

Theology Matters

Dear Friends of *Theology Matters*,

The *Book of Order* was officially changed on July 10 to eliminate the sexual standard of “fidelity and chastity” for church officers. We, the Board of Directors of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry, are deeply grieved by this action of the presbyteries. This act is a rejection of the clear meaning and authority of Scripture. It contradicts the confessions and repudiates 4000 years of sacred history. It severs us from most of the worldwide communion of Christian churches. *Theology does matter!*

Some of the voting commissioners that supported the change claimed it would bring peace to our denomination. We believe there will be greater divisiveness. We expect that what is permissible will soon become mandatory in order to foster “full equality.” We expect the 2012 General Assembly to attempt to change the *Book of Order* on marriage from “a man and a woman” to “2 persons.” We are concerned for the conscience of every Presbyterian who by nature of our connectionalism participates in every ordination. We are concerned for the effect of this on mandatory Board of Pensions dues for installed pastors, collected from every Presbyterian, that likely will soon cover relationships that Scripture forbids. We are concerned for the confusion and divisiveness this will produce as congregations divide over how this action will be implemented when they call new pastors, and elect new elders and deacons.

All of these structural or polity concerns are serious. They are, however the result of a graver issue: the theological collapse of the PC(USA). This vote is another sign of a growing counterfeit Christian doctrine. It is counterfeit Christian doctrine because it denies the saving work of Christ. Christianity entails a system of doctrine based on Scripture’s interpretation of the meaning of historic events. A relationship with Jesus Christ flows out of those events and their meaning. Today the church is undermined by beliefs that not only are inconsistent with Christian faith, but which actively oppose and attack Christian faith. Some people do not know the faith of the church and others have intentionally substituted a faith of their own creation. This newly imagined faith is not Christian; it is a counterfeit. To seek a relationship with God apart from the Jesus revealed in and interpreted by Scripture, is to accept a lie.

The doctrines that lead a person to accept and bless what God has specifically prohibited in Scripture are not Christian doctrines. Indeed, these doctrines deny the authority of Scripture, the nature of human sin, the being and nature of Christ, and the atonement.

Theology Matters began in January of 1995 in response to the counterfeit Christian doctrines expressed at the Re-Imagining Conference held in November, 1993 in Minneapolis. The conference was supported with \$66,000 of Bicentennial funds and attended by 2000 women, including a number of women on staff at the PC(USA) headquarters in Louisville, as well as women leaders in most of the mainline churches. The women rejected the work of Christ applauding one speaker who boasted that “I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.” The women substituted milk and honey representing women’s bodily fluids for the bread and wine and called it communion. Jesus was replaced by Sophia. An artist in the front of the conference area painted four panels of the goddess with earth

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in her womb— portraying a pantheistic religion. A workshop leader claimed that her theology was first of all informed by “making love with Coni,” her lesbian partner. The attendees painted red dots on their foreheads and bowed to the divine in one another. This pantheistic, pagan religion was celebrated by the women attendees as a new version of Christianity. A Christianity without Christ, without the atonement, without Scripture.

In response to the conference, congregations withheld millions in per-capita funds. Nevertheless, in an effort to mask the counterfeit Christian teachings and find a united response to the conference between those who objected to it and those who celebrated it, the 1994 General Assembly approved a statement declaring that “conference presentations and rituals used language, including the term ‘sophia,’ in ways that imply worship of a divine manifestation distinctly different from ‘the one triune God’ ... Yet, some found the use of ‘sophia’ as a name for God to be liberating.” In that act, PC(USA) General Assembly commissioners declared that a counterfeit Christianity without Christ was liberating.

Other people might identify a different point marking the aggressive assault on Christian faith from within the church. Some would mark the 1960s rise of Liberation Theology that morphed into Radical Feminist Theology, Sexual Theology, Black Liberation Theology, etc. Some would identify the modernist controversy of the 1920s and others would go back further to the rise of modernism in the mid-18th century. Some would point to the early church controversies over Arianism, Pelagianism, and Docetism that attacked the nature of Christ and the meaning of salvation. Some would recognize the beginning of the assault on the truth of Judeo-Christian faith when the Hebrew people danced around the golden calf having a feast to Yahweh in Exodus 32. And some would rightly look back to Adam and Eve’s decision in the Garden to be like God and determine for themselves what was true rather than allow God to define truth and falsehood. Certainly the church in every age has been assaulted by counterfeit Christian teachings. The Bible is not a story of peaceful co-existence, but a battle against falsehood. In both the Old Testament and New Testaments, the Gospel is presented in contrast to the idolatry that was creeping into the church and denying the truth. What is at stake in this struggle, as in all others throughout the life of the church, is Christian faith and at the heart of Christian faith, our understanding of Christ himself.

Our Purpose

Theology Matters has understood from its inception that we cannot promote and understand Christian faith without denouncing the counterfeit doctrines that seek to deny and destroy it. *Theology Matters’* purpose has always been:

The restoration of Reformed theology as taught in Scripture and expressed in the Confessions, in the lives of individual Presbyterians and in the Church. To affirm the Christian faith is necessarily to reject all false ideologies. The First Commandment carries both a commitment to the One True Lord God and a rejection of false gods, “I am the Lord your God, ... You shall have no other gods before me.” To commit to the Lord God and reality as he has defined it, without also rejecting false gods and their world view is to unite the worship of the living Lord with idols.

**“I am the Lord your God,...
You shall have no other gods before Me.”
Exodus 20:2-3**

Therefore *Theology Matters* is committed to promoting the doctrines of Reformed Christian faith and their world view implications by contrasting them with the beliefs of false religions and their distorted world views.

Theology Matters is convinced that an obedient understanding of family and ministry can only grow out of a faith in Jesus Christ that is based on Scripture and the Confessions.

**Q. 95 “What is idolatry?
A. It is to imagine or possess something in which to put one’s trust in place of
or beside the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word.”
Heidelberg Catechism**

What We Believe

1. We believe in the One living and true God who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe that “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”¹ We believe that God is our Creator, that he has revealed himself to us through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that apart from this revelation we remain ignorant of his name, his nature, and his will.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that asserts that the creature has the right to name and define the Creator, or to determine how God should act in any time and place.

