND OF REVIVAL WANTED BY THE CHURCH

by

Charles H. Spurgeon

What a company we have here tonight! It fills my heart with gladness and my eyes with tears of joy to see so many hundreds of persons gathered together at what is sometimes wickedly described as 'only a prayer meeting'. It is good for us to draw nigh unto God in prayer, and specially good to make up a great congregation for such a purpose. We have attended little prayer meetings of four or five, and we have been glad to be there, for we had the promise of our Lord's presence; but our minds are grieved to see so little attention given to united prayer by many of our churches. We have longed to see great numbers of God's people coming up to pray, and we now enjoy this sight. Let us praise God that it is so. How could we expect a blessing if we were too idle to ask for it? How could we look for a Pentecost if we never met with one accord, in one place, to wait upon the Lord? Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians. To mix it up with the week-night lecture, and really make an end of it, is a sad sign of declension. I wonder some two or three earnest souls in such churches do not band themselves together to restore the meeting for prayer, and bind themselves with a pledge to keep it up whether the minister will come to it or not.

But now that we have come together, how shall we pray? Let us not degenerate into formality, or we shall be dead while we think we live. Let us not waver through unbelief, or we shall pray in vain. The Lord says to his church tonight, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' Oh, for great faith with which to offer great prayers to-night! We have been mingling praise and prayer together as a delicious compound of spices, fit to be presented upon the altar of incense through Christ our Lord; may we not at this time offer some special far-reaching petition? It is suggested to me that we pray for a true and genuine revival of religion throughout the world.

I am glad of any signs of life, even if they should be feverish and transient, and I am slow to judge any well-intended movement, but I am very fearful that many so-called 'revivals' have in the long run wrought more harm than good. Places which have had the most of religious excitement are frequently the most hard to reach. Men's minds have been baked hard in the oven of fanaticism. A species of religious gambling has fascinated many men, and given them a distaste for the sober business of true godliness. But if I would nail down counterfeits upon the counter, I do not therefore undervalue true gold. Far from it. It is to be desired beyond measure that the Lord would send a real and lasting revival of spiritual life. We need a work of the Holy Ghost of a supernatural kind, putting power into the preaching of the Word, inspiring all believers with heavenly energy, and solemnly affecting the

hearts of the careless, so that they turn to God and live. We would not be drunk with the wine of carnal excitement, but we would be filled with the Spirit; we would not leap upon the altar, and shout and cry, 'O Baal, hear us', but we would behold the fire descending from heaven in answer to the effectual fervent prayers of righteous men. Can we not entreat the Lord our God to make bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the people in this day of declension and vanity?

We want a revival of old-fashioned doctrine. Our fear is that, if modern thought proceeds much further, the fashion of our religion will be as much Mohammedan as Christian; in fact, it will be more like infidelity than either. A converted Jew, staying in London, went into a dissenting chapel which I could mention, and when he reached the friend with whom he was staying, he inquired what the religion of the place could be, for he had heard nothing of what he had received as the Christian faith. The doctrines which are distinctive of the New Testament may not be actually denied in set terms, but they are spirited away: the phrases are used, but a new sense is attached to them. Certain moderns talk much of Christ, and yet reject Christianity. Under cover of extolling the Teacher, they reject his teaching for theories more in accord with the spirit of the age. At first, Calvinism was too harsh, then evangelical doctrines became too antiquated, and now the Scriptures themselves must bow to man's alteration and improvement. There is plenty of preaching in the present day in which no mention is made of the depravity of human nature, the work of the Holy Ghost, the blood of atonement, or the punishment of sin. The Deity of Christ is not so often assailed, but the gospel which he gave us through his own teaching and that of the apostles is questioned, criticized, and set aside. One of the great missionary societies actually informs us, by one of its writers, that it does not send out missionaries to save the heathen from the wrath to come, but to prepare them 'for the higher realm which awaits them beyond the river of death'. I confess I have better hopes for the future of the heathen than for the state of those who thus write concerning them. The heathen will derive but small advantage from the gospel which such triflers with the Scriptures are likely to carry them. I know not a single doctrine which is not at this hour studiously undermined by those who ought to be its defenders; there is not a truth that is precious to the soul which is not now denied by those whose profession it is to proclaim it. The times are out of joint, and many are hoping to make them more and more so. To me it is clear that we need a revival of old-fashioned gospel-preaching like that of Whitefield and Wesley; to me, preferably that of Whitefield. We need to believe: the Scriptures must be made the infallible foundation of all teaching; the ruin, redemption, and regeneration of mankind must be set forth in unmistakable terms, and that right speedily, or faith

