

ORDAINED SERVANT



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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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The cover of this issue of *Ordained Servant* is intended to call attention to a landmark decision which was made this year by the Canadian Reformed Churches (they acted first) and by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. After an extended period (since 1977) during which we were recognized as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Canadian Reformed Churches at their Synod meeting in Neerlandia, Alberta, invited us to enter into full Ecclesiastical Fellowship with them. It is noteworthy that this decision at Neerlandia was unanimous and that our recently concluded General Assembly reciprocated by voting, without dissent, to accept the invitation. One of the things that this closer relationship involves is a mutual responsibility to continue serious discussion of those areas in both doctrine and practice where significant differences remain. It is my hope that the pages of *Ordained Servant* can be used to assist in fulfilling this obligation. One possibility that has already been suggested is an exchange of views that could be seen in the pages of *Ordained Servant* and the fine Canadian Reformed publication called *Diakonia*.



Stephen Doe continues his series on the 'Free Offer of the Gospel', this time giving us some careful exegesis of a pivotal passage. We are also anticipating a final article from him to complete this interesting series.



It is our intention to devote a significant portion of the next issue of *Ordained Servant* to the subject of Reformed Worship. In place of the historic sense of unity that once existed among Presbyterian and Reformed Churches with respect to what constitutes the proper worship of God, there is now a cacaphony of different views and practices. It is our hope that this issue will at least point us in the right direction as we seek to recover this lost unity.

The Gospel Offer and the Altar Call

It is difficult to understand *how* God can be sovereign over us without denying our freedom. But other things also surpass *our* understanding. How can God be three and yet one? How can the Lord Jesus Christ be human, and yet divine? The answer to these—and many other questions—is this: God has not yet enabled us to understand *how* these things can be, but he has clearly revealed *that* they are true.

And so it is with the free offer of the gospel. God has elected some to everlasting life. Yet he *also* commanded his church to go into all the world to preach the gospel to everyone. This is what we call the free offer—the unrestricted call to sinners of every description through the preaching of the gospel. And yet (and this is very important) it is never to be made so as to suggest that God is *not* sovereign.

For this reason you should not expect to hear an 'altar call' in our churches. The altar call is an American invention. And it was *not* invented by Reformed people. This method of evangelism should be rejected because it confuses things that differ. The natural man (the unregenerate sinner) *can* get up and come forward. But (as Jesus said) he can *not* come to *him* unless the Father draws him (Jn. 6:44). Nowhere in the Book of Acts do we find anything like the altar call method. What we find is faithful preaching. Then, when the Spirit applies that word to the hearts of dead sinners, they are made alive and begin to cry out 'what shall we do?'

So we preach the gospel to all, but we depend—not on a man-made method, but—on the sovereign work of the holy Spirit to bring men to conversion.

The Ingredients of a Successful Oversight Program

by

T. Nathan Trice



It would cause me more chagrin than surprise were I to learn that, for many of our church members, the primary activity associated with the office of elder is merely that of “going to Session meetings.” There would, of course, be at least some reason for this. Session meetings are regularly mentioned in our church bulletins. Sessional action taken within those meetings is frequently reported to the congregation, and many parts of the life of the church are directly affected by what goes on in the meetings of the Session. Certainly involvement in such meetings is a vital part of the work of the elder, and, in some sense, it is the glory of Presbyterianism on the local level: a plurality of wise and godly men, governing the affairs of the church through prayerful deliberation and decision-making. In my judgment, however, involvement in Session meetings is among the least demanding of the responsibilities of an elder, and, measured in terms of actual investment of time and energy, constitutes a relatively minor part of the fulfillment of an elder’s calling to office. It really does not come hard for most of us men to be called upon to voice our opinions to one another in Sessional deliberations, and despite the late nights and occasional stress that accompanies it, there is a certain natural gratification that is felt at being involved in making authoritative decisions on behalf of the congregation. On the other hand, it comes far less easily for us as elders to engage ourselves fully in what should be the primary activity which our members associate with the role of elder; personal and pastoral involvement in the lives of the people. Because this direct shepherding labor is easily the most demanding aspect of being an elder, it is also

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the most neglected, perhaps contributing more than we know to the notion among our members that being an elder involves simply “going to Session meetings.” It is this vital work of pastoral oversight that I would like to address in this article.

It is not my intention here to defend biblically the work of pastoral oversight through home visitation and other means. The biblical description of the elder’s role as “keeping watch over souls” (Acts 20:28, Heb. 13:17) is self-evidently something which cannot take place merely by attending Session meetings. Others have written about the broader biblical mandate for elders to take pains to be acquainted with the members of the church, and to provide personalized instruction and accountability, and indeed, our whole Reformed tradition provides rich historical precedent for this aspect of an elder’s ministry. Indeed, this whole realm of duty is, in my experience, *instinctively* recognized by those with truly pastoral hearts. My intention, therefore, is to offer several practical observations regarding what I believe to be the essential “ingredients” to a successful ministry of pastoral oversight in the church.

1. The division of the congregation into “shepherding groups”

In all but the very smallest churches the minister alone will be unable to meet the congregation’s need for oversight, and in light of this, it is wise to assign individual elders to families to function as their primary overseer. By limiting the field of their responsibility, each elder is enabled to direct his pastoral efforts to a

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more manageable number of people, and to make the significant investment of time and energy in them which would be otherwise impossible. Likewise, the members are afforded access to a member of the Session other than the ever-busy minister: an elder who has specifically made himself available to them. When a congregation is properly schooled in this shepherding structure, they will begin to look not only to the minister but also to their “shepherding elder” for counsel and assistance. This will in turn free up the minister to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5) in the visitation and follow-up of visitors to the church, as well as to devote his pastoral work and counseling to those more urgent cases that arise within the congregation. In our congregation, new members are assigned to shepherding elders at the time of their initial interview, and we have found that 10 households per elder represent the upper limit of what is manageable in light of our shepherding goals.

When an elder fully embraces the opportunities afforded him by this division of labor, he will begin to carry about with him a pastoral concern particularly for the welfare of *his own flock* within the flock, for which he is primarily responsible. As is habitual with all true shepherds, his concern will manifest itself in a frequent and habitual “counting of sheep” in a variety of ways. When the members of the church gather on the Lord’s Day for worship and spiritual nourishment, the conscientious shepherding elder will look for each member of his shepherding group, and take note when any are missing from the opportunity to be fed. Likewise, he will regularly name each member of his shepherding group in intercessory prayer, ensuring that not even the youngest of the lambs are left out of his labors in prayer on their behalf. Further, he will diligently plan various avenues by which to check on the health of each of the households within his flock at various points throughout the year, so that even those seemingly least in need are still given the attention of the

shepherd. Especially in a growing congregation it will be vitally important for every member of the fold to have at least one elder conscientiously keeping up with his coming and going.