2. We believe that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. We believe that he was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, performed miracles, suffered and died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, is seated in glorious authority making intercession for his elect, and that he will return to judge sin and establish his eternal kingdom.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that denies either the human or divine natures of Christ, his atoning work, or his exalted Lordship.

3. “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”²

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that asserts that there are other “lords” to whom we owe allegiance.

4. We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the inspired Word of God—the unique, reliable, and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and his will for our lives. We believe that the Creeds and Confessions of the church, while subordinate to Christ and the Scriptures, are nevertheless authoritative standards.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that declares that the Bible is an ancient document inapplicable to modern life, that God continues to give new revelation apart from Scripture, or that the meaning of Scripture is at variance with the plain meaning of its words understood in their historic context. We also reject the false ideology that teaches that the plain meaning of the Creeds and Confessions, understood in their historic context, are without authority in the church.

5. We believe that from every generation and race, God has sovereignly called and redeemed a people for his own glory— “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.”³ We believe that Jesus Christ is alive and present with this people by the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit whose work it is to regenerate, give faith, justify, sanctify, and give assurance that we are, by grace, at the price of Christ’s shed blood, the adopted sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that teaches that human beings have the capacity within themselves, by virtue of their humanity alone, and apart from redemption, to become the sons and daughters of God.

6. We believe that as the people of God, we have been called and commanded to proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, to call men and women, boys and girls, to the obedience of faith, and in every generation to reclaim and reform the purity of the Church’s witness.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that denies the Church’s call, in every generation, to challenge cultural distortions of the gospel and to witness to the uniqueness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and human beings.

1. The Shorter Catechism

2. The Theological Declaration of Barmen

3. 1 Peter 2:9

What We Will Do

The Westminster Confession of Faith in the PC(USA) *Book of Confessions* explains the importance of exposing and correcting counterfeit Christian teachings through church censures or discipline: “Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” (6.171)

We pledge in *Theology Matters* to continue to present, teach, reason, and argue for the truths of Christian faith while denouncing the counterfeit Christian doctrines that deny those truths and lead people astray. We do not do this because we are without sin:

- We do it, in order to vindicate the name of Christ that is being blasphemed by those who use the Name to bless what God has said in his revelation he abhors and what Christ came to redeem.
- We do it, out of love for our neighbor; to reclaim those people who are seeking truth and have been fed lies.
- We do it, so that grace might be extended “to all those who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” because only when sin is acknowledged and repented of, can grace and forgiveness be received.
- We do it, so that the wrath of God might not fall on the church.
- We do it, because Christ came “to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Nevertheless, the crucified and risen Savior told Peter that Peter’s ministry was to “feed my sheep” knowing that many would reject his disciples and the Gospel message even as they had rejected Christ himself.
- We do it, so that one day, as people’s faith in the Christ of Scripture is restored, the P(CUSA) might be renewed.

So we, the Board of Directors of *Theology Matters*, will continue to feed God’s people with the truth of the Gospel and denounce, even more plainly than we have in the past, the counterfeit doctrines being promoted in the name of Christ. We cannot seek peace, co-existence or a false unity with the counterfeit Christian doctrines that have infiltrated the church as if what a person believes is of no consequence. Out of our own thirst and hunger, we call others to come with us to the Living Water and the Bread of Life. We urge you to contend for the Gospel where Christ has placed you for the sake of Christ and his bride the church. We stand with you.

The PC(USA): Through the Lens of Jeremiah

by Lisa Van Riper

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13)

This passage does not refer to the pagan world. It refers to “my people.” As in Jeremiah’s day, portions of the church have turned from God, yet they are still “thirsty.” Having rejected the “living water,” they have dug their own cisterns, defective cisterns that cannot hold running water. Nor is it enough for them to drink the stagnant water from their broken cisterns, they insist that the church embrace their cistern, celebrate it and promote its

stagnant water to a thirsty world. Instead of offering the redemptive, transforming work of Christ, they offer the counterfeit Gospel of “celebration.”

When I see “broken cisterns,” I ask Why? God gives the answer in Jeremiah 2:7-8:

And I brought you into the fruitful land to eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land and My inheritance you made an abomination. The priests did not say, “where is the Lord?” And those who handle the law did not know Me. The rulers also transgressed against me. And

the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit.

The pillars of the culture—prophet, priest and king—did not follow the Lord. Does this sound familiar as institutions both secular and sacred discard the clear teachings of Scripture?

On the day preceding the 87th presbytery vote to affirm Amendment 10-A, I read:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, “Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house and proclaim there this word, and say, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the Lord! Thus, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’ For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.

Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name and say, ‘We are delivered!’ – that you may do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the Lord. (Jer. 7:1-11)

On May 11th when I learned that Amendment 10-A had been approved, I remembered the reading from Jeremiah 7 of “deceptive words” and walking after Baal. My heart ached for the faithful congregations and renewal groups that have worked tirelessly to proclaim the truth. My heart broke also for the faithful people who have sat under weak or even faithless preaching and who would be stunned and bewildered by the headlines. I prayed for opportunities to reach these people who had been subjected to the “deceptive words.”

While Jeremiah recognizes the cause and effect of “broken cisterns,” the book also records a remedy. In Jeremiah 15, the distressed prophet asks, “*Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?*” (v. 18) Jeremiah is having a prophetic

“pity party,” a type of party I’ve hosted for myself. But God responded to Jeremiah’s dismay saying:

Therefore,... “if you return then I will restore you. Before Me you will stand; And if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you. But as for you, you must not turn to them. Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you,” declares the Lord. “So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent.” (Jer. 15:19-21)

When our current denominational crisis is viewed through the eyes of Jeremiah, we can be guided by certain principles:

(1) Amendment 10-A is a broken cistern. It cannot hold water. A broken cistern may allow stagnant water but not running water. For a thirsty person, water from a broken cistern may temporarily quench a thirst. But the water will cause illness. Amendment 10-A may quench a thirst temporarily but it is perpetuating a counterfeit Gospel that will cause further illness to the denomination and to individuals.

(2) Passage of Amendment 10-A is the result of a two-fold problem:

(a) complacency, apathy, and ignorance even in orthodox, evangelical congregations. Many orthodox pastors and congregants have failed to act decisively for years. Subjects have been ignored from the pulpits. Presbytery work has gone undone. The results have been destructive. The writer of Proverbs states: “*For the waywardness of the naïve shall kill them and the complacency of fools shall destroy them*” (Prov. 1:32).

