

# ORDAINED SERVANT



Some Participants in the 1999 Ministerial Training Institute

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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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It was our original plan to devote this issue to the continuing effort to revise the Directory for Public Worship. Because of unexpected changes in the committee working on this—including the loss of Dr. Knudsen—it was not possible to do this. So I decided to put the focus in this issue on preaching.

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We live in a time of great change. What used to be classified as a crime (abortion) is now called a medical procedure. It is understandable, therefore, that all kinds of efforts have been—and are being—made to counter the rapid decline of morality in our culture. (Paul Hill tried to do this by killing an abortion doctor.) But we need to realize that we do *not* face a new phenomenon. Already in the days of Solomon and his successors there was a rapid increase in the number of pagan practices in Israel, one of which was the sacrifice of infants, by fire, to the Canaanite god Molech. And yet—surprising as it may seem to many today—there is no record that I can find of any attempt on the part of true prophets of that era to terminate this vile practice by violent intervention. I do *not* conclude from this that they were indifferent to this great evil. They were not. What I *do* conclude is that they realized that the number one need was not vigilante style attempts to put a stop to it by force, but instead a faithful proclamation of the word of God. This being interpreted means that what *we* need more than anything else is a mighty resurgence of powerful preaching. Nothing else will change people’s hearts and *that’s* what needs changing. But, if it pleases God to bless it, this *can* happen by preaching. It is my hope, then, that this issue of *Ordained Servant* may contribute (even if it be only in a small way) to this eventuality. Of one thing I am sure: we have the message that the world needs to hear. May God give us renewed power to preach it.

“A true Reformation would be characterized by just what is missing in the Modernism of the present day; it would be characterized above all by an heroic honesty which for the sake of principle would push all consideration of consequences aside. Such a Reformation we on our part believe to be needed today; only, we believe that it would be brought about, not by a new religion which consists in imitation of the reduced Jesus of modern naturalism, but by the rediscovery of the gospel of Christ. This is not the first time in the history of the world when the gospel has been obscured. It was obscured in the Middle Ages, for example; and how long and how dark, in some respects, was that time! But the gospel burst forth with new power—the same gospel that Paul and Augustine had proclaimed. So it may be in our own day; the gospel may come forth again to bring light and liberty to mankind. But this new Reformation for which we long will not be brought about by human persuasions, or by consideration of consequences, or by those who seek to save souls through a skillful use of ecclesiastical influences, or by those who refrain from speaking the truth through a fear of "splitting the Church" or of making a poor showing in columns of Church statistics. How petty, in the great day when the Spirit of God again moves in the Church, all such considerations will seem! No, when the true Reformation comes, it will come through the instrumentality of those upon whom God has laid His hand, to whom the gospel has become a burning fire within them, who speak because they are compelled to speak, who, caring nothing for human influences and conciliation and external Church combinations and the praise or blame of men, speak the word that God has given them and trust for the results to Him alone. In other words, it will be brought about by men of faith.”

—J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith*, pp. 103,104



Excerpts from **‘PREACHING AND PREACHERS’**

by

**Martin Lloyd-Jones**

“What is it that always heralds the dawn of a Reformation or of a Revival? It is renewed preaching. Not only a new interest in preaching but a new kind of preaching. A revival of true preaching has always heralded these great movements in the history of the Church.

One of the central fallacies of today is to think that because we are living in the mid-twentieth century we have an entirely new problem. This creeps even into the life and the thinking of the Church with all the talk about post-war world, scientific age, atomic age, post-Christian era, etc. It is just nonsense; it is not new at all. God does not change. As someone put it, ‘Time writes no wrinkle on the brow of the Eternal.’ And man does not change; he is exactly what he has always been ever since he fell and has the same problems. Indeed I would go so far as to say that never has there been a greater opportunity for preaching than there is today, because we are living in an age of disillusionment.

Preaching should always be a transaction between preacher and listener with something vital and living taking place. It is not the mere imparting of knowledge, there is something much bigger involved... Preaching is that which deals with the total person, the hearer becomes involved and knows that he has been dealt with and addressed by God through this preacher.

Something has taken place in him and in his experience, and it is going to affect the whole of his life.

There is something radically wrong with dull and boring preachers. How can a man be dull when he is handling such themes? I would say that a ‘dull preacher’ is a contradiction in terms; if he is dull he is not a preacher. He may stand in a pulpit and talk, but he is certainly not a preacher.

Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.

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What then is the chief thing? I say, none of these mechanics except the love of souls, a knowledge of the Truth, and the Holy Spirit within you. These are the things that make the preacher.

I would say that all preachers should read through the whole Bible in its entirety at least once every year. That should be the very minimum of the preacher’s Bible reading.

The help that I derived in my early years in the ministry from reading the sermons of Jonathan Edwards was immeasurable.

There is no greater mistake than to think that you finish with theology when you leave a seminary. The preacher should continue to read

theology as long as he is alive. Keep on reading; and read the big works.

Nothing is needed more urgently than an analysis of the innovations in the realm of religious worship in the nineteenth century - to me in this respect a devastating century. The sooner we forget the nineteenth century and go back to the eighteenth, and even further to the seventeenth and sixteenth, the better. The nineteenth century and its mentality and outlook is responsible for most of our troubles and problems today.

The romance of preaching! There is nothing like it. It is the greatest work in the world, the most thrilling, the most exciting, the most rewarding, and the most wonderful. I know of nothing comparable to the feeling one has as one walks up the steps of one's pulpit with a fresh sermon on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening, especially when you feel that you have a message from God and are longing to give it to the people. This is something that one cannot describe. Repeating your best sermon elsewhere never quite gives you that. That is why I am such an advocate of a regular and longish ministry in the same place. That is something, I fear, I shall never know again, having retired from the pastoral ministry. But there is nothing to equal that.

There is nothing more important for preaching, than the reading of Church history and biographies .... Read sermons. But be sure that they were published before 1900! Read the sermons of Spurgeon and Whitefield and

Edwards and all the giants. Those men themselves read the Puritans and were greatly helped by them.

What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this. It is to give men and women

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a sense of God and His presence. As I have said already, during this last year I have been ill, and so have had the opportunity, and the privilege, of listening to others, instead of preaching myself. As I have listened in physical weakness this is the thing I have looked for and longed for and desired. I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense

that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him. Preaching is the most amazing, and the most thrilling activity that one can ever be engaged in, because of all that it holds out for all of us in the present, and because of the glorious endless possibilities in an eternal future."

**These quotations appeared in the November 1971 issue of *The Banner of Truth*, and were taken from Lectures originally delivered at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in 1969.**



## 'ESPECIALLY THE PREACHING OF THE WORD'

by

Larry Wilson

It's very revealing that so many of us express doubt when we hear it said that: "*The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means*" to evangelize the world, to extend the church, and to build up believers (Larger Catechism #155). "Especially the preaching of the Word"? Today the majority report seems to be that there have to be better ways to make disciples than preaching—*much* better ways! But in his Word, our Lord insists that "*the foolishness of preaching*" is the principal means he has chosen to use (1 Cor. 1:21).