2. Formal Pastoral Visits

The backbone of successful pastoral oversight is regular pastoral visitation in the home: a subject that has been addressed in this publication before. The primary point which I would make here is that great care should be taken to prevent such elder visits from devolving into mere social visits. It should be understood by the entire household that it is the elder’s focused objective to assess the spiritual condition of each of its members, and

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to provide personalized instruction and encouragement as appropriate. The elder himself should come to the meeting with a plan and focus that will enable him to meet this objective. I have found that a particularly helpful device for bringing the congregations’ ex-

pectations into alignment with that of the elders is a “family visitation guide” which can be distributed periodically to the congregation. This guide outlines the purpose and biblical basis for family visitation, the planned structure of the meeting itself, and the way families can ready themselves for it. The material which our Session uses has been almost entirely borrowed with permission from the Session of Second Parish OPC in Portland, Maine, and is appended here as an illustration. It is distributed to all the members of our congregation at the beginning of each year, and serves to initiate new members to the practice as well as to remind the rest of the congregation once again to expect a contact from their shepherding elder for the purpose of arranging another shepherding visit.

It is extremely important that the shepherding elder prepare himself to effectively *lead* the shepherding visit. The elder should come prepared to follow a simple line of questioning at each visit. These questions should be aimed at the

various aspects of a Christian's life which are indicators of his spiritual well-being, including personal Bible reading and prayer, the marriage relationship, parenting endeavors, and vocational pursuits. In addition to this, it is important to question church members regarding the fulfillment of their membership responsibilities, especially their church attendance and involvement in ministry to others within the body. The purpose of such questioning is to enable the elder to address areas of need with words of admonition and encouragement. When an elder has gotten to know those in his shepherding group well, he will sometimes go on a visit with certain pastoral concerns already in mind, and he will wisely direct the conversation accordingly. One of the primary benefits of regular visitation is that patterns of sin can be dealt with in their early development. When more extended counseling is needed, the minister's assistance can then be enlisted in the form of specialized counseling.

When there are children in the home, they should receive the elder's attention as well, and it will often be most convenient to do this early in the visit in order to be able to dismiss them later for more extended discussion with their parents. The children's progress in learning the catechism should receive the elder's attention in particular, and their readiness to make public profession of faith should be a regular point of discussion and counsel with their parents.

A wise elder will allow for *flexibility* but will seek to retain a *focus* in the course of his visit. He will allow for unplanned emphases on issues of obvious importance which arise in the meeting, but he will remain resistant to even innocent digressions that can sidetrack the meeting. For example, when an elder encounters evidence of marital conflict in the home, it may well be prudent to dwell upon this area for the majority of the visit, to the exclusion of other important concerns. It is unlikely, however, that discussions of a new job or a new home purchase in them-

selves, on the other hand, should be allowed to consume a whole visit, at the expense of broader indicators of spiritual health in the members of the household. This spiritually diagnostic focus of the elders' visit is a delicate and sometimes even uncomfortable experience for members. Consequently, there is the natural tendency on the part of both elders and member to shy away from the most pointed of spiritual conversations. To the degree that this happens, however, the visit has forfeited its primary potential for good, and can very easily become little more than a waste of valuable time, both that of the family and the elder.

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3. Ongoing Informal Fellowship

As fundamental to the shepherding role as these formal visits are, it is utterly essential that such encounters not take place in a vacuum of broader, informal interaction. In fact, their profitability will be determined in large part by the relationship that is built through many other informal times of fellowship by which an elder comes to know and be known by his flock. If the only meaningful contact between an elder and those under his care takes place in an annual shepherding visit, he cannot reasonably expect the members of his shepherding group to be genuinely open and responsive to his probing questions, or for himself to have the insight necessary to profitably minister to them. For this reason, in addition to formal and structured oversight visits, the conscientious elder will embrace the responsibility to develop in informal ways bona fide relationships with those under his care.

There are countless ways in which this fellowship can be fostered, including the occasional lunch appointment with the men of the church or the periodic phone call to the single mother. The avenue with greatest potential, however, is that of elders regularly opening their own homes to the members of their shepherding groups for times of

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unstructured fellowship. This will, of course, place demands upon the elder's entire family, and will even necessitate at times the sacrificing of other legitimate social pursuits in favor of this vital ministry. That this is an essential part of the fulfillment of an elder's calling, however, is made clear by the prominent and repeated place given to "hospitality" as a qualification in Scripture for office (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Showing hospitality is the general responsibility of all the members of the church (1 Peter 4: 9), but is one that in our day seems to go largely undeveloped in many otherwise solid Christian families, contributing largely, in my judgement, to the ineffectiveness of our ministry in the local church. For the elders of the church, this is a critical aspect of their shepherding responsibilities, and their practice in this area should consequently be a model for the rest of the congregation.

4. A Sessional System of Accountability

Elders who take seriously the foregoing responsibilities will quickly find that they are too substantial to be fulfilled by anything less than a determined, systematic approach. Times for both formal visitation and informal hospitality will need to be planned and scheduled in advance, or they will likely not happen at all. In light of this, there is great wisdom in the Session devising a system of accountability to encourage the individual initiative of overseeing elders. The old adage, that it is not so much what is *expected* but that is *inspected* that gets done, applies to the earnest but ever-busy elders of the church as well. Once the necessity of pastoral oversight has been embraced by the Session, then specific goals should be agreed upon. How many formal pastoral visits will each elder seek to make in a year's time? How many occasions for informal hospitality? When the Session as a whole has agreed upon what is good and reasonable to aim for, in light of the local situation, then each elder can pursue these shepherding objectives with his own shepherding

group in light of his own schedule. At Matthews OPC, at the end of each calendar year I ask the elders to submit their visitation schedules for the following year: a list of household names with a corresponding month of the year in which a shepherding visit is intended. I then compile these lists, and during the course of the coming year I include in the docket of our monthly Session meetings reports from each of the elders on the visits planned in the previous month. These reports may be very brief, but they may also serve to inform the elders of pastoral concerns, as well as benefit them with input from the members of the church. Of course, many changes have to be made during the course of a year, and sometimes wholly revised schedules must be submitted. However, at

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every Session meeting there is included in the docket the shepherding visits that are due (or past due!), according to each elder's own schedule, and those visits remain on the monthly dockets until a report is made on them. While it is to be expected that from time to time elders will get behind in their visitation during the course of the year, the benefit of this system of accountability is that any falling behind in visitation responsibilities is a

matter which receives the attention of the whole Session.