(b) years of misguided theology, at best; heretical theology, at worst; “deceptive words” in either case. (“*The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ Those who handle the law did not know Me. The rulers transgressed against Me. And the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit*” (Jer. 2:8)). Consequently, portions of the denomination are in danger of biblical, theological and confessional illiteracy; of a false view of Scripture; of a false view of the person and work of Jesus Christ; and even of a counterfeit Gospel that offers no need for repentance or power for redemption and transformation.

(3) God desires faithful shepherds for his flock. He condemns those who scatter the flocks (Jer. 23). The “flock” can be scattered by three means: a) Shepherds can preach incomplete or weak messages that leave their flocks with no power of discernment, helpless against the “wolves” congregants encounter inside or outside of the church. b) Shepherds can preach error, again leaving the flock vulnerable to the “wolves.” c) Shepherds themselves can be the “wolves” which theologically ill-equipped search committees call to the flock.

(4) Congregations that take advantage of Amendment 10-A to condone, celebrate and ordain those who persist in behavior that Scripture calls sinful, are in danger of judgment. Not all congregations can legitimately claim to be, “the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7).

(5) Pity parties are not acceptable. Preservation of the flock and perseverance in the truth are required and rewarded. (“Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze” Jer.15:20.) Being a protective wall of bronze will require clear, direct teaching. Many in the pews have been fed theological baby food. In an instantaneous, media-driven culture, congregants move from one sound bite to the next, often feeling rather than thinking. Many have lost the ability to recognize “the dots” much less “connect the dots.” While our motives must always be rooted in love and our words filled with grace, we cannot sugarcoat the seriousness of the situation. A counterfeit Gospel, and not just sinful behavior, is presented.

(6) Congregations now have a clear choice. We can return to the Lord on his terms, in repentance and obedience. We can extract the precious from the worthless. Or, we can choose not to return. If we do return, He will make us as a fortified wall of bronze, a beautiful, protective wall. For those who do not return, they will be left to the effects of the broken cisterns. A “wall of bronze” or a “broken cistern”? The choice is now ours.

Regardless of structural changes that some congregations consider, the work of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry will continue to be needed. The passage of Amendment 10-A is perhaps the most visible manifestation yet that the PC(USA) is a “broken cistern.” The brokenness is a direct result of poor theology, a situation that this Board recognized over a decade ago. Regardless of the structural decisions of individual congregations, these congregations will be, at least temporarily, in exile. But even as God used the exile recorded in Jeremiah to bring forth his remnant, he can use our exile to bring forth his remnant. Perhaps, God will use publications such as *Theology Matters* to develop the remnant. Certainly, we should be available

to bring theological clarity in the midst of deceptive words.

Through the voice of Jeremiah, God gives hope in exile:

Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ... “Thus, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ‘Build your houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare. ... For I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and hope.’”
(Jer. 29:1, 4-7,11)

There are several lessons from Jeremiah:

- (1) An exile is part of God’s plan (“to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile...” (Jer. 29:4)).
- (2) If the passage of Amendment 10-A is the trigger for exile, then it is a “severe mercy.” Denominational and theological complacency, apathy and ignorance have been the hallmark of even orthodox congregations for too long. The passage of this amendment should be a wake-up call. While painful, to be awakened to a threat and given the chance to respond is merciful.
- (3) There will be both congregations exiled and individuals exiled within congregations who will need theological encouragement and equipping.
- (4) Those in exile must continue to carry on their work. They must multiply and not decrease (Jer. 29:5-7).
- (5) God is faithful to those in exile. His plan is for their welfare (Jer. 29:11).

It is vital that the work of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry continue. The theological root of the broken cistern of the PC(USA) must be addressed and those in exile must be equipped with biblical, theological and confessional truth that will grow the remnant.

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Ambassadors for Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:10

by Mark Atkinson

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. (2 Corinthians 5:16)

It is clear from 2 Corinthians 5:16, that the church perceives the place of spiritual realities in life. In the history of science and the study of our world, two inventions had the effect of opening up entire new worlds of study, worlds that we hitherto did not know existed. The microscope introduced us to a world too small to be seen by our eyes and the telescope to a world too large for our vision. There is more to life than what we can perceive with our unaided five senses. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul points to a world that is hidden from unbelievers. They do not and cannot see it. Jesus sometimes says, “*Let he who has ears, hear. Let he who has eyes, see.*” A key insight regarding Christ’s followers is that they perceive a world that others do not see. Paul writes, *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.* Paul is saying that, for Christians, the realities of spiritual truth take priority over the material world.

We live in a world in which we do not see Jesus Christ physically. He has ascended to his heavenly throne. That is a spiritual statement. Jesus Christ’s ascension refers to an *unseen* world. It is not an *unreal* world, but an *unseen* one. When Paul says that we no longer regard Christ according to the flesh, he means that we see the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ. He is not just an accidental character on the stage of world history. His life, death, suffering, resurrection, and ascension are at the very center of the meaning of human history and the purpose of this world. But to grasp these truths, you must have the eyes of faith to see, and the ears of faith, to hear.

It is here, in the ability to see spiritually, that we will find part of the explanation regarding the action of the Presbyterian Church in removing our ordination standards. There are many, including many in positions

of leadership within our denomination, who do not discern things spiritually.

They do not have ears to hear, or eyes to see. The primary motivational energy behind this change in our standards is to permit the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The change also will further undermine our commitment as a church to the marriage of a man and woman for it will permit the ordination of those who live together but are not married. The agenda promoting this change comes from the world. It is in clear violation of the teaching of Scripture. This action has been taken because the message of the world—that which can be physically seen and heard—is permitted to overrule the spiritual teaching of the Scripture and the historic witness of the church. The agenda of the world is permitted to drown out the spiritual understanding given to us in God’s Word.

The Church Proclaims That New Life Is Available In Jesus Christ

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor 5:17)

When Jesus Christ comes into a person’s life, he brings new life. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. If a person is in Christ, then he or she has experienced regeneration. The word *regeneration* is the theological word for being *born again*. To *generate* means to give life. To *regenerate* means to give it again. This is not a command, but a declaration. Paul is not saying, “*be regenerated.*” It is not in our power to give life to ourselves. He is saying that those who are in Christ have been regenerated, born again, given new, spiritual life.