This importance of preaching grows out of the fact that our Lord Jesus really is alive, really is exalted, and that he himself is supernaturally working to save sinners and to gather, build, and rule his church. It pleases him to do so by his Spirit through his Word—*especially* through the preaching of his Word. Note the chain of reasoning the Holy Spirit pursues through the apostle Paul in Romans 10:13-17.

*"<sup>13</sup> ... 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?<sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'<sup>16</sup> But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?'<sup>17</sup> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*

### "Especially the preaching of the Word"?

First, to be saved, sinners need to *ask* the Lord to save them. "*For 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'*" (v. 13). You need to ask, but mere words aren't enough. They must flow from sincere faith. "*But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?*" (v. 14a).

Second, sinners have to hear about the Lord before they can believe in him. Romans 10:14b asks, "*And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?*" Moreover, in order to believe *in* the Lord you must *believe* the Lord. "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*" (Rom. 4:3). You need to do more than believe certain truths *about* the Lord. You must believe the Lord.

But in order to believe the Lord, you must *hear* the Lord. So it's striking that Romans 10:14b more literally says, "*And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard?*"<sup>1</sup> Sinners must hear Christ himself so they can believe him and call upon him and be saved. This is so important that Jesus stressed it repeatedly. He taught that in order to be saved, sinners must "*hear the voice of the Son of God*" (Jn. 5:25). He said, "*My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me*" (Jn. 10:27).

Merely human words just don't have the supernatural power that it takes to effectually call sinners out of spiritual death into spiritual life. This fact made the apostle Paul determine to rely on the Lord sovereignly to use "*the foolishness of preaching*" (see 1 Cor. 1:17-2:5). What sinners need to hear is Jesus Christ himself addressing

## ESPECIALLY THE PREACHING OF THE WORD

them personally and powerfully by his Spirit through his Word. And that's the point of Romans 10:14, "*And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard?*"

Third, that sinners might hear the Lord's own voice, the Lord has chosen to use *preachers* as his conduit. "*And how are they to hear without a preacher?*" (Rom. 10:14c). The word translated "preacher" (*kerusso*) literally means a herald or public crier. In the ancient world—without press conferences and modern media—a king would send out heralds, official representatives who would publicly proclaim his deeds or decrees. Preachers of God's Word are the heralds or official representatives of King Jesus.

The apostle Paul was intensely aware that this is the preacher's role. And so he frequently made claims like these:

- "*And of this gospel I was appointed a herald*" (2 Tim. 1:11).
- "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us*" (2 Cor. 5:20).
- "*Christ is speaking through me*" (2 Cor. 13:3).
- "*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe*" (1 Thess. 2:13).
- "*For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake... But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us*" (2 Cor. 4:5-7).

Preachers are heralds or servants whom the living, exalted Christ is pleased to use as his conduit—like transporting "*treasure*" in "*jars of clay*"—in order to speak personally and powerfully to sinners. This is why Jesus tells them, "*He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me...*" (Luke 10:16).

Fourth, in order to do this, the Lord uses his church to *send* those preachers. Romans 10:15 asks, "*And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'*" The word translated "sent" is *apostello*, from which we get the word "apostle." An "apostle" is "one who is sent." Jesus Christ directly set apart and commissioned ("sent") twelve apostles ("*sent ones*") to represent him and to establish the New Testament church (Eph. 2:20). The Twelve represented Jesus as no one else can. But in addition to these "apostles of Jesus" there were also "apostles of the churches," men whom the churches *sent* out as their special messengers (2 Cor. 8:23).

God's Word insists that before someone can be a preacher (an official herald), he must be "*sent*." The Lord Jesus directly sent his twelve apostles. The same Lord Jesus indirectly—through his church, the body over which he is Head—sends his preachers. The Son sends his preachers by his Spirit through the saints. The Lord works in the church to enable his faithful people to recognize and publicly commission or ordain ("*send*") those whom he himself has chosen and gifted to serve as his authoritative heralds (see, for example, Acts 13:1ff.). It's been observed that "some were sent, but others went." But unless the preacher is "*sent*" through the church, he simply does not have the Lord's authorization to act as his official herald. You see, God insists that "*the church of the living God*" is "*the pillar and foundation of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15). This is why Romans 10:15 so decidedly insists, "*And how can men preach [herald] unless they are sent [apostled]?*"<sup>2</sup>

In short, in Romans 10:13-17 God insists that his church must commission (ordain) certain people for the task, or else there won't be any gospel preachers. And the gospel must be preached, or else sinners won't hear Christ's voice and message. And sinners must hear Christ's voice and message, or else they won't believe the truths of his saving work for sinners. And they must believe

these truths, or else they won't call out to him. And they must call out to him, or else they won't be saved.

In other words, God insists that "*the Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means*" of grace to save sinners and to build up believers and churches.<sup>3</sup> This is the Lord's work done in the Lord's way by the Lord's might. God has chosen to use a weak and foolish *message* communicated through a weak and foolish *means* in order that it will be crystal clear that he alone is the one who supernaturally saves (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5).

### The great problem

Does this mean that God doesn't permit unordained believers—believers who are not *sent*—to tell others about Jesus? Of course not! God calls every believer to confess Jesus Christ openly (Rom. 10:9-10). What this does mean is that when they do so, unordained believers do not function as Christ's authoritative heralds.

Well, does that mean that the Lord will never use the witness of an unordained believer as an instrument to effectually call sinners to salvation? Of course not! The Lord is sovereign, free, and infinitely compassionate and gracious. He *often* uses the witness of his faithful people. We see this both in Scripture and in Christian experience. What it does mean is that he especially promises to bless the preaching of his Word as an effectual means of grace.

The great problem we have in the modern church is not that too many unordained believers are too diligent to bear witness to Jesus Christ in their daily vocations. Far from it! Our great problem is that we moderns are no longer confident that preaching really *is* the means by which Jesus Christ *especially* works to save sinners, disciple believers, and build his church.

As a result, we increasingly reckon preaching to be outmoded and ineffective. So instead, we look to other things to produce our growth. We rely on business techniques, marketing techniques, programs, groups, and activities.

### The gravity of this problem

These things aren't all wrong. But don't we have to ask whether the modern insistence that we *must* do these things in order to minister effectively in our day doesn't reflect unbelief? Unbelief! Unbelief that God will use his *message*—the gospel—through his *means*—the foolishness of preaching—as the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe! Ask yourself honestly—does it really matter *in practice* that our Lord Jesus Christ is alive and exalted? Does it really make a difference *in practice* that he has poured out his Holy Spirit?

When we don't trust the exalted Christ to work by his Spirit through his Word, we'll replace the authoritative proclamation of the gospel with "sharing," political lectures, self-help speeches, dramatic or artistic or musical performances, multimedia presentations, special effects, puppets, clowns, films, etc. etc. etc. Not only that, but • when we lose sight of Jesus Christ's supernatural involvement in the ministry of the Word—we'll expect churches and ministers to meet people's every "felt need." Ministers will be expected to be CEOs, managers, pace-setters, motivators, change-agents, counselors, facilitators, fund-raisers, etc., etc., etc. Everything and anything *except* heralds of King Jesus and stewards of the mysteries of God!

Eventually, not only does God's gospel *means* get forgotten. Even God's gospel *message* gets forgotten! All because preachers and elders and deacons and believers and churches no longer expect the exalted Christ to use the preaching of the Word to evangelize the world, to grow his church, and to edify believers. What

this means is that—in practice—preachers and elders and deacons and believers and churches are not trusting the living, exalted Christ. To the extent that this is true of us, we're guilty—in practice—of unbelief!