will be more rare than gold of Ophir. We must demand from our teachers that they give us a 'Thus saith the Lord'; for at this time they give us their own imaginations. Today the Word of the Lord in the book of Jeremiah is true: 'Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you'. [Jer. 23. 16,17]. Beware of those who say that there is no hell, and who declare new ways to heaven. May the Lord have mercy upon them!

Urgently do we need a revival of personal godliness. This is, indeed, the secret of church prosperity. When individuals fall from their steadfastness, the church is tossed to and fro; when personal faith is steadfast, the church abides true to her Lord. We have in and around our own denomination many true-hearted servants of Christ, who are hardly put to it to know what to do. Their loyalty to their Lord and to his truth is greater than their love to sect or party, and they know not whether to abide in their present position, and fight out the great question, or to lift the old banner, and quit their apostatizing associates. Do whichever they may, it is upon the truly godly and spiritual that the future of religion depends in the hand of God. Oh, for more truly holy men, quickened and filled with the Holy Spirit, consecrated to the Lord, and sanctified by his truth! What can be accomplished by worldly professors, theatergoing church members, semi-infidel teachers, and philosophical preachers? Nothing but ruin can follow from a preponderance of these. Their presence is grievous to God, and disastrous to his people. Brethren, we must each one live if the church is to be alive; we must live unto God if we expect to see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in our hands. Sanctified men are the necessity of every age, for they are the salt of society, and the saviors of the race. The Lord has made a man more precious than a wedge of gold—I mean a decided, instructed, bold, unswerving man of God.

We deeply want a revival of domestic religion. We have been saddened at the terrible accounts of the impurity of this city; but, doubtless, one cause of this state of things is the neglect of household religion among Christians, and the entire absence of common decency in many of the lodgings of the poor. The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the Puritans; but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. See how the families of many professors are as dressy, as gay, as godless as the children of the non-religious! How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when his own disciples do not teach his gospel to their own sons and daughters? Have we not need to repeat the lament of Jeremiah? 'Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.' How different this from the father of the faithful, of whom the Lord said, 'I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord'! The surest way to promote godliness abroad is to labor for it at home. The

shortest method for the overthrow of priestcraft is for every man to be the priest in his own house, and to warn his sons against deceitful men. May our dear children be so well taught from infancy that they may not only escape the common vices of the age, but grow up to become patterns of holiness! This is a great difficulty to our poorer friends in this loathsome city, which is becoming as polluted as heathendom. A good sister, who lives close to this house of prayer, came up from a country town with her little boy, and she was horrified before long to hear him use profane language, being evidently unaware of its meaning. He had picked it up in the street close to his mother's door. Where are the children of working-folks to run if they are not able to walk the streets? All around us vice has become so daring that a blind man may almost be envied; but even he has ears, and will, therefore, be vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. Good people say to me, 'What are we to do?' I wish those who live in the breezy country village would stop there, and not come into our close streets, and lanes, and courts, which reek with blasphemy and dirty talk. Why do working-men so often think it necessary, in their ordinary conversation, to use such abominable expressions, which have no useful meaning, and are simply disgusting? If ever Christian people should be pure, and should watch over their children with a holy jealousy, now is the time, and this is a worthy subject for daily prayer.

I would sooner have the doctrines of grace revived, individual piety deepened, and family religion increased, than I would watch a frantic crowd parading the street with noisy music, and harsh clamor. I see no special virtue in drums and tambourines. Make what noise you will to attract the careless if you afterwards give them sound instruction in the truth, and make them to know the meaning of the Word of the Lord; but if it be mere stir, and song, and swagger, what is the good of it? If gospel truth is not taught, your work will be a building of wood, hay, and stubble, soon to be consumed. Quick building is seldom permanent. Gold, silver, and precious stones are scarce material, not easily found; but then they endure the fire. What is the use of a religion which comes up in a night, and perishes as soon? Ah me, what empty bragging we have heard! The thing was done, but then it was never worth doing; soon things were as if it never had been done; and, moreover, this sham way of doing it made it all the harder toil for the real worker.