The world wants to say that you cannot change. Lady Gaga sings “Born this way” and the message is that there is no option for change. In fact, same-sex attraction is not an inherited trait; its causes are complex and variable. The message of the gospel of Christ is that change most certainly *is* possible because “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Fairview Presbyterian Church has become part of the *Exodus International Church Association*. Exodus International is the largest umbrella organization of groups who work with and minister to those who struggle with same-sex desires and who seek freedom from those desires and the “gay” lifestyle. One of the groups under the umbrella is Presbyterian: **One by One**. The Session began talking about joining the Exodus International Church Association in the fall of 2010. After agreeing to do so, it took a couple of months to complete the application process. Soon after being added to the Exodus International web site, a man contacted me and explained that he has struggled with same-sex attraction in the past but that he now is happily married with two children. What did the Apostle Paul say? “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Fairview Presbyterian Church seeks to be a place that offers grace and healing in the name of Jesus Christ. If someone is struggling with their sexual identity, they will find a welcome here at Fairview Presbyterian Church. If God were to bring through our doors a lesbian couple, they would receive a welcome. They would not hear approval of their lifestyle, but they would be welcome and we would be genuinely glad of their presence. The only people who can walk through our doors on Sunday mornings are sinners. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12-13). We welcome those whom Christ brings to us with the same warmth and welcome that he would offer.

People of faith perceive the reality of the spiritual world. People of faith understand that in Christ there is new life. Thirdly, the Christian faith is founded on the facts of what *Jesus has done*, not aspirations of what *we hope to do* one day.

The Christian Faith Is Founded On The Facts Of What Christ Has Done, Not Aspirations Of What We Hope To Do

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18-19)

First, note the word *all* at the beginning of this verse. Everything Paul is talking about is from God, a gift of God. It is not some, not most, but all. It is not man seeking God, but God seeking men and women.

I commend to you, J. Gresham Machen’s 1923 book, *Christianity and Liberalism* www.biblebelievers.com/machen. It is remarkable how applicable it is to our situation today. Contrasting Christianity with Liberalism (note the assumption that Liberalism *is not* Christian) Machen writes, “Christianity is a religion not founded on aspirations, but on facts. Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative.” Liberalism tells us what we are supposed to do. The Christian faith tells us what God has done. A liberal preacher specializes in exhortation. The Christian preacher declares the gospel of Christ.

Paul writes, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself.” It is in the past tense; it is what God has done. Through Christ, God has been reconciled to the world. This is the gospel message.

We have a task to do. We are not passive. We are given the *ministry of reconciliation*. God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Note, the *ministry of reconciliation is the message of reconciliation*. It is not our accomplishment. It is not our work. It is God’s work. We are tasked to declare it and proclaim it.

Paul explains that we are given the ministry of reconciliation. We are to proclaim the message of God’s reconciliation through Christ. This is the task of the church. The nature of our responsibility in the church, is to be ambassadors.

We Are Christ’s Ambassadors

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 5:20-6:2)

My wife Lois Ann and I have been privileged to know and call as friends a handful of ambassadors through the years. The office of ambassador is a very important position. An ambassador is not a head of state. But the ambassador is the representative of a state. He (or she) is the official agent of the sending nation. He has the authority to transact business and to speak in the name of

his sending nation. The ambassador conveys and communicates policy, but he does not create policy. An ambassador does not represent himself.

We are the ambassadors of Christ. We do not do the work of redeeming and regenerating, but we do the work of proclaiming the message. A pastor's job is to point to Christ. We represent Christ. We are to point only to Christ. A pastor is to warn those who point to something or someone other than Christ. We are ambassadors of the Great Commission. Our job is to declare the two great truths of regeneration and reconciliation. We say to the world, "*God has done it. Therefore, repent and turn to him in faith.*"

The most serious failure of the Presbyterian Church in adopting amendment (10-A) is that in the current *Book of Order* language of "fidelity and chastity," the emphasis fell upon our duty to obey what is taught in the Holy Scriptures and the confessions of faith. In the new language, we are called upon only to be "*guided by*" the Scriptures and confessions. However, an ambassador's job is to obey his sending authority. In this change, as a church, we are repudiating the sending authority of God.

God's people perceive the spiritual world. We know that new life is to be found in Jesus Christ. The Christian faith is a faith based on facts, things that happened in history. As God's people, we are his ambassadors. Lastly, we are servants of God, not mouthpieces for the world.

We Are Servants Of God, Not Mouthpieces For The World

We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities.... (2 Cor 6:3ff)

The religion of Liberalism, as Machen described it, is a religion of aspiration. In the heyday of the World Council of Churches, a popular phrase at the time was that "*The world sets the agenda for the church.*" This has certainly been reflected in the story of the spiritual drift of the Presbyterian Church (USA). That the world promotes the sexual revolution in general and homosexuality in particular is not surprising. That the church would do so is a counterfeit Christianity.

I want to conclude with a portion of the "Here We Stand" document that was adopted and distributed by the leaders of the renewal groups within the Presbyterian Church (USA). Note that the title is taken from Martin

Luther's famous response to the demand of the Diet of Worms that he recant his writings and teachings.

We declare that individually and corporately, we Presbyterians are called to a life of fidelity to God, in accordance with his will revealed in the Word of God (e.g. Gen. 2:24; Exod. 20:14; Jude 3-8; Heb. 13:4; Rom. 1:26-27; Rom.13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Eph 5:1-10; Matt. 15:17-20; and others); and that, as officers of the church, we "accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ..." (*Directory for Worship*, W-4.4003b).

We further declare that we Presbyterians who are officers of the church, have voluntarily promised to "receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do..." (*Directory for Worship*, W-4.4003c) and that the confessions call us to lives of sexual holiness; (4.087; 4.108-4.1099.47; 7.247-7.249).

We further declare that we Presbyterians are called to repentance from every form of idolatry and from every other sin that seeks to rule us individually or corporately, including sexual sin and the temptation to accept sexual sin as permissible behavior.

We further declare that we Presbyterians are called to hold each other accountable to the standards, the teaching, the grace and truth, of the Scriptures and the Confessions, even when the councils of the church err.

We choose to obey God, as revealed in Jesus Christ through Scripture.