### The great need

What about you? Are you earnestly praying that the sovereign, exalted Christ will transmit his treasures through the jar of clay he's placed over you? Are you urgent and persistent in asking the Holy Spirit to give you ears to hear? When you come to a worship service, do you expect to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd through the undershepherd he's placed over you? Do you expect the Holy Spirit to work powerfully? Are you regularly asking the Lord of the Harvest to send out *preachers* into his harvest field? If your congregation has no pastor, do you see it as an driving necessity to look for one? If you are looking for one, what are you looking for? Are you especially praying that God will provide you a faithful *preacher* of his Word?

If these things are not true of us, then we're failing to trust Christ. If we don't *expect* him to bless the message and means he himself has appointed, then we need to admit that we're guilty of unbelief. We're relying on "*broken cisterns that cannot hold water*" when all the while "*the fountain of living water*" is right here (Jer. 2:13).<sup>4</sup> Pastor Steve Miller puts it this way: "People do not feel urgently the need to pray for their pastors each Sunday morning before they come to church. They expect nothing, so they automatically get up and go to church unprepared, prayerless, harried and hurried, and basically (though they might not recognize this as accurate) with irreverence. They don't really expect to meet with God or to be awed and subdued by His presence. Nor do they expect amazing things, such as conversions, changed hearts and minds, new attitudes, repentance, a new gaining of assurance of salvation."<sup>5</sup> Dear

brothers and sisters, can you not see? This is unbelief.

Since this is so, is not the time long overdue for us to get down on our faces in repentance before our living, sovereign Lord Jesus Christ? Is not the time long overdue for us to cry out in contrition for his forgiveness and mercy and refreshing? Ought not we who are preachers be the first in line to repent?<sup>6</sup>

Unless we do repent, should we not expect our churches to languish with ineffective or vacant pulpits? And whose fault will it be? Our own . . . no one else's. Could our Lord be speaking to us when he says, "*You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*" (Rev. 3:17-18)?

<sup>1</sup> "In accordance with normal grammatical usage, the phrase '*the one of whom (hou)*' should be translated '*the one whom*' and so means the speaker rather than the message" (John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* [InterVarsity Press, 1994], p. 286). Compare John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> "We need to realize that the New Testament teaches that the main business of spreading the gospel is the work of men specially commissioned to do so. (This in no way lessens the responsibility of all believers to bear witness to Christ.) God calls these men to his work by causing their gifts and graces to be recognized in the churches, which are then expected to commission them to the work to which he has so obviously called them. Nobody has authority to go unless he is sent in this way. Freelance preachers, commissioned by nobody, and answerable to nobody, are a prostitution of the New Testament's understanding of the work of gospel preaching" (Stuart Olyott, *The Gospel as it Really Is* [Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1979], pp. 93-94).

Matthew Henry comments, "How shall a man act as an ambassador, unless he have both his credentials and his instructions from the prince that sends him? This proves

that to the regular ministry there must be a regular mission and ordination. It is God's prerogative to send ministers; he is the Lord of the harvest, and therefore to him we must pray that he would send forth laborers, Mt. 9:38. He only can qualify men for, and incline them to, the work of the ministry. But the competency of that qualification, and the sincerity of that inclination, must not be left to the judgment of every man for himself: the nature of the thing will by no means admit this; but, for the preservation of due order in the church, this must needs be referred and submitted to the judgment of a competent number of those who are themselves in that office and of approved wisdom and experience in it, who, as in all other callings, are presumed the most able judges, and who are empowered to set apart such as they find so qualified and inclined to this work of the ministry, that by this preservation of the succession the name of Christ may endure for ever and his throne as the days of heaven. And those that are thus set apart, not only may, but must preach, as those that are sent."

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. 1:23-25 *"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God ... And this is the word that was preached to you."* Heb. 4:2, 12 *"We also have had the gospel preached to us ... the word of God is living and active ..."*

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 10:6-8 *"But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)..."* You don't have to fly up to Toronto to encounter Christ! You don't have to drive down to Brownsville to meet with the Lord. He comes to you! He comes to you by his Spirit through his Word, especially through the preaching of the Word!

<sup>5</sup> Steve Miller is the pastor of Nashua OPC in Nashua, PA. In personal correspondence, he writes: "People do not feel urgently the need to pray for their pastors each Sunday morning before they come to church. They expect nothing, so they automatically get up and go to church unprepared, prayerless, harried and hurried, and basically (though they might not recognize this as accurate) with irreverence. They don't really expect to meet with God or to be awed and subdued by his presence. Nor do they expect amazing things, such as conversions, changed hearts and minds, new attitudes, repentance, a new gaining of assurance of salvation."

"The latter is a matter about which I feel more and more keenly. I have noticed that people in our churches don't have assurance of salvation. This is a major matter in our experience of salvation. It is an important doctrine in the system of doctrine as its set out in the Confession of Faith,

Larger and Shorter Catechism. Our puritan fathers considered this element of the subjective experience of salvation to be foundational in many ways. I think of it as a primary major step in building a really mature and active congregation. This occurs to me now because the older preachers who wrote our standards used to preach what they believed people needed to hear in order to be assured of their salvation. Speaking to the "inward graces unto which the promises are made," which is a fundamental element in assurance. Is there inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made? How will people know unless they are made aware of these graces, unless the preacher calls to these graces and seeks their response from the hearts of his hearers, and unless the preacher sets out the promises—making them as promises in his sermons with real sincerity arising from his own experience with them?

"How impoverished our pulpits have been from this sort of preaching as of late! So let the people plead with God for such preaching and such preachers, but, dear Lord, let us be such ourselves to the saving of our own souls and the salvation of those who hear us. *We* need to change first ... we, the preachers! When we know what sacred thing we are to do and participate in ourselves, when we are the sort of men we would expect could do such a thing, and when we actually begin to preach in that way, then I believe people will believe in preaching again. O, may God work in us preachers today. Savior, please give us preachers of the sort that really preach. Then watch the view of preaching change."

<sup>6</sup> I would recommend that every preacher read at least the following books with much prayer and self-examination:

- Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998)
- John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990)
- *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Vol. 10, 1999, "Preaching" (Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 229 Seminary Drive, Dyer, IN 46311)

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# Biblical Theology and the Session -Part 1

Redemptive History and the Church's Confession of Faith

by James S. Gidley

## *Introduction*

Many centuries ago, Tertullian posed the question, “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?” When you think of the answer that Tertullian gave to that question, you might think that it is also the answer to the question, “What has Biblical Theology to do with the Session?” — Nothing.

After all, isn't Biblical Theology an impractical, scholarly pursuit, and isn't Session work the epitome of hands-on practicality? What do they have in common? Worse yet, some might even conclude from the alleged impracticality of Biblical Theology that a devotion to it would be positively inimical to faithful Session work.

I maintain that the truth of the matter is far otherwise. In prosecuting the case for the mutual strengthening that Biblical Theology and sound Session work contribute to each other, I will be addressing the following question: “What difference does it make to a Session that the ministry of the Word is committed to a redemptive-historical<sup>2</sup> hermeneutic?” To state the question another way: “What should a congregation and Session look like that is shepherded by a redemptive-historical ministry?”