Oh, Christian men and women, be thorough in what you do, and know, and teach! Hold truth as with an iron grip; let your families be trained in the fear of God, and be yourselves 'holiness unto the Lord'; so shall you stand like rocks amid the surging waves of error and ungodliness which rage around you.

We want, also, more and more, a revival of vigorous consecrated strength. I have pleaded for true piety; I now beg for one of the highest results of it. We need saints. It may be that all cannot attain unto 'the first three'; but we cannot do without champions. We need gracious minds trained to a high form of spiritual life by much converse with God in solitude. These are the standard-bearers of the army; each one is as a king's son. There is an air about them, humble as they are, as of men who breathe a purer atmosphere. Such was Abraham, who, by his

communion with God, acquired a more than royal bearing. The king of Sodom shrinks into insignificance in the presence of the high-minded sheik who will not take of his lawful spoils from a thread to a shoe-latchet, lest the heathen king should say, 'I have made Abraham rich.' Saints acquire nobility from their constant resort to the place where the Lord meets with them. There, also, they acquire that power in prayer which we so greatly need. Oh, that we had more men like John Knox, whose prayers were more terrible to Queen Mary than ten thousand men! Oh, that we had more Elijahs, by whose faith the windows of heaven should be shut or opened! This power comes not by a sudden effort; it is the outcome of a life devoted to the God of Israel. If our life is all in public, it will be a frothy, vapory, ineffectual existence; but if we hold high converse with God in secret, we shall be mighty for good. The Puritans were abundant in meditation and prayer; and there were giants in the earth in those days. He that is a prince with God will take high rank with men, after the true measure of nobility.

May the Lord send us many self-contained Christians, whose godliness leans on God for itself, and is not a second-hand affair! We see too many Christian people depending upon one another, like houses 'run up' by 'jerrybuilders,' which are so slenderly built that, if you were to pull down the last one in the row, they would all follow. Beware of being a lean-to; endeavor to rest on your own walls of real faith in the Lord Jesus. I tremble for a church whose continuance depends upon the talent and cleverness of one man. If he is removed, the whole thing will collapse: this is a wretched business. May none of us fall into a mean, poverty-stricken dependence on man! We want among us believers like those solid, substantial family mansions which stand from generation to generation as landmarks of the country; no lath-and-plaster fabrics, but edifices solidly constructed to bear all weathers, and defy time itself. Given a host of men who are steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and then the glory of God's grace will be clearly manifested, not only in them, but in those round about them. The Lord send us a revival of consecrated strength, and heavenly energy! May the weakest among us be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord!

As for you who are not converted to God, many of you will be caught in the great wave of blessing, if God shall cause it to break over us. When saints live unto God, sinners are converted to God. 'I was converted,' said one, 'not by hearing a sermon, but by seeing one.' How was that?' he was asked. 'My next door neighbor was the only man in the street who went to a place of worship; and, as I saw him go out as regularly as clockwork, I said to myself, 'That man regards the Sabbath, and the God of the Sabbath, and I do not'. By-and-by I went into his house, and I saw that comfort and order reigned in it, while my room was wretched. I saw how his wife and children dwelt in love, and I said to myself, 'This home is happy because the father fears God'. I saw my neighbor calm in trouble, and patient under persecution. I knew him to be upright, true, and kind, and I said to myself, 'I will find out this man's secret,' and thus I was converted. Preach by your hands if you cannot preach by your tongues. When our church members show the fruits of true godliness, we shall soon have enquiries for the

tree which bears such a crop.