As grateful recipients of Christ's mercy, we choose to proclaim the Gospel to those in error on this matter, even in our own denomination, and to seek their repentance and restoration to life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Presbyterians committed to following Christ, we call the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to repent of this recent action that conforms to the desires of the flesh rather than yielding to and upholding the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, by which she is conformed to Christ.

I invite you to pray with me for our denomination:
Heavenly Father, we lift up to you our beloved church.
We ache for how it has drifted from the gospel message

of Christ's reconciliation and new life, replacing it with the idolatry of human effort. Forgive us our folly. Transform us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Give us ears to hear and eyes to see the greatness and glory of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Make us true ambassadors, faithful in our message, declaring Christ, lifting up Christ, pointing to Christ, honoring Christ,

exalting Christ—him and him alone. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Mark Atkinson is a pastor in PA and on the Board of Directors of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry.

The Origin of the Counterfeit Gospel

by Randal Working

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:18-23)

The flashpoint in our denomination's *Kirchenkampf* has been the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians. As those who live and minister amidst the culture wars of our larger society, this struggle has been perhaps unavoidable. But as crucial as sexual ethics are for the integrity of Christian life and witness, the larger issue is how we perceive the person and will of God. For Christians in the Reformed tradition, humans are unable to access the divine, yet God in grace makes a way for us to know and approach him in fellowship. Therefore, our theology does not begin from the ground up, but from the top down. It is not speculative, and attempts to construct doctrines and ethics apart from the means God has given us are idolatrous.

To be sure, many are conflicted because someone we love is in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. We

want always to be pastoral, but must realize that pastoral means giving both comfort and warning.

Against Speculation

Nevertheless, what we proclaim, we know from the Bible, the normative experience of God's word and work as declared by the prophets and the apostles. Speculation contradicts the classic Christian and Reformed understanding of revelation, which comes to human beings miraculously, as a human impossibility, from above. To grope for truth on our own is to make determinations based on *a priori* assumptions. One's attention may then turn to experience, tradition, rationalism, or mysticism. These modes of thinking can be valid ways of discerning some truths. As a means of knowing God, however, they are futile. Attempting to understand the divine through these methods constitutes what the Reformed tradition calls speculation. This includes bringing preconceived principles against which we evaluate the teaching of Scripture, reframing it in our image. In so doing, it is possible to disregard major themes of the Bible, such as when the verse "God is love" is turned into "love is God." When we say that, we make love itself, or rather our definition of love, into an idol. God is indeed love, but he is not defined by words or values beyond himself and to which he is answerable. To say this is to base our faith not on the authority of Scripture as it infallibly witnesses to Christ, but rather on our own experience and reason. In so doing we attempt to control God, and therefore worship a false god of our own device.

Mingled vanity and pride appear in this, that when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves as they ought to do, they measure Him by their own carnal stupidity, and neglecting solid inquiry, fly off to indulge their curiosity in vain speculation. Hence, they do not conceive of Him in the character in which he is manifested, but imagine Him to be whatever their own rashness has devised. This abyss standing open, they cannot move one footstep without rushing headlong to destruction. With such an idea of God, nothing which they may attempt to offer in the way of worship and obedience can have any value in His sight, because it is not Him they worship, but instead of him, the dream and figment of their own heart. This corrupt procedure is admirably described by Paul, when he says that "thinking to be wise, they became fools." (Calvin, Inst. I.4.1)

Calvin insists that conjecture does not lead to an understanding of the truth because it is motivated by "vanity and pride." In consequence, this does not lead to revelation, but only makes clear our "carnal stupidity." This amounts to human sinfulness clouding our spiritual vision. We do not discern God or his will for us in our own efforts. Our apprehension of the divine in the created order is not salvific; it is not enough to bridge the divine/human divide, but only to make us responsible and to condemn us.

Fundamentally Different Views Of Scripture

This "bottom-up" view of Scripture yields a counterfeit Christianity. By beginning with human experience, progressives arrive at conclusions on issues like homosexuality, abortion, the exclusivity of Christ, and the necessity of personal regeneration that oppose the clear meaning of Scripture.

According to Karl Barth, the attributes of God are not abstractions, but expressions of his relational character speaking and acting in divine love and freedom. Under the category of God's love are his perfections of mercy, grace, patience, holiness, righteousness, and wisdom. Under the category of his freedom are the perfections of his eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, unity, constancy, and glory. The meaning of these is not derived from speculation on God's attributes, but in illuminating the character of God for us in Jesus Christ.

We see Jesus Christ in the Old Testament in anticipation and the New Testament in fulfillment, revealing the God who lives and makes himself known in word and action. As the Barmen Declaration declares, "*Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we have to hear and whom we have to trust*

and obey in life and in death." That affirmation contrasts with a negation that follows. If one accepts by faith the lordship of Christ, then one repudiates all other sources of revelation: "*We reject the false doctrine, as though that the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and beside this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths as God's revelation*" (8.12, *Book of Confessions* PC (USA)).

The Spirit of God and the Word of God cannot be divided. According to Calvin, an inner experience of the "Spirit" apart from the historic witness to him in Scripture is idolatrous. The Spirit is our guide in reading Scripture, certainly, but no religious experience can substitute for the revelation of God which is both objective (from above) and subjective (our inner reception of it). What one receives from the Bible is not to be measured in the first instance against what is rational, nor against what seems to affirm our human instincts, but against the wisdom of the repentant, renewed heart.

Christian faith looks to the Reformed Protestant hermeneutic of *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus*. The only valid way of developing theological dogma in the church is deductively. The Westminster Confession of Faith in our *Book of Confessions* (BOC) says,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (6.006 BOC)

Only what we might find in Scripture using clear deductive reasoning is valid. The Westminster Confession of Faith goes on,

All things in Scripture...are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (6.007 BOC)

Other sources and authorities may indeed instruct us in devotion and in governing the life of faith. However, these other voices are subordinate to and must be corrected by the written Word of God.

Progressives, in contrast, look to experience as the lens through which to view the Bible. The Bible is not read for propositional truth, but for a record of religious experience that reflects only the context from which it

arose. It serves as an analogy to epitomize a message of liberation. From nineteenth century attempts to remove supernatural aspects of Scripture to the work of the Jesus Seminar, these efforts indicate a human-centered, naturalistic approach to revelation that is irreconcilable with Christian orthodoxy in general, and Reformed orthodoxy in particular. It yields a counterfeit Gospel.