5. Honest Identification of the Elder's Greatest Need.

Recently I heard another minister refer to a startling assessment which the leadership of his church had made concerning the reasons for the inadequacies of their congregation's ministry to one another. "Why are people not better cared for in our congregation?" was the question asked, and, after ruling out various merely administrative possibilities, the answer was finally given: "*People are not adequately cared for because we just don't care.*" I, of course, recognized the measure of hyperbole in this assessment, for I knew that the congregation involved was a spiritually mature

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one in many ways. I was, however, immediately struck with the penetrating insight of this assessment which, in my judgment, gets to the very heart of why needy people often “slip through the cracks” of the ministry of our churches. Even after we have recognized our pastoral responsibilities as elders, agreed upon our oversight objectives, and submitted ourselves to a system of accountability, the determining factor of whether or not we actually fulfil our duties to God’s people is the measure to which we retain in ourselves the caring heart of a shepherd toward them. Likewise, effective oversight in the local church requires not so much elders with expansive amounts of time, but rather, a constant attentiveness and loving responsiveness in even small ways to the needs of our people.

When I began my pastoral ministry, I was early impressed with the need for *wisdom* in the fulfillment of my shepherding responsibilities, and I remain so. I have since then, however, come to see that I have another, more ever-present spiritual need in the fulfillment of my duties as shepherd, and that is *love*. In the day-to-day work of the ministry, it is not so much wisdom which I find myself in need of, but sacrificial devotion to the well-being of God’s people. I need to be enabled by the Spirit to *care*, deeply and passionately, about the well-being of the sheep: all of them, and all of their needs. I submit that we as elders need to be honest enough to recognize that the primary reason for unfulfilled shepherding responsibilities is our own failure simply to care sufficiently about the sheep. To be sure, we may be readily moved to compassion by sudden, crisis-level needs, and galvanized to sacrificial action on the behalf of sheep who are in dire distress. But a far greater test of a shepherd’s heart is in the every day, ordinary care of sheep, when their souls’ needs are occasioned not by severe providences of God, but perhaps by patterns of sin which are irksome and even exasperating. Compassionate care is especially tested when they themselves are

unconscious of their need and therefore unresponsive to our assistance. I have learned from experience that there is a profound difference between a natural affection for people with which many of us are gifted, and sacrificial Christian love which “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Cor. 13:7). When God imparts this grace to us elders, the work of pastoral oversight *will get done*, despite all providential hindrances and personal inadequacies. When this

most essential work of an elder is not being done, we need to look first to the absence of this grace as the most likely cause. This is the most fundamental ingredient to the establishment of a successful pastoral oversight program, and can be gained only by the rekindling of a shepherd’s heart in us by the Great Shepherd himself. Brothers, let us seek this grace earnestly and incessantly in

prayer, for surely he is willing to give it!

Rev. T. Nathan Trice currently serves as pastor of Matthews Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. Although this article was intended to be a companion piece with the brochure included in the previous issue, we did not receive this in time. We therefore recommend that you look at the brochure as you read this article.

THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL:

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE NON-ELECT - Part 3

by Stephen D. Doe



Introduction

The free offer of the gospel is the idea that God truly calls sinners to Himself in the proclamation of the gospel and that this offer is sincerely made to elect and non-elect alike. It is grounded in the benevolent love of God for His creation. Psalm 145:9, for instance, says that the Lord is good to all and compassionate to all his works or makings [the participial form of *asah*], cf. Psalm 119:64. Even man's sin and the corruption which it brought cannot remove God's attitude of mercy toward his creatures. If we look closely at one text, Matthew 5:43-48, we can see this more clearly.

The Context

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-48) Jesus has been teaching his disciples how they are to have a righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees which was a merely legalistic righteousness (v. 20). Christ contrasts the Pharisees teaching with his own instruction as the second Moses. He rejects a works righteousness and instead describes the behavior of those broken by their sin. His disciples realize their spiritual poverty and mourn over sin (vv. 3-4), and identify with him, the obedient Son who fulfills all the Law on behalf of his people (v. 17).

The Contrast in vv. 43-44

In vv. 43-44 Jesus contrasts what the teachers of the Law have said ("You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,'"") with what God had actually taught in the Old Testament. Leviticus 19:18 had simply said to love one's neighbor as one's self. The religious teachers had added to that the phrase, 'and hate your enemy.' So God's people are to show care for even their enemies (Exodus 23:4-5). The Pharisaic addition limited the application of the command of God to a degree which was attainable to unregenerate man. This ethical 'dumbing down' is part and parcel of the effort of the unregenerate man to have a law which he can obey apart from dependence on the grace and power of God.

Jesus' contrast is that rather than hating one's enemy (v. 43), his disciples are to love them and to pray for them. Notice several things about vv. 43-44: The verb for 'love' in both verses is *agapao* frequently used of God's love towards his people. The verbs in v. 44, 'love' and 'pray', are both in the imperative mood, that is, they are commands. The word for 'enemy' is *echthros*. It probably comes from the word for 'out' and so means someone who is outside or against you (cf. Matthew 13:39, Romans 5:8,10). The parallel between 'enemy' and 'the persecuting-you-ones' shows that these are those who are opposed to the sons of the kingdom and hence are opposed to God.

Consider the two verses together. The followers of Jesus are to think and act differently than followers of the teachers of the Law. The latter limited love to those (neighbors) where less cost was involved as v. 46 shows: you love those who love you. They also added the unbiblical idea that it is all right to hate one's enemies in spite of the Old Testament teaching. Those who would learn from Jesus must love even those who would harm them or are set against them.

The Comparison in v. 45

Jesus moves from talking about the behavior of his people in vv. 43-44 to another, additional reason for our obedience. The first reason to obey Jesus' command is (in v. 44) of course, that he is the one saying

it. That is sufficient in itself, but in v. 45 Jesus adds another part to his argument. Note these things: Jesus begins with the word 'thus' or 'then' or 'in order that'. This word connects v. 45 to vv. 43-44 with the sense that the behavior of vv. 43-44 will result in his disciples being like their heavenly Father.

What the Father does is described in terms of God's acting. God does not merely passively permit something, but wills it to come to pass. He acts to make the sun to rise and the rain to fall. God determines to do certain things. The subjects of these two actions in v. 45 are of two kinds: evil/unrighteous and good/righteous. Note that these are ethical categories. Jesus does not use an article which would say, 'the evil and the good, the righteous and the unrighteous' but makes the categories absolute. Jesus' form of argument moves from the greater (God the Father) to the lesser (Jesus' disciples). God the Father in heaven sends his sun and rain on those who oppose him (evil and unrighteous men) as well as on those who love him (good and righteous men), therefore his sons are to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors. That is the form of Jesus' argument.

The Implications for Our Discussion

Implicit in Jesus' argument from the greater to the lesser is the reverse. We (the lesser) are to do what our heavenly Father (the greater) does. He loves his enemies and we are to love our enemies that we might be seen to be his sons.