It is not that we should look for something radically different from what the Reformed Churches have exhibited at their best. Much less should we expect something eccentric or bizarre. Rather, the characteristics of a redemptive-historical ministry, consistently carried out, will be just the characteristics that we should expect from a faithful Reformed ministry. Any ministry,

not consciously redemptive-historical, yet otherwise faithfully Reformed, will exhibit these same characteristics. But I am claiming that the redemptive-historical ministry has an inner strength that conduces well to faithful Reformed ecclesiastical life.

Likewise, we must recognize that not everything that claims to be a redemptive-historical ministry really carries out its intentions well. Given the criticism that is leveled against redemptive-historical ministry in some quarters of the Reformed household of faith, one of my aims today is to encourage you to the sort of faithfulness that will be the most effective rebuttal of such criticism.

## *Redemptive History and the Church's Confession of Faith*

First, the redemptive-historical ministry should be devoted to the Confession and Catechisms. In my experience of eighteen years sitting under two redemptive-historical ministries, I have found this to be so. I have come to believe that this is not an anomaly, but a requirement and a natural outgrowth of the redemptive-historical approach.

At first glance, it may seem that a concern for Biblical theology and a concern for the Confession and Catechisms would be unrelated or even antagonistic. After all, it can be argued that the Confession and Catechisms are systematic statements of the faith. Wouldn't it be more natural to expect a devotion to the Confession and Catechisms in a ministry that was committed to systematic theology? And devotion to systematic theology is often associated with careful and precise treatment of the plan of salvation (*ordo salutis*).

Wouldn't we expect more devotion to the Confession and Catechisms in such a ministry?

Yet in the churches which I have mentioned, there is a strong and sustained emphasis on memorization of the Shorter Catechism. Anomaly or outgrowth of principle?

In answer to this, let me simply observe that the strength of our Confession and Catechisms is that they are redemptive-historical as well as systematic. Further, I will argue that they are first redemptive-historical and only secondarily systematic.

This feature struck me when I first began reading the Confessional documents. I was coming to the Reformed faith from Arminianism and general evangelicalism, and one of the things I loved about the Reformed faith was its logical consistency and its amenability to systematic statement. More specifically, I was focused on the plan of salvation and was coming to love the Calvinistic *ordo salutis* opposed to the Arminian. Then I came to questions 27 and 28 of the Shorter Catechism: "Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?" "Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?" These questions and answers seemed to me to be out of place in a systematic exposition of the faith. Obviously they have an irreducible element of redemptive history in them. They cannot be reduced to statements of timeless ideals or doctrines. At first glance, they do not seem to say anything about the *ordo salutis*. They make no sense without redemptive history.

But it is not that these questions are unique or out of place. It is simply that I could not reduce them to a near-sighted focus on the plan of salvation. Looking back at the preceding questions of the catechism, you can readily discern a redemptive-historical structure throughout. Beginning with the Person and nature of God, the Catechism passes on to the decrees of God, creation,

providence, the fall, redemption through Christ the application of redemption, and the believer's eschatological hope. Questions 4-38 of the Shorter Catechism, devoted to telling us what we are to believe concerning God, bear on their face a redemptive-historical structure. They are ordered by a sequence of time.

On further reflection, it should be evident why this is so. The religion of the Bible is a religion that centers on the mighty acts of God in history. Therefore any true expression of the faith of the Bible must be essentially an exposition of the mighty acts of God.

Is this feature unique to the Shorter Catechism? Let us take a brief tour of Schaff's *Creeeds of Christendom* to find out. Schaff begins with *Scripture Confessions*<sup>3</sup>. Most of these are very short, and focus on the confession of God as the Lord, or of Christ as the Son of God (Deut. 6:4, John 1:50, Matt. 16:16, John 6:68, John 20:28, Acts 8:37, 1 Cor. 8:6). He also cites Matt. 28:19, which speaks of teaching "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." He finally cites two passages that briefly summarize the content of that teaching, 1 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 6:1,2. It will be well to consider these two texts explicitly: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory." (1 Tim. 3:16, NKJV) "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." (Heb. 6:1,2, NKJV)

It is remarkable that these two texts seem neatly to divide between them the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*. 1 Timothy 3:16 is remarkable

in its resolute focus on redemptive history, so much so that the believer's faith is not even spoken of in active voice. Rather, we have Christ "believed on in the world." The believer recedes from view and the important thing is that Christ is in fact believed on<sup>4</sup>.

Equally remarkable is the focus of Hebrews 6:1,2 on the application of redemption. Here in the heart of what could be argued is the quintessential redemptive-historical book of the New Testament, we have this summary of the elementary principles of Christ in distinctively *ordo salutis* language.

But you will note the parallels between the two texts. As you know, the *ordo salutis* based on the *historia salutis*. What happens to Christ happens to his people. What happens to Christ's people has already happened to Christ. At any rate, we do not have simply a progression to a logical organization of "Biblical truths". Rather, we have an *ordo salutis* which is itself based on a progression of events in time, taking this character from the *historia salutis* on which it is based.

Let us now turn to that fountain of all ecclesiastical creeds, the Apostles' Creed. I know you are familiar with it, but it will be helpful to have its words distinctly before us<sup>5</sup>:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.*

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*

It is customary to regard the Apostles' Creed as fundamentally Trinitarian, given its threefold statement of faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is most certainly true, and it gives us confidence that the early Church did indeed believe in the Triune God of the Bible.

Nevertheless, I would ask you to take a closer look at the content of faith that is subsumed under the three headings. What we are given here is not a discourse on the ontological Trinity. Rather, the Apostles' Creed is built on the economic Trinity. The creed focuses our attention on the mighty acts of God in history — specifically, the mighty acts of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost<sup>6</sup>. In doing so, the creed sounds a distinctly Pauline note. The middle section captures the essence of 1 Timothy 3:16 and elaborates it. The last section captures Paul's emphasis on the Spirit as the Spirit of the resurrection at work even now in the community of the Spirit, the church.

I would even suggest that the Apostles' creed divides redemptive history into three ages: the age of the Father, which is the age of the first creation; the age of the Son, His appearance in the flesh, His resurrection, and so forth; and the age of the Spirit, which is also the age of the Church. Of course, the creed gives no countenance to modalism, but this is because the creed is structured not ontologically, but redemptive-historically. There *are* successive ages of redemptive history, marked off by the mighty acts of God in history.

It is instructive to compare the orthodox Apostles' Creed with the version professed by Arius<sup>7</sup>:

*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty;*

*And in the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, who was begotten of him before all ages, the Divine Logos, through whom all things were made, both those in the heavens and those on the earth; who came down and was made flesh; and suffered; and rose again; and*

*ascended to the heavens; and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.*

*And in the Holy Ghost; and in the resurrection of the flesh; and in the life of the world to come; and in a kingdom of heaven; and in one Catholic Church of God which extends to the ends of the earth.*

Schaff rightly remarks: "It is heretical not by what it says, but by what it omits."<sup>8</sup> Notice that among the things that Arius omits are the specific references to Mary and Pontius Pilate. The orthodox creed is rooted in real history and recalls the names of real people. The creed of Arius suppresses these things.