The conviction that God has spoken for himself in the person of Jesus Christ leads in a distinct direction. God is transcendent and mysterious, but the center of the message of the church is simple and clear. The greatest truth is that the world is lost, and that Jesus Christ was born to rescue sinners. This means that the Word does not stay an abstraction. He is not mainly a mystical feeling, not a mere example of religious enlightenment, not a case study of social or economic liberation. He is, as Barth stressed, an event, the ontological and noetic becoming experiential, and personal for us, the Word become flesh who dwelt among us. We know God because of what Jesus did, which was to live and die on our behalf on the cross.

Where Do We Go From Here

The first chapter of Romans shows us that a sovereign, living God created all that is. God speaks, and creation comes into being. God redeems humanity out of sheer grace through the instrument of our faith. Act and being, the Word and work of God are united in the person of Jesus Christ. That means that the Bible speaks, that it actually communicates and conveys the reality of God. Creation and redemption integrate in anticipation of eschatology, the grand conclusion in God's design for the world. Many in the culture and in the churches today would escape God's call to honor and obey him in our mortal bodies, as they would seek to transform the meaning of Scripture's clear teaching and transcend the limitations of the flesh. This tendency is either libertine or Gnostic, ancient heresies that once again trouble the church. The protection against this danger lies in respecting the parameters of Scripture. We are not free to speculate into areas God has not revealed. We are not to contravene the clear directives of Scripture. Instead, we are to keep close to the center of it, which is Jesus Christ who "learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8b).

What do we do when some in the church offer a counterfeit Christian faith? We must hold in tension Jesus' instruction on church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17 with his parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43, where he reveals there will be both saved and unsaved, righteous and unrighteous ("all who do evil") within the church. The final word on the fate of those in the church will only be

spoken on the day of judgment, when the character of each will be disclosed. We must temper accountability, as Paul demonstrates when he hands "Hymenaeus and Alexander...over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20), with making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Might we even see an analogy for remaining in fellowship with liberals in the story of Hosea? The prophet is told to marry a promiscuous woman, "for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD" (Hosea 1:2). Later, the LORD calls him to redeem her, saying "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods" (3:1). The adulterous woman can be seen as a type of the Bride of Christ and a contrast with the longsuffering love of Yahweh for idolatrous Israel.

I advocate staying in our denomination for the time being for the following reasons: we have a responsibility to bear witness to God's grace and truth in the church, to the flock that is PC(USA), as well as to the world. We are inheritors of a historic Reformed and evangelical tradition that should be preserved. We are stewards of the work and resources of generations of Presbyterians, which should not be simply turned over to our progressive and liberal adversaries. There is the real prospect of loss of connections with like-minded conservatives who feel led to stay. We should not think that transition to another confession will protect us from the issues currently plaguing us; they surge around us in the wider cultural waters in which we swim. Eventually, all churches will likely have to face the same issues.

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Note for the following article:

J. Gresham Machen, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was deeply concerned about the rise of liberal theology in the 1920s in the northern Presbyterian Church and in many seminaries. When the Board of Princeton reorganized the seminary along more liberal/modernist lines, Machen left to found Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (1929). This is his final sermon to the Princeton seminarians. We have included it here because Machen's concern, that liberal theology denied the Gospel, remains at the root of the division we see today in the PC(USA).

Fight the Good Fight Of Faith

(1 Timothy 6:12)

by J. Gresham Machen

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

The Apostle Paul was a great fighter. His fighting was partly against external enemies—against hardships of all kinds. Five times he was scourged by the Jews, three times by the Romans; he suffered shipwreck four times; and was in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. And finally he came to the logical end of such a life, by the headsman's axe. It was hardly a peaceful life, but was rather a life of wild adventure. Lindbergh, I suppose, got a thrill when he hopped off to Paris, and people are in search of thrills today; but if you wanted a really unbroken succession of thrills, I think you could hardly do better than try knocking around the Roman Empire of the first century with the Apostle Paul, engaged in the unpopular business of turning the world upside down.

But these physical hardships were not the chief battle in which Paul was engaged. Far more trying was the battle that he fought against the enemies in his own camp. Everywhere his rear was threatened by an all-engulfing paganism or by a perverted Judaism that has missed the real purpose of the Old Testament law. Read the Epistles with care, and you see Paul always in conflict. At one time he fights paganism in life, the notion that all kinds of conduct are lawful to the Christian man, a philosophy that makes Christian liberty a mere aid to pagan license. At another time, he fights paganism in thought, the sublimation of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body into the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

At still another time, he fights the effort of human pride to substitute man's merit as the means of salvation for Divine grace; he fights the subtle propaganda of the Judaizers with its misleading appeal to the Word of God. Everywhere we see the great apostle in conflict for the preservation of the church. It is as though a mighty flood were seeking to engulf the church's life; dam the break at one point in the levee, and another break appears somewhere else. Everywhere paganism was seeping

through; not for one moment did Paul have peace; always he was called upon to fight.

Fortunately, he was a true fighter; and by God's grace he not only fought, but he won. At first sight indeed he might have seemed to have lost. The lofty doctrine of Divine grace, the center and core of the Gospel that Paul preached, did not always dominate the mind and heart of the subsequent church. The Christianity of the Apostolic Fathers, of the Apologists, of Irenaeus, is very different from the Christianity of Paul. The church meant to be faithful to the apostle; but the pure doctrine of the Cross runs counter to the natural man, and not always, even in the church, was it fully understood. Read the Epistle to the Romans first, and then read Irenaeus, and you are conscious of a mighty decline. No longer does the Gospel stand out sharp and clear; there is a large admixture of human error; and it might seem as though Christian freedom, after all, were to be entangled in the meshes of a new law.

The human instruments which God uses in great triumphs of faith are no pacifists, but great fighters like Paul himself. Little affinity for the great apostle has the whole tribe of considerers of consequences, the whole tribe of the compromisers ancient and modern. The real companions of Paul are the great heroes of the faith. But who are those heroes? Are they not true fighters, one and all? Tertullian fought a mighty battle against Marcion; Athanasius fought against the Arians; Augustine fought against Pelagius; and as for Luther, he fought a brave battle against kings and princes and popes for the liberty of the people of God. Luther was a great fighter; and we love him for it. So was Calvin; so were John Knox and all the rest. It is impossible to be a true soldier of Jesus Christ and not fight.