Those who reject the idea of the free offer of the gospel say that there is no love in God toward the evil/unrighteous in the actions of v. 45. The sun and the rain come upon the evil/unrighteous, that is, the reprobate, only because God is intentionally showing his loving favor to the good/righteous or the elect. The reprobate evil/unrighteous receive benefits only because they live in the same world as the elect. This, however, would destroy the moral force of what Jesus is saying. His disciples are to intentionally and pointedly love their enemies because that is what God does to his enemies in the gifts of sun and rain. It is also said that these benefits indicate no love on God's part but are simply functions of the creation. That again is not what Jesus says. The sun and the rain do not occur by

bare permission but true choices by God to display his goodness to his creatures. Finally it is said by some that the gifts of sun and rain which God pours out on His creatures serve, in the case of the reprobate, to increase their guilt. That is far from what this passage teaches. That interpretation too would remove the moral force of Jesus, teaching. For his argument from the greater to the lesser to stand, God must act in a way which is parallel to the way in which we are called to act.

There is nothing in any of these verses to modify or change the absoluteness of the categories: some are enemies, evil, unrighteous, and some are neighbors, good, righteous. If we try to change the categories we are bringing something into the text which is not there. The argument Jesus makes is very simple: God loves (in a non-redemptive way) his creatures, even the evil and unrighteous, who are enemies. He demonstrates that (non-redemptive) love by doing them good in the form of sun and rain. The sons of the kingdom are to imitate that love. This love of God is sacrificial in character because his justice demands that the unbeliever's ingratitude be immediately punished, a point Paul touches on in Acts 14:15-17 and 17:23-31. The believer is to be an imitator of his heavenly Father in demonstrating love when it is least deserved or merited, for God himself has a non-redemption love which is shown to the works of his hands, man as God's creature and image-bearer.

We must go a step further, however, in a final study, to see that the mercy of God which is over all his works is also found in the proclamation of the gospel.

This is the third part of Pastor Stephen D. Doe's fine discussion of the Free Offer of the Gospel. A fourth and final section which is planned for the next issue of *Ordained Servant* will conclude this series. Stephen is currently serving as Pastor of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Barre VT.



WHAT IS A WORSHIP SERVICE?

by

Larry Wilson

Frequently, people calling to inquire about our church ask, “Are your worship services contemporary or traditional?” Every time I hear that, I feel a lot like the guy who’s just been asked, “Are you still beating your wife?” How can you answer a question like that? It’s the wrong question! It starts out with wrong assumptions. It doesn’t even begin to get at the real meaning of worship.

Of all the various kinds of meetings we can have, a worship service is unique. It’s qualitatively different from any other kind of meeting on this earth because, above all else, public worship is a meeting between God and his people.

In the Old Testament, God called his people to gather for public worship at a central sanctuary (the tabernacle or temple). They had to go even when it involved the inconvenience of travelling great distances to do so! Why? Because that’s where God was! In other words, that’s where he revealed his presence in a special way in order to meet with his people. In Bible shorthand, his “Name” was there.

The Lord commanded: “But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go” (Deuteronomy 12:5). He gave the promise, “In every place where I record my Name, I will come to you and I will bless you” (Exodus 20:24).

This meant that after the temple was built in Jerusalem, God’s Old Testament people had to travel there to worship him. That’s the significance of the Samaritan woman’s question to Jesus: “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is Jerusalem” (John 4:19-20). In other words, where can you

meet with God? Is it on Mt. Gerizim (as the Samaritans said)? Or is it in Jerusalem (as the Jews said)?

Jesus responded, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 20:21-22). That is, the Jews followed the Old Testament form of worship and it was correct—for the time of the Old Testament! But a time is coming, Jesus said, when Old Testament worship will be outmoded.

And so Jesus went on to say: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). When does that time come? When Jesus comes (John 4:23, 26).

Jesus Christ has come! He has fulfilled the Old Testament forms. He has transformed them. He has ushered in the New Testament.

Because of the finished work of Christ, God no longer limits his church to one nation (Israel). Now, the church is an expanding, international community.

Because of Jesus, we no longer worship in “shadows” (temporary Old Testament forms which were designed to point to and prepare the way for Christ). Instead, we worship in “truth” (John 4:23-24; cf. 1:17; 14:6).

Because of Jesus, we no longer go to a physical sanctuary in Jerusalem to meet with God. Now we go to a spiritual sanctuary in heaven—because that’s where Jesus is! If God’s Old Testament people had to approach God through one place, God’s New Testament people have to approach God through one Per-

What is a Worship Service?

son. We approach the Triune God through Jesus (John 14:6). God's presence is not located in the temple. It is located in Jesus.

God's Old Testament people needed a priest to enter the presence of God for them. Jesus is our High Priest, and because of his finished work all God's people are priests who can go into God's very presence through him (Hebrews 10:19-25; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

Now we worship "in spirit" (John 4:23-24). God is spirit, and now we approach him in his heavenly sanctuary by his Holy Spirit (Philippians 3:3; Revelation 1:10), the living water (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). In this way we come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than that of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

At the very same time, our Lord comes to meet us in our earthly worship assemblies, just as he promised; "for where two or three are gathered together in my Name, said Jesus, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Just as God put his Name in the Old Testament temple (Deuteronomy 12:5), so now he puts his Name in the New Testament temple. And that temple is Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:19-22) and those who are united to Jesus Christ, his church (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22)! Now Jesus declares God's Name in the midst of the church's worship services (Hebrews 2:12; cf. Psalm 22:22)!

This is why church worship services are different from any other kind of meetings we can have. Public worship is, first and foremost, a meeting between the Lord and his people.

This is why we preach rather than discuss God's Word in a worship service. The Minister of God's Word—one formally recognized by the church to serve officially as God's herald—represents God as he comes and speaks to his people by his Word and Spirit. In this way, the Lord puts his "Name" in the midst of his people.

This is also why worship services are a duty and not an option for believers. Let us not give up assembling together, as some are in the habit of doing! (Hebrews 10:25). This is why an informal gathering with your family or with a parachurch group can never serve as an acceptable substitute for public worship with the church on the Lord's Day. The Lord's "Name" isn't there!

This is why a worship service is not a sharing session, although there's a place for that. It's why a worship service is not an evangelistic program, although there's a place for that, too. But a worship service is not merely a meeting of people with each other. Above all else, a worship service is a meeting of God with his people.

And this is why the question, "Are your worship services contemporary or traditional?" misses the point. I've found that when people ask that question, they are—virtually without exception—assuming that worship is an optional meeting between people and people. The more important question is, "Do you see worship as a meeting between God and his people?" That's primary. Questions about styles of music are not unimportant, but they are secondary.

Each Lord's Day, then, as you gather with your church congregation in the exalted Name of Jesus Christ, remember that you gather first and foremost to meet with God. "Come before his presence with singing—Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise" (Psalm 100:2, 4). Listen eagerly to his voice as his Word is proclaimed, and don't harden your heart against it (Psalm 95:7-8). "Give to the LORD the glory due his Name; bring an offering and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:8-9).

Larry Wilson is the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education, the committee that has oversight of this publication. This article, however, was written while he was still pastor of the Grace OPC in Columbus, OH.