But of vastly greater importance, Arius omits the cross and the grave. It is this mighty act of God that carried away our sins. It should then come as no surprise that he also omits the forgiveness of sins under the third heading.

Time would fail us to go on to an examination of the other creeds that Schaff has collected for us. But once again, I would place before you the principle: Since the character of the Biblical faith is redemptive-historical, any creed that truly expresses that faith must also be redemptive-historical.

It is true that in the providence of God, the Church had to declare herself on the ontological Trinity, and that other ontological questions arose in the history of the Church that required the Church to make further statements of faith in an ontological mold. But I would still contend that the organizing principle of the Church's confession is not ontology but redemptive history<sup>9</sup>.

To return to the question posed initially: "What should a congregation and Session look like that is shepherded by a redemptive-historical ministry?" It should have an unabashed love for the Confessions of the Church, and it should have a sustained program of inculcating the Catechism in both children and adults.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Originally presented at the *Kerux Conference*, June 22-25, 1999, Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Westminster, California. Revised: July 24, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 3-8, Baker Book House, 1977 (edition originally published ca. 1889).

<sup>3</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 3-8, Baker Book House, 1977 (edition originally published ca. 1889).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II., p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> For this observation I am indebted to Mr. Douglas Miller of Coraopolis, PA.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter IX of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "Of Free Will", affords us with another example. If you come to this chapter with a philosophical bent, you would expect an ontological treatment of the nature of the will. And you will be sorely disappointed. Instead, you find a strong emphasis on redemptive history: "Man, in his state of innocency...Man, by his fall into a state of sin...When God converts a sinner..." and finally "in the state of glory." Yes, there is *ordo salutis* here also, but the backbone is redemptive history. Contrast this with the philosophical treatment of the subject by Jonathan Edwards in his treatise, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of the Will*.

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# **The Confessional Subscription Debate at Westminster Theological Seminary in California**

by

**Graham Harbman**

## **Subscriptionism: A Crucial Debate**

Numerous theological debates continue to swirl within Reformed circles. Proponents for each side ardently insist that this or that particular issue must be defended at all cost in order to prevent further erosion of our Reformed heritage. Notable issues currently at the forefront in various Presbyterian and Reformed denominations are: the days of creation, the regulative principle of worship, and the ordination of women. There is, however, one recurring feature in all these issues. That feature is the role of confessions. How one views the authority of his church's confession bears directly on his approach to each of the above issues. But there continues a debate, particularly in American Presbyterianism, over the exact role of confessions, specifically the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. What exactly does it mean for a candidate for the ministry to vow that he "receives and adopts" the Westminster Standards? What constitutes taking an exception to the Standards and what limitations, if any, should the church place on a man who takes an exception?

The Student Association of Westminster Theological Seminary in California recently hosted a debate on confessional subscription to examine these questions on September 17-18, 1999. Dr. William Barker, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary

in Philadelphia, spoke in defense of system (or loose) subscription and Dr. Morton Smith, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, defended full (or strict) subscription. In order to lay the historic background, Dr. Robert Godfrey, president and professor of church history at Westminster in California, spoke on the development and role of creeds and confessions in church history up through the Reformation, and Dr. Michael Horton, professor of historical theology at Westminster in California, addressed the church's need for creeds and confessions in postmodern America.

## **Historical Background and the Need for Confessions Today**

Dr. Godfrey reviewed the precedent for creeds in the New Testament and Ancient church. Drawing implications from the 1619 Form of Subscription from the Synod of Dort, he said that the church must not treat confessions as out-of-date museum pieces, but rather, she must actively conform to them and willingly amend them wherever necessary. Doing so is essential for preserving the sole authority of the Bible. Confessions are not, however, mere compendiums of systematic theologies from which we can pick and choose at leisure. They are not simply one man's theology; they are the corporate church's theology. As such, they should be embraced not only by her officers, but also by her members. He noted that this continental

approach is contrasted with American Presbyterian A.A. Hodge who said that the church ought not make any condition for membership which Christ did not make for salvation.

Dr. Horton emphasized that confessions are necessary for the church in postmodern America as she fights against individualism, pragmatism, and sectarianism. Put positively, confessions help keep succeeding generations in the covenant and give the church an identity in missions. Confessions also allow us to be more ecumenical in the face of sects whose exponential growth promotes schism.

### American Presbyterianism

With that introduction, Drs. Barker and Smith, both ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), focused on the particular issues in American Presbyterianism. They have written extensively on this subject and engaged together repeatedly in similar forums over the past 20 years. Before reviewing their presentations, it would be helpful to define terms. Both men agree that strict and loose subscription do not adequately describe their positions. While full and system are not perfect, they are better descriptors. First, neither position says that every phrase and proposition in the standards must be received and adopted. There is no evidence of anyone in the history of American Presbyterianism who held such a position. Both sides acknowledge that particular phrases and words could be sharpened without compromising any doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Full subscription says that every doctrine in the Westminster Standards is “essential and necessary” and should not be excepted by any

ordained officer. System subscription says that a minister need not receive and adopt every doctrine but only those which are “essential and necessary” to the system of doctrine contained in Scripture. If one remarks at this point that these two definitions only force the question of what constitutes a doctrine as opposed to an “essential and necessary” doctrine, he is right on track for following the rest of the debate!

### The Adopting Act of 1729

Their differences begin with interpreting the Adopting Act of 1729 in which the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church in colonial America adopted the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Each speaker presented a detailed analysis of the actions taken by the General Synod on September 19, 1729 and the precedence which those actions set for subsequent synods.

On that day, two different acts were adopted, the “Preliminary Act” in the morning and the “Adopting Act” in the afternoon. Much of the discussion that day had to do with portions of chapters 20 and 23 regarding the civil magistrate. Since many took exception to these portions, the Preliminary Act made reference to “all the essential and necessary articles” of the Standards. The Adopting Act in the afternoon specifically identified these exceptions as pertaining only to the civil magistrate and therefore no reference was made to “all the essential and necessary articles.”

Smith and full subscriptionists hold that the Adopting Act definitively interprets the intent of the Preliminary Act. The Adopting Act determined that the portions regarding the civil magistrate and no others were acceptable exceptions to the Standards. The emphasis is on the Adopting Act being a definitive interpretation of the Preliminary Act, settling the only

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<sup>1</sup> There is room for a nuance here in what exactly constitutes a doctrine and this nuance will show itself in the remaining discussion. Suffice it so say, however, that there is general agreement on this specific point.

issue regarding subscription so that there is now no justification in altering their decisions. Barker and system subscriptionists hold that the Adopting Act and Preliminary Act must be viewed together. Instead of having the Adopting Act definitively interpret the Preliminary Act, we must see it as setting an example for subsequent church courts. Later courts must in turn determine for themselves whether a particular doctrine is “essential and necessary” to the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures in the same manner followed by this first court.

### The Real Question

Armed with his own interpretation of the Adopting Act, each speaker cited the same church court cases and the massive writings of Charles Hodge to support his position. After the detailed presentations, the speakers offered rebuttals and exchanged questions to further clarify the issue at stake. By the end it became evident that their main difference can be summarized with one pivotal question. Their difference over what constitutes an “essential and necessary” doctrine turns out, in the final analysis, to be a matter of judgment. Neither speaker could offer a definitive criterion for how to distinguish between a doctrine and an “essential and necessary” doctrine. The real question comes down to whether a man should be allowed to teach something which the church courts hold to be out of accord with its standards.