Dear friends, at our prayer meetings of late our Lord has very graciously spoken to one and another of the unconverted among us. What a mercy that they were so far interested as to come! We have not said very much to them, but we have been praying for them, and we have talked of the joys of our holy faith, and one after another they have quietly given their hearts to God while in the prayer meeting. I feel very glad about it; it was all that we needed to make these meetings the gate of heaven. Such conversions are specially beautiful, they are so altogether of the Lord, and are so much the result of his working by the whole church that I am doubly delighted with them. Oh, that every gathering of faithful men might be a lure to attract others to Jesus! May many souls fly to him because they see others speeding in that direction! Why not? The coming together of the saints is the first part of Pentecost, and the ingathering of sinners is the second. It began with 'only a prayer meeting,' but it ended with a grand baptism of thousands of converts. Oh, that the prayers of believers may act as lodestones to sinners! There are a few among us who are not saved, and but a few. I do not believe they will long escape the saving influence which floods these assemblies. We have made a holy ring around certain of them; and they must soon yield to our importunity, for we are pleading with God as well as with them. Their wives are praying for them, their brothers and sisters are praying for them, and others are in the devout confederacy; therefore they must be brought in. Oh, that they would come at once! Why this reluctance to be blessed? Why this hesitation to be saved? Lord, we turn from these poor foolish procrastinators to thyself, and we plead for them with thine all-wise and gracious Spirit! Lord, turn them, and they shall be turned! By their conversion prove that a true revival has commenced to-night! Let it spread through all our households, and then run from church to church till the whole of Christendom shall be ablaze with the heaven-descended fire!

Let us pray.

*Now we pray Thee to grant us the blessing which we have already sought, and let it come upon all the churches of our beloved country. May the Lord revive true and undefiled religion here and in all the other lands where Christ is known and preached, and let the day come when heathendom shall become converted, when the crescent of Mohammed shall wane into eternal night, and when she that sitteth on the Seven Hills and exalteth heresy in the place of God shall be cast down to sink like a mill-stone in the flood.*

*Let the blessed Gospel of the eternal God prevail, let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Oh! that we may live to see that day. The Lord bless our country; have pity upon it. God bless the Sovereign with every mercy and blessing. Grant that there may be in Thine infinite wisdom a change in the state of trade and commerce, that there may be less complaint and distress. Oh! let the people see Thy hand, and understand why it is laid upon them, that they may turn from wrong-doing and seek righteousness and follow after peace. Then shall the blessing return. The Lord hear us as in secret we often cry to Thee on behalf of this misled land. The Lord deliver it, and lift up the light of His countenance upon it yet again, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

# “BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS”

## A Computer Software Review by

**Pastor William Shishko**

Somewhere in the midst of a recent 3 week “sabbatical” granted to me by my Session I became a full-fledged computer convert! I had used a computer since the old Radio Shack Tandy 1000 days, and had even graduated to an 8088 machine, and (for a very brief time), a 286 machine still using DOS and a simple word processing program. My conversion to computer maturity began in late 1993 when our family purchased a 486 Gateway computer complete with a CD ROM drive, fax modem and - best of all Windows and Microsoft Works. Within a week I learned the basics...and since then our four oldest boys have used it so much I barely have time to sneak in a few minutes on America On Line in the late hours of the night! Recently, however, the church upgraded my study’s entire computer system, so that I’ve now graduated to Microsoft Word (which is so much easier to learn than Word Perfect!), and have made the all-important transition from using a computer along with my work to using a computer for (virtually) all of my work. I urge all of my fellow pastors who are making comparatively little (or, worse yet, no) use of a computer to make that crucial transition as soon as possible. Like it or not, computers are THE technology of the future; and, when they are “fully” used, they become a pastor’s right hand man!

A big part of my computer conversion as a pastor is due to a software package called BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOW™ (published by HERMENEUTIK™, Computer Bible Research Software), which the church purchased for me for use with the computer system. I was introduced to it at a pastor’s conference in the fall of 1994, and was impressed with the glowing endorsements of it that came from a number of pastors who had used it for some time. After just a few weeks of working with it I would add my hearty endorsement to theirs. I

realize that there are many Bible software (and now, CD ROM) packages available, and I’m not in any position to compare BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS with these, but let me offer some reasons for you to consider purchasing and using this superb tool for Bible study and sermon preparation.

BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS was written by Michael S. Bushell in the early 1990’s. Bushell had purchased all of the different Bible software packages for his work in biblical studies, and had not found anything that fully met his needs So he wrote his own program! BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS (now at version 3.00) was the result. It is now an acknowledged leader in the Bible software industry.

The user of BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS is greeted by three “windows” upon opening up the program. The Command Center (in the upper right), is a Windows Dialog box containing a number of command buttons and list boxes as well as the all-important command line used for typing in words, phrases, and references to be searched. This is the heart of the system, giving the user the ability to direct the program to call up a vast amount of biblical data in (believe it or not!) less than a second. The Results Window (in the upper left) displays the actual texts of verses that result from the word, phrase, and reference searches initiated in the Command Center. Not only does one have the benefit of the instantaneous appearance of verses (in multiple versions, as selected in the command center), but at the click of a mouse button one can gain immediate information of the definition, morphology, and usage of any given word in the text being studied. The standard lexical aids are Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon for the New Testament, and Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon for the Old Testament. The lexical information is concise and accurate. Each type of information appears in its

own data Dialog box, allowing the user to quickly scan it “click and drag” with the mouse to highlight what is necessary for the word processor, and place it in the MDI Text Editor (the bottom portion of the screen), or in a windows document on which you are working. Since the King James version is keyed to the numbering system in Strong’s CONCORDANCE it allows the user to quickly access further information in other lexical aids which follow that format, e.g. THE THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. I cannot emphasize enough that this program is FAST! There is no doubt that the pastor or Bible student is saving time and using it with much greater efficiency with this program.

Those using the entire BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS “Research Bundle” will need over 100 MB of hard drive space...but that will allow the user access to everything from the United Bible Societies’ (UBS) 3rd Edition of the New Testament to the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) Hebrew Old Testament to the Septuagint, Apocrypha and Latin Vulgate. English Versions include the King James, New King James, New American Standard, American Standard, and others. No Bible software that I know of is this complete. Command center controls allow you to do searches with multiple wild cards, and to supplement your research with included resources like Robertson’s Word Pictures, Easton’s Bible Dictionary, and Nave’s Topical Bible. All of this comes with every possible tool to enable you to review previous passages, load and retrieve notes, and do whatever morphological work is necessary. Reformed and Presbyterian ministers will also appreciate complete access to the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms on the software. This addition (reflecting the theological position of the software’s author) makes BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS uniquely beneficial to Reformed pastors and Bible students. Long term plans for the software include the addition of modules for various foreign language Bibles. What promise this holds for missionary work and theological training overseas!

The producers of BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS highly recommend that it be used with Microsoft Word, since the support for the program’s Hebrew and Greek fonts is best in that program. The program is now also

available on CD-ROM. It is recommended that the BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS be used with at least a 386 computer with 8 MB of RAM (although 4 MB is sufficient for one application at a time). My personal advice is that you upgrade your current computer (or replace it entirely) so that you have maximum hardware capacity for using all of the features of this superb resource. I should add, also, that the support from HERMENEUTIKA is excellent. The staff is knowledgeable and eminently helpful, and never have I been made to feel like a computer dummy when I’ve had to call for help. Prior to such calls, however, you will want to acquaint yourself with the well-written User Manual included in the package. Even if you don’t like these sometimes tedious literary tutors, I urge you to work patiently through the one sent with this program. Trying to learn it in ignorance of the directions will only frustrate you as you face a computer housing what could well become your most valued pastoral reference work next to the Bible itself.

For more information on BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS you may call HERMENEUTIKA at (406)-837-2244. Purchasers also can secure a significant discount over the list price of \$299.00 by purchasing in quantities, or through a dealer who has done so. One such dealer is Westminster Discount Book Service, P.O. Box 125 H, Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583. Their telephone number is (914) 472-2237. I give the highest recommendation to an investment in BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS for every serious Bible student and for every pastor who is looking for helpful tools for his work.

**Michael Bushell, the creator of BIBLE WORKS FOR WINDOWS, has served as an elder of the Orthodox Presbyterian congregation of Silver Spring, Maryland. The writer of the above review—Rev. William Shishko—is pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Franklin Square, N.Y. 11010**