A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ELDERS

by

Greg Reynolds



as modified by William Shishko

The following elder training program was developed by Pastor Greg Reynolds and subsequently slightly modified by Pastor William Shishko. It was produced in the early 1980's. It was used in the early years of Westchester OPC, now located in Mount Vernon, New York. It was also used for the training of two new elders in the OPC, Franklin Square. The advantage of the program is that it is a thorough introduction to both our Church standards and the work of the eldership. It is ideal for men who are training their initial group of elders, particularly in a mission church or in the revitalization of an established church. It provides ample time for a pastor to develop the major elements necessary for men to serve as faithful and useful ruling elders. For men in larger congregations, however, it may not be possible to carve out the time necessary to do justice to this program. In such situations it may be better to produce an abridged program that still covers the areas outlined below. The bibliography is somewhat dated, but the works referred to are standard volumes with value that is hardly dated.

INTRODUCTION

- A. This program is being instituted to train men for the New Covenant office of ruling elder. (I Timothy 5:17)
- B. The Program may be participated in only by those who are invited by the session. (The congregation may submit suggestions).
- C. The program may lead to the presentation of a candidate(s) by the session to the congregation for election to the office of ruling elder. This depends upon the assessment of the session and the self-assessment of each participant.
- D. The program requires diligent, thoughtful, and prayerful preparation. Each class hour should be prepared for by at least one hour of reading and reflection on the assigned material. (Each class will be between 1 and 2 hours long.)
- E. Participation is essential for the edification of each member and to aid the session in its assessment of each man. Come prepared, therefore, both to ask and answer questions on the material.

A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ELDERS

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

(cf. Public Profession Class Bibliography, handout)

- Week # 1: INTRODUCTION: SCRIPTURE
- Read: Williamson, “*The Westminster Confession of Faith*” Chapter 1 (pp. 1-22)
 (W.C.F. I)
 Three helpful supplements in order of their value are:
 a. Shaw, “*An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*” (C.F.P.);
 b. A. A. Hodge, “*The Confession of Faith*” (B.T.T.);
 c. Clark, “*What Do Presbyterians Believe?*” (P&R)
- Week # 2: GOD, TRINITY, DECREE
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 2, 3 (pp. 23-40); W.C.F. II
- Week # 3: CREATION, PROVIDENCE, FALL
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 41-61; W.C.F. IV - VI)
- Week # 4: ACCOMPLISHMENT OF REDEMPTION:
 Covenant, Christ The Mediator
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 7, 8 (pp. 62-84; W.C.F. VII, VIII)
- Week # 5 APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION:
 Free Will, Effectual Calling, Faith & Repentance
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 9-11 (pp. 85-102; W.C.F. IX, X, XIV, XV).
- Week # 6: APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION:
 Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Good Works
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 12-15 (pp. 103-125; W.C.F. XI-XIII, XVI).
- Week # 7 APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION:
 Perseverance, Assurance
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 16, 17 (pp. 126-136; W.C.F. XVII, XVIII):
 Shishko mimeo on “*Five Points of Calvinism*.”
- Begin Reading: Williamson, “*Shorter Catechism*” (Vol. II (pp. 1-80) on the Ten Command-
 ments: cf. “*Larger Catechism*” Ques. 91-149 (F.P.P. ed. pp. 178-238).
- Week # 8: LAW OF GOD, CHRISTIAN LIBERTY
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 18, 19 (pp. 137-157; W.C.F. XIX, XX)
- Finish Reading: Williamson, “*Shorter Catechism*” Vol. II (pp.1-80)

A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ELDERS

- Week # 9:** WORSHIP, SABBATH, OATHS AND VOWS
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 20, 21 (pp. 158-179; W.C.F. XXI, XXII)
Berghoef and DeKoster, “Elder’s Handbook” (Chapter 6 (pp. 81-90)
“O.P.C. Directory for Public Worship” cf. W.C.F. (F.P.P.)
“The Directory for the Public Worship of God” (pp. 369-394)
- Week # 10:** MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE, CHURCH, COMMUNION OF SAINTS
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 22-24 (pp. 180-199; W.C.F. XXIV - XXVI)
Witherow, “The Apostolic Church”
Reed, “Biblical Church Government”
Owen, “Works...” Vol. XIII (pp. 173-181); Vol. XV (pp. 445-530); Vol. XVI
(pp. 254-257)
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapter 8 (pp. 97-120).
Attend first session meeting.
- Week # 11:** SACRAMENTS: BAPTISM AND LORD’S SUPPER
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 25-27 (pp. 200-230; W.C.F. XXVII-XXIX)
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapter 13 (pp. 165-174) (cf. Neilands, “Studies”)
Douma, “Infant Baptism & Conversion”
Miller, “Baptism”
Owen, “Infant Baptism & Dipping” Vol. XVI (pp. 258-269)
- Week # 12:** CHURCH DISCIPLINE: THE STATE, CHURCH GOVERNMENT
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 28-30 (pp. 231-251; W.C.F. XXX, XXIII, XXXI)
Galbraith, “Why the O.P.C.?”
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapters 9, 10 (pp. 121-140).
Make first regular congregational visit
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapter 7 (pp. 91-96)
- Begin Reading: Williamson, “Understanding the Times” (pp. 1-62) (cf. Roger Wagner ar-
ticles in “Journal of Pastoral Practice” Vol. VI (Nos. 1-4)
Owen, “Works...” Vol. XVI (pp. 1-105; pp. 151-182; 210-239).
- Week # 13:** APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION:
 Glorification, Eschatology, Evangelism and Apologetics
- Read: Williamson, Chapters 31, 32 (pp. 252-267; W.C.F. XXXII, XXXIII)
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapters 19, 20 (pp. 235-257)
Attend second session meeting (or @ #14)
- Finish Reading: Williamson, “Understanding the Times” (pp. 63-103) [Available on web at:
<http://home.rconnect.com/~giwopc/>]
- Week # 14:** QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERSHIP

A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ELDERS

Read: “Elder’s Handbook” Chapters 1-5, 11 (pp. 1-80; 141-152)
Eyres, “The Elders of the Church” Chapters V-VIII (pp. 25-46)
C.H.M.C.E., “Practical Guidelines for Church Planting” (pp. 7-11)
Miller, “The Ruling Elder” (pp.17-28) cf. Brown, I Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Scipioni, “Timothy, Titus and You” is helpful as a workbook on self-examination in the area of qualifications).

Week # 15: THE OFFICE OF RULE

Read: Coppes, “Who Will Lead Us?” Chapter 9 (pp. 93-104)
Eyres, “The Elders” Chapters I-IV (pp. 1-24)
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapters 16-18 (pp. 207-234)
Owen, “Works...” Vol. XVI, Chapter VII (pp. 106-130)
Miller, “The Ruling Elder” (pp. 1-16) cf. Dabney, Disc. Vol. 2 (pp. 119-157) cf. W.C.F. (F.P.P.)
“The Form of Presbyterical Church Government” (pp. 396-416)
“O.P.C. Form of Government” Chapters V, X (pp. 10, 11, 18)

Week # 16: THE DUTIES OF THE ELDER AS SHEPHERD

Read: Baxter, “The Reformed Pastor” (Especially Chapter II (pp. 87-123)
“Elder’s Handbook” Chapters 12, 14, 15 (pp. 153-164; 175-206)
Owen, “Works” Vol. XVI Chapter VIII (pp. 130-143)
Adams, “Shepherding God’s Flock” Vol. I. (pp. 75-136); cf. McNair, “Challenge” (pp. 1-29)
McNair, “Growing Living Church” (pp. 87-108)
Owen, Vol. XIII (pp. 1-89)
Make congregational visit and attend session meeting (here or at #17).