Barker submits that the church has no place to bind a man’s conscience and limit what he teaches. If a man believes something which the courts determine to be contrary to its standards, it has two options. It can either: (1) decide the issue is not an essential and necessary doctrine and therefore choose to ordain him with no limitations placed on his teaching, or (2) decide the issue is an essential and necessary doctrine and not ordain him. (He was quick to point out

that every minister has the responsibility to protect the peace and unity of the church and so must exercise extreme sensitivity as he teaches and preaches on such topics.) Barker believes that to ordain a man and then tell him that he cannot teach something because it is contrary to the church’s standards is unbiblical because it binds his conscience to something other than the Word of God and thus elevates the standards to the authority of Scripture.

Smith submits that there is biblical warrant for insisting on full subscription and the church must prohibit any teaching contrary to the standards in order to preserve orthodoxy. The Westminster Standards teach “nothing more or less than the very doctrines of the Word.” If exceptions are allowed to be taught, then ruin is inevitable. Smith cited the demise of the Northern Church in the Old School/New School controversy of the 19th century as an example of what happens when system subscription is tolerated.

Barker objected to the claim that the Westminster Standards teach “nothing more or less than the very doctrines of the Word.” According to him, this is de facto elevation of the Standards to the authority of Scripture. In fact, many Presbyterians agree that the Westminster Standards indeed go beyond Scripture regarding the Sabbath, and most would agree that the Word has more to say on eschatology than the Westminster Standards does.

Smith defended himself against the charge of elevating the Westminster Standards to the authority of Scripture by appealing to language within the Confession itself which teaches that the Scripture is our single rule for faith and life. If the Confession says this so clearly, then certainly one cannot charge the Confession with being elevated to a position which itself denies.

## Summary

In conclusion, these two leading authorities on confessional subscription agree that the debate boils down to one crucial question. Is it biblical for the church to prohibit a man to teach a doctrine which it determines to be an exception to its own standards? Smith says yes because it is necessary to preserve the orthodoxy of the church. Barker says no because it unbiblically binds the man's conscience and elevates the standard to an authority equal with Scripture.

Throughout the debate, both men conducted themselves in a true spirit of humility and mutual respect. It was a pleasure to see men with such deep convictions present themselves with such exemplary character. The Church of Christ needs more leaders who will set such a godly example of how to humbly conduct oneself in the midst of significant differences among brothers. At the conclusion of the debate, both men remarked that their continued dialogue in forums such as this has helped narrow the gap of their differences and increase their appreciation for the vast similarities in their positions.

## Bibliography

The following are helpful writings by both men on subscriptionism:

- Both wrote chapters in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (University Press of America, 1995), ed. David Hall.
- Barker participated in an exchange with George W. Knight, III in the Spring/Fall 1984 issue of *Presbyterian* (Covenant Theological Seminary).
- Barker and Smith also have articles in four different issues of *Presbyterian Advocate* (Presbyterian Reformation Society): Jan 91; Mar-Apr 91; Sep-Oct 92; Jan-Feb-Mar 93.
- Smith, *The Presbyterian Debate: Studies in Presbyterian Polity* (Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1994).

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**The persons subscribing to that creed are bound to adhere to its teachings as long as they enjoy the privileges accruing from that subscription and from the fellowship it entails. They must relinquish these privileges whenever they are no longer able to avow the tenets expressed in the creed. In this sense a creed may be said to be normative within the communion adopting it. For the Church concerned officially declares in the creed what it believes the teaching of Scripture to be. And so the person who has come to renounce the tenets of the creed to which he once subscribed has no right to continue to exercise the privileges contingent upon subscription. He may not in such a case protest his right to these privileges by appeal to Scripture as the supreme authority. It is entirely conceivable that the creed may be in error and his renunciation of it warranted and required by Scripture. But his resort in such a case must be to renounce subscription and with such renunciation the privileges incident to it. Then he may proceed to expose the falsity of the creedal position in the light of Scripture.**

**— John Murray (Collected Writings, Vol. 4, p. 272)**



## A Charge to New Church Officers

by

Stephen Doe

When the apostle Paul considered the words which he would leave with the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:18-35), he first of all rehearsed his own activity in the city. Then he said to them, “Guard yourselves...” (Acts 20:28). Every officer in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church no doubt knows those famous words very well. We know that Paul goes on to say that they are to shepherd the flock of God. But the hardest thing of all is that first command: guard yourselves [ - present active imperative], or attend to yourselves, or take heed to yourselves. In other words, the apostle tells us, don’t only consider others but first of all have a regard to ourselves, our own spiritual state. That is what I would like to charge each of you with: guard your own spiritual state.

When we turn to the judgment of Christ of this congregation in Revelation 2:1-7, we find that the elders at Ephesus did shepherd the flock, they did root out false teachers, they did encourage the believers to persevere. But they failed as leaders in a devastating way. You remember Christ’s words: “You have forsaken your first love...” (2:4). What love? Surely it is their love for Christ! This is a prime danger for those who lead the church, to forsake our first love, our own devotion to Christ. We are so often urging that on others, we are so eager to see people grow in their Christian lives that we neglect to take heed to ourselves. And when the leaders of a congregation fail to guard their own spiritual state, when they neglect their own devotion and love for Christ, the congregation will surely follow into a dead formalism. So take heed to yourselves.

The apostle Paul was aware of this danger of spiritual neglect and spoke of it in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. He called for others to pray for his ministry in Ephesians 6:19-20. Toward the end

of his life he came back again to the centrality of his own hope in Christ in 1 Timothy 1:15. This is why Paul is so bold to call others to imitate him, because he was intent on imitating Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9, 2 Timothy 3:10). In Acts 20, the opening section, beginning at verse 18, stresses the reality and sincerity of Paul’s own faith. Paul wanted to guard himself.

How do you take heed to yourself? Let me urge on you several things. Guard yourselves when it comes to the worship of God. Sundays are always busy for the ordained officers of a church. We have responsibilities. We want things to go smoothly, for visitors to be welcomed. Yet we can fail to worship ourselves. Guard yourselves by pleading with God to give you hearts hungry to worship Him, to long for the courts of the Lord. See that you are the most eager of all God’s people to be in worship on the Lord’s Day, for here is where you will meet your God. Take heed to the sermons, listen to them so as to apply them to your own hearts. Elders mustn’t just be attentive to the preaching of the Word in order to be examples and guardians of the preaching, but must look forward to it as the Word we need. Ask the Lord to plant that Word in your own heart first of all.

Take heed to yourselves at the Lord’s Table. Do not simply take care in the administration of the sacrament, but come to the Table because you must have Christ. Do you see yourself as needing Christ and dying if Jesus Christ is not your bread and drink? Is the Cross of Christ like honey to your own hungry soul? Guard yourselves when you come to the Table of the Lord.