God grant that you—students in the seminary—may be fighters, too! Probably you have your battles even now; you have to contend against sins gross or sins refined; you have to contend against the sin of slothfulness and inertia; you have, many of you, I know very well, a mighty battle on your hands against doubt and despair. Do not think it strange if you fall thus into divers temptations. The Christian life is a warfare after all. John Bunyan rightly set it forth under the allegory of a Holy

War; and when he set it forth, in his greater book [The Pilgrim's Progress], under the figure of a pilgrimage, the pilgrimage too, was full of battles.

There are indeed, places of refreshment on the Christian way; the House Beautiful was provided by the King at the top of the Hill Difficulty, for the entertainment of pilgrims, and from the Delectable Mountains could sometimes be discerned the shining towers of the City of God. But just after the descent from the House Beautiful, there was the battle with Apollyon and the Valley of Humiliation, and later came the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Yes, the Christian faces a mighty conflict in this world. Pray God that in that conflict you may be true men; good soldiers of Jesus Christ, not willing to compromise with your great enemy, not easily cast down, and seeking ever the renewing of your strength in the Word and ordinances and prayer!

If you decide to stand for Christ, you will not have an easy life in the ministry. Of course, you may try to evade the conflict. All men will speak well of you if, after preaching no matter how unpopular a Gospel on Sunday, you will only vote against that Gospel in the councils of the church the next day; you will graciously be permitted to believe in supernatural Christianity all you please if you will only act as though you did not believe in it, if you will only make common of the church. A man may believe what he pleases, provided he does not believe anything strongly enough to risk his life on it and fight for it. "Tolerance" is the great word. Men even ask for tolerance when they look to God in prayer. But how can any Christian possibly pray such a prayer as that? What a terrible prayer it is, how full of disloyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ!

There is a sense, of course, in which tolerance is a virtue. If by it you mean tolerance on the part of the state, the forbearance of majorities toward minorities, the resolute rejection of any measures of physical compulsion in propagating either what is true or what is false, then of course, the Christian ought to favor tolerance with all his might and main, and ought to lament the widespread growth of intolerance in America today. Or if you mean by tolerance forbearance toward personal attacks upon yourself, or courtesy and patience and fairness in dealing with all errors of whatever kind, then again tolerance is a virtue. But to pray for tolerance apart from such qualifications, in particular to pray for tolerance without careful definition of that of which you are to be tolerant, is just to pray for the breakdown of the Christian religion; for the Christian religion is intolerant to the core.

There lies the whole offense of the Cross—and also the whole power of it. Always the Gospel would have been

received with favor by the world IF it had been presented merely as one way of salvation; the offense came because it was presented as the only way, and because it made relentless war upon all other ways. God save us, then, from this "tolerance" of which we hear so much. God deliver us from the sin of making common cause with those who deny or ignore the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ! God save us from the deadly guilt of consenting to the presence as our representatives in the church of those who lead Christ's little ones astray; God make us, whatever else we are, just faithful messengers, who present, without fear or favor, not our word, but the Word of God.

But if you are such messengers, you will have the opposition, not only of the world, but increasingly, I fear, of the Church. I cannot tell you that your sacrifice will be light. No doubt it would be noble to care nothing whatever about the judgment of our fellow men. But to such nobility I confess that I for my part have not quite attained, and I cannot expect you to have attained to it. I confess that academic preferments, easy access to great libraries, the society of cultured people, and in general the thousand advantages that come from being regarded as respectable people in a respectable world—I confess that these things seem to me to be in themselves good and desirable things. Yet the servant of Jesus Christ, to an increasing extent, is being obliged to give them up. Certainly, in making that sacrifice we do not complain; for we have something with which all that we have lost is not worthy to be compared. Still, it can hardly be said that any unworthy motives of self-interest can lead us to adopt a course which brings us nothing but reproach.

Where, then, shall we find a sufficient motive for such a course as that; where shall we find courage to stand against the whole current of the age; where shall we find courage for this fight of faith? I do not think that we shall obtain courage by any mere lust of conflict. In some battles that means may perhaps suffice. Soldiers in bayonet practice were sometimes, and for all I know still are, taught to give a shout when they thrust their bayonets at imaginary enemies; I heard them doing it even long after the armistice in France. That serves, I suppose, to overcome the natural inhibition of civilized man to develop the proper spirit of conflict. Perhaps it may be necessary in some kinds of war. But it will hardly serve in this Christian conflict. In this conflict I do not think we can be good fighters simply by being resolved to fight. For this battle is a battle of love; and nothing ruins a man's service in it so much as a spirit of hate.

No, if we want to learn the secret of this warfare, we shall have to look deeper; and we can hardly do better than turn again to that great fighter, the Apostle Paul.

What was the secret of his power in the mighty conflict; how did he learn to fight?

The answer is paradoxical; but it is very simple. Paul was a great fighter because he was at peace. He who said, "Fight the good fight of faith," spoke also of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"; and in that peace the sinews of his war were found. He fought against the enemies that were without because he was at peace within; there was an inner sanctuary in his life that no enemy could disturb. There, my friends, is the great central truth. You cannot fight successfully with beasts, as Paul did at Ephesus; you cannot fight successfully against evil men, or against the devil and his spiritual powers of wickedness in high places, unless when you fight against those enemies there is One with Whom you are at peace.

But if you are at peace with that One, then you can care little what men may do. You can say with the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men"; you can say with Luther, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen"; you can say with Elisha, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them"; you can say with Paul, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" Without that peace of God in your hearts, you will strike little terror into the enemies of the Gospel of Christ. You may amass mighty resources for the conflict; you may be great masters of ecclesiastical strategy; you may be very clever, and very zealous too; but I fear that it will be of little avail. There may be a tremendous din; but when the din is over, the Lord's enemies will be in possession of the field. No, there is no other way to be a really good fighter. You cannot fight God's battle against God's enemies unless you are at peace with Him.