Week # 17: THE DUTIES OF THE ELDER AS LEADER

Read: Eyres, “The Elders” Chapters XI, XII (pp. 59-69)
Adams, “Shepherding God’s Flock” Vol. III (pp. 1-151)
McNair, “Challenge” (pp. 30-56)
McNair, “Growing Living Church” Chapter 9 (pp. 120-128)
McNair, “Living Church” (pp. 61-82) cf. O.P.C. F.O.G. Chapter XIII (pp. 23-26)

Week # 18: CONCLUSION, BETWEEN ELECTION AND ORDINATION

Read: Eyres, “The Elders” Chapters IX, X (pp. 47-58)
McNair, “Growing Living Church” (pp. 79-86)
O.P.C. Standards
By-laws of the Presbytery of N.Y. & New England
By-laws of Congregation
Meet with session.

Arminianism, Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism

by

Brenton Ferry



Introduction

In spite of the formal similarity between Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism has much in common with Arminianism. In fact, Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism appear to be ‘alter egos’ of the same problem. This is illustrated by an examination of certain presuppositions upon which their systems operate.

Presupposition #1: God’s Decree - God’s Desire

Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism both require that God’s decree and God’s desire correspond. The Arminian believes that since God desires that all should be saved, he did not decree that only some will be saved. The Hyper-Calvinist believes that since God decrees that only some will be saved, he does not desire that all should be saved. So, the Arminian collapses God’s decree into his desire, and the Hyper-Calvinist collapses God’s desire into his decree. Or you could say that they each effectively erase one for the other. But both extremes arise from the principle agreement that there must be no tension between God’s decree and God’s desire. The Calvinist, on the other hand, recognizes an important distinction between the decree and desire of God, and lives with the tension that there are some things which God decrees but does not desire (like sin and damnation), and there are some things which God desires but does not decree (like universal repentance and salvation).

Presupposition #2: The Love of God

Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists both believe God’s love is restricted by his intent to save. Arminians believe God loves the whole world, therefore he is prepared to save the whole world. Hyper-Calvinists believe that since God only saves the elect he only loves the elect. But, Calvinists believe that in some way God loves even those he does not intend to save.

Presupposition #3: Ability & Responsibility

Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists both believe that

ability to exercise saving faith and responsibility to exercise saving faith must correspond. Arminians suppose that since all are responsible to exercise saving faith, all must be able. Hyper-Calvinists believe that since only the elect are able only the elect are responsible. But, true Calvinists believe that even though many are not able to exercise saving faith, all are responsible to exercise saving faith.

Presupposition #4: The Extent of the Atonement and The Free-Offer of the Gospel

Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists both believe that knowledge of the extent of the atonement is necessary for the proclamation of the gospel. Arminians say that since the gospel must be proclaimed to all the atonement must be extended to all. Hyper-Calvinists believe that since the saving benefit of the atonement only extends to the elect, the gospel offer is really only for the elect. Yet, Calvinists believe that though we know the benefits of the atonement will not extend to all in a saving way, the benefits are to be offered to all in the preaching of the gospel.

Conclusion

These four points demonstrate that, in principle, Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism are similar in that both attempt to get rid of the tension by the use of human reason. Calvinism, on the other hand, is a system that is willing to live with a quiet tension, in order to avoid both of these errors.

Brenton Ferry is currently serving as Pastor of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, in Mount Airy, NC. Brenton is one of a growing number of younger ministers of the OPC who have participated in studies offered by the Ministerial Training Institute.

The Biblical View of Church Unity

by

Archibald A.Allison



INTRODUCTION

To the casual onlooker there seems to be little, if any, unity in the church of Jesus Christ today. If you look in the telephone book you see over seventy-five different categories under the main category of “Churches.” There is Adventist, Anglican Catholic, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Baptist American, Baptist Bible Fellowship, Baptist Conservative, Baptist Free Will, Baptist Independent, Baptist Non-Affiliated, Baptist Southern, Bible, Brethren, Calvary Chapel, Charismatic, and the list goes on and on. Some of those categories are for churches that are one of a kind, such as Church on the Rock or Cornerstone Family Church.

Is there any such thing as Church unity? What is church unity when there are seventy-five different categories of churches, just in Fort Collins? There are many different answers to these questions. Some say there is no unity in the church. Some say all Bible-believing churches are united because they all believe in Jesus as the Savior of sinners. That is church unity right there. So we must turn to the Bible to understand the biblical view of church unity. Since God the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, the Bible gives us God’s view of church unity. What does God say about the unity of his church, the church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

I. THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

First, what is the church? According to the Bible, the church is the covenant people of God. The church is the people whom God has called out of this sinful world to be his people. God promises his covenant people (1) that he will be their God and (2) that he will dwell with them. We see this in Genesis 12:1-3 where God calls Abram and his family to leave his relatives in Mesopotamia and sets Abram and his family apart as the holy people of God to whom God will give his covenant blessings. We read in Genesis 12:7 that Abram built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. The Lord was his God and

as one of God’s people he worshipped and served the Lord.

In Genesis 17 God more fully reveals his covenant to Abraham (Gen.17:1-8). Central to the covenant is God’s promise “I will be God to you and your descendants after you.” When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt “God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am Yahweh; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:1-7).

All through the Bible God refers to his eternal covenant of grace in which he promises believers and their children that he will be their God and he will make them his people. God requires that his covenant people obey his law, the Bible. That body of people with whom God establishes his eternal covenant is the church. Those are the ones he has called out to be his, which is what the Greek word for church means: “called out.” Jeremiah 7:23.

This same eternal covenant of grace is brought into its fullest and richest dimension by the Mediator Jesus Christ and his work of redemption. Jeremiah prophesied of the richness of God’s covenant after the coming of Christ in 31:33-34. This is the new covenant which the New Testament speaks of. Hebrews 10:11-18. It is the same essential covenant as the old covenant. The promises and obligations are the same. The new covenant differs from the old covenant in glory, richness, power,

The Biblical View of Church Unity

effect, and the way in which God administers the covenant. Jesus Christ the Mediator of the new covenant, the Great High Priest, and Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, replaces the priests and sacrifices of the old covenant. Reality in Christ replaces the shadows and ceremonies of the old covenant (Colossians 2:16-17).