Take heed that you do not see this church as your church or as a burden which God has loaded

onto your shoulders. Every church officer struggles with those feelings at some time or other. But this is not your church; take heed that you do not see yourself as the saviors of the church. Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the body. Do not beat the sheep to make them what you want them to be. They are Christ's flock, so take heed that you do not forget that. Do not think that God is seeking to crush you by placing the burden of this congregation on you. Take heed to yourselves, that you beg Christ to rule His church and to give you the grace to simply obey His Word. Guard yourselves that you do not subtly, without thinking, become lords of the flock. Take heed that you do not forget whose church it is. Keep these things uppermost in session meetings, in diaconal meetings, in private prayers for the flock.

Brothers, guard yourselves that you do not forsake your first love, the love that counts most of all. You cannot love the flock well, unless you love Christ better. For if you forsake your first love, then your congregation will follow you, into formalism, externally good and orthodox, but inwardly dying. Know your own need of Christ. Let your love for Christ be a mark of your service to this church that you belong to. See that each of you desires to know Christ better and to be filled with all the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 3:14-19). Guard yourselves, brothers.

**Stephen D. Doe currently serves as pastor of Covenant OPC in Barre, VT. He gave this charge at a November installation of Officers in the Merrymeeting Bay OPC, Topsham, ME. He also submitted the following excerpt from J.C. Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of St. Mark**

J.C. Ryle wrote some encouraging words to every preacher in commenting on Mark 1:38: "We ought to observe here, what infinite honor the Lord Jesus puts on the office of the preacher. It is an office which the eternal Son of God Himself undertook. He might have spent His earthly ministry in instituting and keeping up ceremonies, like Aaron. He might have ruled and reigned as a king, like David. But He chose a different calling. Until the time when He died as a sacrifice for our sins, His daily, and almost hourly work was to preach. 'Therefore,' He says, 'came I forth.'

Let us never be moved by those who cry down the preacher's office, and tell us that sacraments and other ordinances are of more importance than sermons. Let us give to every part of God's public worship its proper place and honor, but let us beware of placing any part of it above preaching. By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world. There are many now who sneer at missionaries, and mock at those who go out into the high-ways of our own land, to preach to crowds in the open air. But such persons would do well to pause, and consider calmly what they are doing. The very work which they ridicule is the work which turned the world upside down, and cast heathenism to the ground. Above all, it is the very work which Christ Himself undertook. The King of kings and Lord of lords Himself was once a preacher. For three long years He went to and fro proclaiming the Gospel. Sometimes we see Him in a house, sometimes on the mountain side, sometimes in a Jewish Synagogue, sometimes in a boat on the sea. But the great work He took up was always one and the same. He came always preaching and teaching. 'Therefore,' He says, 'came I forth.'

Let us leave the passage with a solemn resolution never to 'despise prophesying.' (1 Thess. 5:20) The minister we hear may not be highly gifted. The sermons that we listen to may be weak and poor. But after all, preaching is God's grand ordinance for converting and saving souls. The faithful preaching of the gospel is handling the very weapon which the Son of God was not ashamed to employ. This is the work of which Christ has said, 'Therefore came I forth.'"

Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), paperback, 373 pp., list price (\$22). Reviewed by Brian D. Nolder.

Sidney Greidanus' new book may be the most important book to be published on preaching since...well, since his last book on preaching!<sup>1</sup> This is not a book about sermon delivery or pulpit presence. Rather, as the subtitle suggests, this is a book about interpreting the Old Testament in a Christian, Christ-centered way, in order that preachers may feed God's flock with the life-giving of Gospel of grace from *all* of God's word in a way that is hermeneutically responsible. Consequently, though it is obviously geared for preachers, its clear and simple style will help any Christian to understand and appreciate Augustine's famous quote, "The New Testament is in the Old concealed." I can think of few more richly biblical and truly useful books that I have read on the important subject of preaching the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

Greidanus begins his book with a simple thesis in two parts: The first is that ministers must preach *Christ*. Not just the Law, and not simply God, though preaching should certainly be theocentric (p. 286)<sup>3</sup>—but Christ, the one who has explained the Father (John 1:18) and in whom all the fullness of deity dwells (Col. 2:9). After all, that is what Jesus did: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news [gospel] of God" (Mark 1:14). But what is that Gospel of God if not the "good news" about Jesus? What is it to proclaim the kingdom of God if not proclaiming his King, the Lord Jesus (Acts 28:31)? Greidanus says that this is preaching about Christ's person (who he is) and his work (what he has done on behalf of sinners in his death and resurrection). But he also adds a helpful third category to expand our vision of preaching Christ, that of his teaching (Christ is not only our Priest and our King, but he is also our perfect Prophet).<sup>4</sup>

The second part of the author's thesis is that ministers must preach *the Old Testament*. Think about it: It pleased God to have the Holy Spirit inspire over 75% of God's Word *before* the Promised One we read about in those pages came into the world! There are a host of reasons that the author lists

for preaching the Old Testament—as well as why it has been neglected over the past few centuries (strangely, the author ignores or is unaware of how dispensationalism contributed to this neglect within more orthodox circles)—but just consider this one: We like to quote the verse where Paul tells us that *all* Scripture is inspired by God (II Tim. 3:16). But do we remember that it was the *Old Testament* Scripture that he was referring to? That it is the *Old Testament* Scriptures that are profitable to equip the man of God for "every good work"?

The problem, of course, is: if we're supposed to preach Christ and preach the Old Testament, how do we preach Christ as we preach the Old Testament? How do I preach Christ *from* the Old Testament? How do I do it without forcing the OT to say something it does not seem to say? How do I do it without allegorizing? This book was written to answer just these kinds of questions.

After these opening chapters, Greidanus gives us a brief but helpful survey of the history of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. A healthy typological approach that paid attention to the historical context and the intention of the original authors developed right from the start, culminating in the school of interpretation associated with Theodore of Mopsuestia and the church of Antioch (pp. 91-94), and modeled in the *Homilies* of John Chrysostom (pp. 94-96). However, it was quickly eclipsed by the allegorical approach (pp. 70-90), which developed into the more sophisticated "fourfold sense" of Scripture (in today's lingo, historical, spiritual, moral and eschatological) that dominated the medieval era (pp. 98-109). While unhealthy in the long run, part of the impetus for the allegorical approach's development was to demonstrate that the OT, just as much as the NT, was the "book of the Church": in response to Judaism, which disputed the Church's claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah prophesied in the OT (p. 74), and Gnosticism, which said that the OT and its God was far too earthy and violent and therefore was unnecessary for Christianity (p. 70). The Reformation helped restore the primacy of the "literal sense," though Greidanus also demonstrates how Luther frequently slid back into allegory (p. 126), and Calvin often used the OT simply for moral instruction and believers' general experiences of God (pp. 150-51).