But how shall you be at peace with Him? Many ways have been tried. How pathetic is the age-long effort of sinful man to become right with God; sacrifice, lacerations, almsgiving, morality, penance, confession! But alas, it is all of no avail. Still there is that same awful gulf. It may be temporarily concealed; spiritual exercises may conceal it for a time; penance or the confession of sin unto men may give a temporary and apparent relief. But the real trouble remains; the burden is still on the back; Mount Sinai is still ready to shoot forth flames; the soul is still not at peace with God. How then shall peace be obtained?

My friends, it cannot be attained by anything in us. Oh, that that truth could be written in the hearts of every one of you! Oh, that it could be written in letters of flame for all the world to read! Peace with God cannot be attained by good works, neither can it be attained by confession of sin, neither can it be attained by any psychological

results of an act of faith. We can never be at peace with God unless God first be at peace with us. But how can God be at peace with us? Can He be at peace with us by ignoring the guilt of sin? by descending from His throne? by throwing the universe into chaos? by making wrong to be the same as right? by making a dead letter of His holy law? "The soul that sinneth it shall die," by treating His eternal laws as though they were the changeable laws of man?

Oh, what an abyss were the universe if that were done, what a mad anarchy, what a wild demon-riot! Where could there be peace if God were thus at war with Himself; where could there be a foundation if God's laws were not sure? Oh, no, my friends, peace cannot be attained for man by the great modern method of dragging God down to man's level; peace cannot be attained by denying that right is right and wrong is wrong; peace can nowhere be attained if the awful justice of God stand not forever sure.

How then can we sinners stand before that Throne? How can there be peace for us in the presence of the justice of God? How can He be just and yet justify the ungodly? There is one answer to these questions. It is not our answer. Our wisdom could never have discovered it. It is God's Answer. It is found in the story of the Cross. We deserved eternal death because of sin; the eternal Son of God, because He loved us, and because He was sent by the Father Who loved us too, died in our stead, for our sins, upon the Cross. That message is despised today; upon it the visible church as well as the world pours out the vials of its scorn, or else does it even less honor by paying it lip-service and then passing it by. Men dismiss it as a "theory of the atonement," and fall back upon the customary commonplaces about a principle of self-sacrifice, or the culmination of a universal law, or a revelation of the love of God, or the hallowing of suffering, or the similarity between Christ's death and the death of soldiers who perished in the great war.

In the presence of such blindness, our words often seem vain. We may tell men something of what we think about the Cross of Christ, but it is harder to tell them what we feel. We pour forth our tears of gratitude and love; we open to the multitude the depths of our souls; we celebrate a mystery so tender, so holy, that we might think it would soften even a heart of stone. But all to no purpose. The Cross remains foolishness to the world, men turn coldly away, and our preaching seems but vain. And then comes the wonder of wonders! The hour comes for some poor soul, even through the simplest and poorest preaching; the message is honored, not the messenger; there comes a flash of light into the soul, and all is as clear as day. "He loved me and gave Himself for me," says the sinner at last, as he contemplates the

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Saviour upon the Cross. The burden of sin falls from the back, and a soul enters into the peace of God.

Have you yourselves that peace, my friends? If you have, you will not be deceived by the propaganda of any disloyal church. If you have the peace of God in your hearts, you will never shrink from controversy; you will never be afraid to contend earnestly for the Faith. Talk of peace in the present deadly peril of the Church, and you show, unless you be strangely ignorant of the conditions that exist, that you have little inkling of the true peace of God. Those who have been at the foot of the Cross will not be afraid to go forth under the banner of the Cross to a holy war of love.

Where are you going to stand in the great battle which now rages in the church? Are you going to curry favor with the world by standing aloof; are you going to be "conservative liberals" or "liberal conservatives" or "Christians who do not believe in controversy," or anything else so self-contradictory and absurd? Are you going to be Christians, but not Christians overmuch? Are you going to stand coldly aloof when God's people fight against ecclesiastical tyranny at home and abroad? Are you going to excuse yourselves by pointing out personal defects in those who contend for the Faith today? Are you going to be disloyal to Christ in external testimony until you can make all well within your own soul? Be assured, you will never accomplish your purpose if you adopt such a program as that. Witness bravely to the Truth that you already understand, and more will be given you; but make common cause with those who deny or ignore the Gospel of Christ, and the enemy will forever run riot in your life.

There are many hopes that I cherish for you men, with whom I am united by such ties of affection. I hope that you may be gifted preachers; I hope that you may have happy lives; I hope that you may have adequate support for yourselves and for your families; I hope that you may have good churches. But I hope something for you far more than all that. I hope above all that, wherever you are and however your preaching may be received, you may be true witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ; I hope

that there may never be any doubt where you stand, but that always you may stand squarely for Jesus Christ, as He is offered to us, not in the experiences of men, but in the blessed written Word of God.

Many have been swept from their moorings by the current of the age; a church grown worldly often tyrannizes over those who look for guidance to God's Word alone. But this is not the first discouraging time in the history of the church; other times were just as dark, and yet always God has watched over His people, and the darkest hour has sometimes preceded the dawn. So even now God has not left Himself without a witness. In many lands there are those who have faced the great issue of the day and have decided it aright, who have preserved true independence of mind in the presence of the world; in many lands there are groups of Christian people who in the face of ecclesiastical tyranny have not been afraid to stand for Jesus Christ. God grant that you may give comfort to them as you go forth from this seminary; God grant that you may rejoice their hearts by giving them your hand and your voice. To do so you will need courage. Far easier is it to curry favor with the world by abusing those whom the world abuses, by speaking against controversy, by taking a balcony view of the struggle in which God's servants are engaged.

But God save you from such a neutrality as that! It has a certain worldly appearance of urbanity and charity. But how cruel it is to burdened souls; how heartless it is to those little ones who are looking to the Church for some clear message from God! God save you from being so heartless and so unloving and so cold! God grant, instead, that in all humility but also in all boldness, in reliance upon God, you may fight the good fight of faith. Peace is indeed yours, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. But that peace is given you, not that you may be onlookers or neutrals in love's battle, but that you may be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Notes:

¹ This is the last sermon preached by Dr. J. Gresham Machen at Princeton. This sermon is taken from David Otis Fuller, Editor, *Valiant for the Truth: A Treasury of Evangelical Writings* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1961), 448-45. 5 Reprinted with permission from wwwFOUNDERS.org; Founders Ministries, Cape Coral, FL.