The church is the covenant people of God in all ages. The church began in the Garden of Eden when God said to the serpent in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” God promised to set Eve and her Seed apart as his people redeemed by Christ and in battle with Satan and his kingdom. In the garden the line of battle down through the ages was drawn between the Christ and his church, on the one side, and Satan and all unbelievers on the other side.

That is the same church that Christ was speaking of in Matthew 16:17-19. The line of battle is still the same: Christ and his church versus Hades which is the place where God punishes the souls of the wicked who are in Satan’s kingdom of darkness. That is the same church in which the apostles taught and which still exists today.

The church is the covenant people. In the Old Testament the church, or covenant people of God, were primarily—but not exclusively—the children of Israel. Abraham had servants who were not his blood descendants, but were God’s covenant people. Circumcision, the Old Testament sign and seal of God’s covenant of grace, was for every male in one’s household, including servants who were not Israelites. Rahab and her family and Ruth are other examples of non-Israelites who joined the covenant people of God in the Old Testament.

In the new covenant the Israelites who broke God’s covenant were cast out of the covenant. God gave the kingdom to different people: to non-Israelite peoples or nations. Today the church is made up of God’s covenant people from every tongue and tribe and nation, including Israelites. One of the creeds from the Reformation, the Heidelberg Catechism, puts it this way in Q&A 54:

Q. What do you believe concerning the *holy catholic church*?

A. I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by his Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life.

B. All those who believe the covenant promises of God, together with their children, ought to join themselves publicly to a local congregation of the church of Jesus Christ. God seals his special covenant relationship with believers and their children in the sacrament of baptism. By baptism both believers and their children are publicly united to the body of Christ and admitted as members of the church. Those who publicly profess their faith in Christ and their commitment to keep God’s covenant in this way are to be recognized and treated as God’s people, as members of Christ’s body, which is his church. Those who do not publicly profess their faith in Christ and do not publicly commit themselves to keep God’s covenant and have not been baptized are not part of God’s covenant people. They are outside the church.

Article 28 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, another Reformation creed, states this covenantal obligation of every Christian to join the church, the covenant people of God, in this way:

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his state or quality may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the Church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow. All therefore who draw away from the Church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

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C. The church belongs to its Savior and Head, Jesus Christ. “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ” (Westminster Confession of Faith XXV.6). Ephesians 1:22; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18.

D. The church, as the body of Christ, lives in fellowship with Christ and in obedience to him (John 15:1-8; Ephesians 5:23-33). The church worships the triune God both corporately and as families. The minister of the Word together with the elders proclaim and apply the Scriptures and rule in the church. The members of the church are to edify one another, teach the covenant to their children and their children’s children, and also bear faithful witness of the gospel of Christ to those outside the church.

E. The Holy Spirit also governs his church by working in the minds and hearts of his people by and with the Word as it is expounded and applied by the office bearers of the church (1 Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 4:11-16).

The Belgic Confession brings many of these Scriptural points together in Article 27:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. This holy Church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man. Thus during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord kept for Himself seven thousand persons who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

II. The Unity of the Church

That brings us to the second point: The Unity of the Church.

The Bible teaches that the church of Jesus Christ is one. Christ has only one body. He has only one church. He has only one covenant of grace. He has only one covenant people. Christ is not divided. I Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:12-14. Ephesians 4:1-6.

That one church, that one covenant people down through every generation, is united by God’s one eternal covenant. God’s one eternal covenant of grace unifies all of Scripture, all of redemptive history, all of God’s covenant people, the church in every place and in every age from the beginning of the world to the end. God’s eternal covenant promise is stated in Ezekiel 37:26-27: “I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Leviticus 26:12. God makes this same covenant promise to every church and to every member of God’s covenant people.

This promise is fulfilled in Jesus who is Emmanuel, which means “God with us” (John 1:14). Jesus is the mediator of the covenant of grace. He has by his own blood redeemed his people to be his holy dwelling place or Temple. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9-17. Ephesians 2:21-22). This covenant promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. Revelation 21:1-4.

B. The church must recognize, appreciate, confess, and live out this covenantal unity of the people of God. This unity is not a human achievement. Rather, this unity is created by God, since he is the one who has established his covenant with his people.

C. In the Bible God describes the church as one church. Exodus 19:5-6. Deuteronomy 14:1-2. 26:16-19. Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:11-22; 4:1-16. 2 Corinthians 12:13. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12). In the New Testament we are to make disciples of all the nations or peoples of the world (Matthew 28:19-20). Everyone who believes becomes part of the one church or covenant people of God.

D. This unity includes the covenant people of God in the past, the present, and the future. John 17:20-21.

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E. The apostles proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. The one church of Christ is built upon that foundation. The apostles established local churches as covenant communities ruled by elders. These churches in various locations around the world were not independent, but together formed the one body of Christ, united by Christ the head, by the presence of the one Holy Spirit, and by the one eternal covenant of God with his people in every place. When the elders at Antioch and Jerusalem resolved a problem in the churches, their decision was binding on all the churches (Acts 15; 16:4-5).

F. Individual Christians and churches attain to the unity of the one church of Christ by growing in spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16). Unity and maturity are the result of mutual, loving admonition and submission to Scripture. Maturity and unity is shown by speaking and doing the truth in love.

G. Each member of the church of Jesus Christ is essential to the body of Christ. The growth of the whole body depends on the active participation of each part (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:13,16). Those who bear special office in the church are to equip the members for and help them in this work (Eph. 4:11-12).

III. Working Out This Unity in the Church Today

How do we apply this to the church today? How do we work out these truths in the church today?

A. The unity of the church is not mere tolerance of other Christians and church despite our differences. It is not just having a good attitude and feeling toward everyone. Biblical church unity is having no divisions; being perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Biblical church unity is based on all the truth revealed in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is a dynamic oneness in which believers and churches confess the same doctrine with one mouth and live in common, faithful obedience to the law of God. Biblical church unity is centered in the truth, in everything God has revealed in Scripture. Ephesians 4:13. Biblical church unity is confessional, that is, together we must confess all that God teaches us in his word and live in obedience to it. (John 17; Philippians 2:1-2). Creeds (summaries of the teaching of Scripture) are an important tool for biblical church unity.

B. The unity of the church is in Christ and his covenant. Biblical church unity is both a given reality and also a requirement. The unity of faith is both God's gift and a mandate to us. Ephesians 4:1-6,13,15. God requires us as families and churches to show this unity more and more in our confession and life. God says that the church will more and more come to the unity of faith in this age. Ephesians 4:11-13. We must actively pursue this goal of serving the Lord in perfect peace, purity, and unity. Not to strive for this goal with all our hearts is to violate the law of Christ.

Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to strive for visible, practical unity in Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:10; Romans 15:5-6; Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 4:3. It is not biblical unity for Christians to think differently about the teaching of the Bible. Biblical church unity is agreement on the truth of God's Word so that we glorify God with one mind and one mouth. The most important thing we can do to promote biblical church unity is to study, defend and propagate the faith once delivered to the saints. We should never grow weary of studying God's Word.