In preaching from the OT, Greidanus says that a lack of proper hermeneutics often causes preachers to fall into three basic (but sadly, frequent) errors: Moralizing (as if the point of Gen. 9 was, “Noah got drunk. Don’t get drunk like Noah did.”), Generalizing (treating the unique, redemptive-historical events in the lives of OT characters as if they were the experiences of Everyman or Every Believer; “Have great faith like David and you’ll be able to conquer the Goliaths in your life!”) and Allegorizing (the four rivers in Gen. 2 represent the four gospels; though this was Origen’s ancient error [pp. 82-87], Greidanus documents how Spurgeon frequently succumbed to it [pp. 157-59]). A subset of allegorizing would be *Typologizing*. While the author strongly commends typological interpretation, typologizing is the habit of trying to find types in incidental details rather than the grand events (e.g., the Exodus) and institutions (e.g., the OT offices, the sacrificial system) that genuinely contribute to the progress of redemptive history. Perhaps the classic example of typologizing is identifying the cord hanging on Rahab’s window as a type of Christ’s blood shed on the cross since it was scarlet, the color of blood (Josh. 2:17-21).<sup>5</sup> It is important here to remember Vos’ admonition that for something in the OT to be a type, it must have had a symbolic purpose in its original historical context (i.e., to Israel), e.g., the tabernacle/temple (Heb. 9:24), the sacrificial system (Heb. 10:4), Canaan (Rom. 4:13), etc.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to these approaches, Greidanus calls for a “Christocentric” approach/method of interpreting the OT (pp/ 227-77). The use of such a method does not deny that we have to initially interpret an OT text according to its original literary-historical context, i.e., “as if” there were no NT (pp. 284-86). However, we must be honest and acknowledge the fact that we are interpreting the OT as Christians who live *after* the Resurrection—a reality, by the way, which Paul himself says is “according to the [OT] Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4). We do not so much “read the NT back into the OT” as follow the NT itself by acknowledging that an OT text is not rightly interpreted until it finally tells us about Christ and the realities of the New Covenant (Luke 24:44-48).<sup>7</sup> We must recognize that Christ “filling up” the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17) has given them a fundamentally different “color” that must affect the hermeneutical process.

In developing this method of interpretation, Greidanus does a helpful survey of how the NT authors themselves use the OT (pp. 182-225). Though all of the NT authors are authoritative in their use of the OT, not all of their methods are therefore appropriate for us to use in interpreting the OT (e.g., Paul’s “allegory” of Hagar and Sarah in Gal. 4 would be appropriate for a sermon on Gal. 4, but not for one on Gen. 21<sup>8</sup>). That said, Greidanus shows seven “ways” that the NT authors use the OT, and these become the basis of his Christocentric method of interpreting the OT: redemptive-historical progression (showing how the metanarrative of Creation, Fall and Redemption/Consummation—which forms the backdrop to and is constantly being interacted with in Israel’s history—is fulfilled in Christ and his Church); promise-fulfillment (e.g., the messianic prophecies in Isaiah and the Psalms and their fulfillment in Christ); typology (found primarily, though not exclusively, in narrative and the Law: though we should not typologize, we are not restricted only to those types explicitly mentioned in the NT; this is an extensive section that deals with this difficult, controversial topic, and the author helpfully draws from, among others, the prior work of Vos and Clowney in this area); analogy (which Greidanus admits is more of a homiletical tool than a hermeneutical principle); longitudinal themes (Greidanus’ term for the even less transparent term, *biblical theology*, unlike the previous ones that deal with the history of *redemption*, this one and the next draw on the history of *revelation*); New Testament references<sup>9</sup> (though, again, with the proviso that NT authors are not always giving the definitive interpretations of OT passages they quote, but are sometimes simply making use of them to support their particular point; note for example how Paul uses Psalm 19:3 in Rom. 10:18 to talk about the spread of the Gospel, whereas David was obviously referring in the psalm to God’s general revelation in nature); contrast (somewhat like redemptive-historical, but highlighting the “how much more”-newness aspect of the New Covenant, the presence of the kingdom which was not present before the coming of King Jesus, the way the Gospel solves OT dilemmas, etc.; it also puts a check on inappropriate analogies, e.g., that the Church is to conquer the world for Christ in a physical way as Israel was to conquer Canaan; cf., II Cor. 3; Heb. 8-10<sup>10</sup>). The author gives extensive examples of how these

different ways are found in the different genres of the OT (narrative, prophecy, psalms, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

The author concludes with some practical steps on how to construct an OT sermon that makes use of this Christocentric method (pp. 279-92). He gives a lengthy example from Gen. 22 (pp. 292-318), showing whether any or all of the seven ways are found in the passage and which one(s) contribute to the central point of that passage. The final chapter contains several brief discussions of other OT texts to help the reader practice using the Christocentric method and to show how it differs from allegorical interpretation (pp. 319-46). Two appendices further discuss sermon preparation, but the basic principles could also be applied to preparing Bible studies.

The helpful thing about Greidanus' approach is that it liberates us from relying on simply one way to preach Christ from any particular OT passage. Some passages may present many ways to Christ (though only some or one of which may contribute to that passage's main point in its original context), while others may only present one, and that one may not always be easy to identify! (In a recent series on Judges, I found myself relying on contrast again and again, even though the judges are certainly kingly types, and God's kingship and covenant fidelity are certainly longitudinal themes throughout the book.) It also helps us realize that the Gospel really can be preached from the OT in a way that is not artificial but genuinely arises out of the text, confirming Augustine's famous quote above. The Gospel really *is there!* It will become that much clearer if we "make questioning the text about its witness to Jesus Christ an ingrained habit" (p. 319).

I am convinced that *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* is one of the most significant books to come along in a long time, not simply on preaching, but on how all Christians should interpret the OT. It is easy to read and straightforward in its presentation. Though the bibliography is a goldmine, the book's greatest weakness is that there is no author index. It is highly recommended for all pastors and others desiring to faithfully teach and preach the OT with the sweet-smelling fragrance of the Gospel of Christ.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/IVP), 1988.
- <sup>2</sup> A good place to get Christian books at a discount is the Westminster Bookstore, 888-WTSBOOK or bookstore@wts.edu.
- <sup>3</sup> The author rightly criticizes the *Christomonism* of Barth and neo-orthodoxy (and as that tendency is found in Lutheranism), as if Christ was the *only* subject of the Scriptures (p. 178). Strikingly, he says that there is tendency toward Christomonism in "Christian communities where the Psalms are no longer sung . . ." (ibid.).
- <sup>4</sup> One can immediately see how this category can make preaching Christ from wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs) possible, showing connections with the Sermon on the Mount and how Christ has become for us "wisdom from God" (I Cor. 1:30).
- <sup>5</sup> I have a study guide on Joshua, and the title of the chapter on this passage is entitled, "Saved by the Blood." The destruction of Jericho and the salvation of Rahab and her family are certainly typological. The point is that we do not have to point to the color of the cord in order to argue that point or to show how the atonement is its ultimate fulfillment.
- <sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; repr. 1991), pp. 144-48. "The bond that holds type and antitype together must be a bond of vital continuity in the progress of redemption. Where this is ignored, and in the place of this bond are put accidental resemblances, void of inherent spiritual significance, all sorts of absurdities will result, such as must bring the whole subject of typology into disrepute. Examples of this are: the scarlet cord of Rahab prefigures the blood of Christ; the four lepers of Samaria, the four Evangelists." Ibid., p. 146. The fact that later biblical authors in the OT (or the NT) never reflect on Rahab's cord and its color shows that it did not have symbolic import in Israel, confirming that it is indeed dubious to view it as a type of Christ's blood (in contrast to, e.g., the passover Lamb; cf., I Cor. 5:7).
- <sup>7</sup> Luke 24:44 is not saying that only certain parts of the OT (i.e., "the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms," the traditional tripartite division of the OT Scriptures, with Psalms standing for the Writings [*ketubim*] as the