C. The ultimate goal of biblical church unity is one world-wide presbyterian/reformed church.

D. The present division of the church is because families and churches are unfaithful to God in doctrine, confession, practice, and life. Their doctrine and life is contrary to the Word of God. This is the result of pride, laziness, and even God's chastisement for sin.

Pride is a main cause of disunity (Proverbs 13:10). In our pride we refuse to listen and be corrected in doctrine and life. We are more interested in defending our church than in understanding, believing, and living according to the truth. We harshly condemn those who disagree instead of humbly exhorting them to search the Scriptures and consider our arguments. We are characterized by strife and vainglory rather than lowliness of mind (Philippians 2:3).

Because of laziness we do not search out the truth as we should. But there is no way the church can be of one mind when people are too lazy to learn the Scriptures. (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15).

The Biblical View of Church Unity

E. Since we are in this sinful situation, biblical unity can only come through repentance and reconciliation. We must repent of our pride, laziness, ignorance, and all the sin and disobedience that has led to disunity. We must turn from false doctrine and sinful practices and start obeying God's law. We must face our sins, acknowledge that we were wrong, and forsake those errors. If we are in an unfaithful church that has broken from the unity of the church of Christ, we must leave that church and join with a faithful church that endeavors to maintain the unity of faith by submitting to Scripture in all things.

F. There are degrees of purity among Christians and churches. There are presbyterian/reformed churches that are more faithful and others that are less faithful. There are non-reformed churches which desire to be faithful. There are unfaithful churches which have departed so far from the faith that they are no longer part of the one covenant people of God (e.g. the synagogues that rejected the gospel of Christ preached by the apostles).

G. Since biblical church unity is confessional, there can only be true unity among those who faithfully hold to the whole teaching of Scripture. Churches which faithfully hold to the whole teaching of Scripture are called reformed/presbyterian.

With love, humility, and a teachable spirit, we must avoid pride, a censorious spirit, and foolish and unprofitable questions. We must continually study the Scriptures and in meekness and patience instruct those who oppose the truth. Heretics and false teachers are a great threat to biblical unity. Their mouths must be stopped. (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:14; Philippians 2:3-4; Psalm 119:97-104; Proverbs 2:1-9; Romans 14:1-10; II Timothy 2:23-25; Proverbs 12:1).

H. Steps in seeking biblical church unity:

1. Mutual agreement on what the gospel is. The same confession of the Christian faith and life in all major points.

2. Recognize each other as true churches of Christ in which the marks of the church are found (Belgic Confession of Faith, Art. 29). Establish a sister church relationship in which official interchange may take place, including the exchange of delegates at the meet-

ings of the ruling bodies of the church.

3. Fellowship and cooperation in domestic and international organizations which express our oneness in faith and life.

4. Willingness to give, receive, and respond to reproof; self-examination in light of Scripture

5. Steps toward actual union of churches:

a. Reconcile any sin that is involved in separate existence as a church. This may be error in doctrine or practice. Separate existence may only be due to different languages, in the past and/or present.

b. Agree on the same government and confessional standards

I. We all have the responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to greater faithfulness, in order to seek the unity of the whole church of Christ.

J. The approach of the National/World Council of Churches and Promise Keepers to church unity is unbiblical. There is no true unity without the same confession. We can not all worship together unless we are united in doctrine and life. It is not enough to say that we all have the same Savior: Jesus. That is the same basis of unity adopted by the World Council of Churches (WCC): "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Savior according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." WCC does not have biblical unity. Their approach does not work and is not scriptural.

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Qualifications for Ruling Elders An Historical Survey

by

Mark R. Brown



The gift of rule or government is the basis for the office of the ruling elder in the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. Ruling elders are also known as church governors or most commonly as simply elders. These ruling elders are distinguished in our Standards from the ministers of the word who are sometimes called teaching elders. A ruling elder or church governor is expected to be a godly, wise and respected man. These three essential qualifications for the office of ruling elder are found in all the classic definitions of the office. As you read the following historical selections please note how each of these three essential qualifications is set forth. While there is a richness and variety of terminology, it is clear that the qualifications may all be included under the three key headings of godly, wise and respected men. For memorizing the qualifications you may remember the alliterative outline of the elder as a respected religious ruler.

1. John Calvin was the pioneer in bringing lay leaders back into the position of sharing with the clergy in the discipline of the church. This quote of Calvin is from his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. “By these governors (1 Cor. 12:28) I understand seniors (elders) selected from the people to unite with the bishops in pronouncing censures and exercising discipline. For this is the only meaning which can be given to the passage, ‘He that ruleth with diligence’ (Rom.12:8). From the beginning therefore, each church had its senate (Latin “senatum”—French, “conseil ou consistoire:”—council or consistory) composed of pious, grave, and venerable men in whom was lodged the power of correcting faults.”

2. The Westminster Assembly’s Form of Government summarized succinctly the O.T. roots and N.T. fruits of the office of elder in

the Reformed Churches under the title of ‘Other Church-Governors.’ “As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly called Elders.”

3. Samuel Miller was the leading exponent of Presbyterianism in the early 19th century from his position as a professor at Princeton Seminary. In his book *The Ruling Elder* he said. “The plan of discipline for which we plead, is founded, essentially, on the principle of REPRESENTATION, which, in a greater or less degree, pervades all human society.” “Now it is evident that the method of conducting discipline at present under consideration, assigns to every Pastor a Council or Senate of pious, wise, prudent men, chosen from among the body of communicants.”

4. James H. Thornwell was the leading Southern Presbyterian theologian before the Civil War. In Vol 4, pg. 142 of his *Collected Writings* he said: “Qualifications of the Ruling Elder are 1. True godliness; 2. Good sense; 3. Tenderness. These make an Elder indeed. We often mistake the qualities that are necessary to the efficiency of the office. It is not learning so much, or social position, or outward advantages that are required. Give us godly men, men understanding the Gospel, men courteous, tender and possessed of the confidence of the people, and in connection with the Ministers of the Word, they will accomplish an incalculably great and blessed work.”

Qualifications for Ruling Elders - An Historical Survey

5. Thomas Smyth was the leading 19th exponent of classic Presbyterian polity. In his Ecclesiastical Catechism, Question 132 he asks: "What are the qualifications necessary for the office of ruling elder?" His answer: "The qualifications for the office of ruling elder are sincere piety, sound principles, a capacity for judging, prudence, zeal, and an unblemished reputation."

6. We conclude this historical survey with the statement found in the *OPC Book of Church Order, The Form of Government*. Chapter X, OF RULING ELDERS

1. Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by the people from among their number, are to join with the ministers in the government of the church, and are properly called ruling elders.

2. Those who fill this office should be sound in the faith and of exemplary Christian life, men of wisdom and discretion, worthy of the esteem of the congregation as spiritual fathers.

3. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church

in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

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