

HRA Reformation Voice

The Voice of the Heidelberg Reformation Association

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THIS ISSUE:

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

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MINISTER'S ALL?

by R. Scott Clark

A few days ago I responded to a post by Australian minister Gordon Cheng who raised a question about the centrality of preaching in “evangelical” ministry. I responded indirectly to his point (which he notes in his response to Colin) and took the opportunity to make a couple of related points.

His point, it seems to me, is to diminish the centrality and uniqueness of preaching by equivocating between the official, public, ordained administration of the Word and the unofficial witness to the gospel by the laity.

He seems to want to describe all that as “preaching.” This move is part of the democratic, populist spirit of modern spirit of evangelicalism.

When I say I “modern” I don’t mean last week. Nathan Hatch has shown that, in American evangelicalism this has been the dominant pattern since the 1820s. Arguably, that pattern has roots in the so-called “First Great Awakening” almost a century before that.

It is universally assumed among contemporary evangelicals that Scripture teaches what is widely known as “every member ministry.” I understand how folk come to that conclusion and, over the years, I’ve been on both sides of this question. I’m back where I started. I don’t see it. If I can be brutally honest when I embraced the “every member ministry” model during my pastorate in Kansas City it was because we were a small church and we didn’t seem to be growing and, in response to the tremendous internal and external pressure felt by most pastors to “grow the church” I adopted a series of “new measures.” I became a predestinarian evangelical. I fiddled with the Regulative Principle and I made friends with the so-called “church growth” movement and I let those things color my biblical exegesis. I read a series of distinctly modern assumptions back into Ephesians 4.

The “every member ministry” model hangs by a very thin biblical reed. It depends upon how one reads Eph 4:11-12:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...(ESV)

It depends on a comma. Did Christ give the various offices listed “to equip the saints to do the work of ministry” or did he give them “to equip the saints, for the work of ministry....”? In other words, are these two phrases to be taken as a list of things to be done by these special offices or is the purpose of the offices to equip the laity to do the work of ministry.

Well, first of all, Paul didn’t use a comma. The earliest NT texts had no such punctuation. The comma is

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...(Eph. 4:11-12,ESV)

an interpretation by editors of the Greek text and the English translations. It might be right, it might be wrong but it’s an interpretation. I certainly won’t pretend to sort out this question in a blog post. It is worth noting, however, that any view that hangs on a comma supplied by editors, is not well grounded in the text of Scripture and the flow of redemptive history.

I think the “every member” model probably has a lot more to do with democratic populism than it does with the biblical view of the church. Our Lord did not give the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16) to every member but to the apostles, the first officers in the visible, institutional church. The “every member” model fits well into the program-driven approach adopted by virtually all evangelicals since the 18th century but does it fit Paul’s view of the church elsewhere? It seems to me that, if Paul had such a view, he would have expounded on it in detail in other places but he did not. He did, however, spend a considerable amount of space detailing the nature of the special offices. 1 and 2 Timothy were written to a young pastor. 1 Tim 3 is about the offices of elder or overseer (vv.1-7) and deacon (vv.8-13). Most of 1 and 2 Timothy are about how Timothy should conduct his office as pastor. Much of Titus 1 is taken up with the matter of elders and Titus 2, again, is about the conduct of pastoral

ministry. 1 Peter 5 is devoted to the office of elder. In other words, we have extensive revelation about the special offices and precious little about so-called “every member” ministry.

I’ve heard it argued that Acts 8 reflects the apostolic approach to “every member ministry” in as much as the church was scattered and “those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” One difficulty with the application of this narrative to this question is that the only Christians named in the narrative are special officers (Stephen and Philip). The first example of this preaching to which Luke turns is Philip. It is not at all clear that the intent of his narrative is to supply a ground for the “every member” ministry model.

This is not to say that there are not other ways of communicating the Word of God outside of the official pulpit ministry of the visible, institutional church. It is to say that, however, if we are to think biblically about this question, then we must be honest with the biblical text. I confess that, in the past, for the reasons I’ve given above, I haven’t always been completely honest with the biblical text. I regret that very deeply.

Why would Paul turn to “every member ministry” in the midst of a discussion aimed at and about the ministry of special officers? In the verses before Eph 4:11-12 he’s speaking to Timothy about the conduct of his office and the first thing he says in v. 13 has to do with the public administration of the Word. In short, the every-member interpretation of Eph 4:11-12 doesn’t seem to fit even the immediate context.

Finally, on this point, how likely is it that Paul is saying that Timothy and the other officers are to train what was almost certainly a largely illiterate congregation to do the work of ministry? We’re reading a great deal of modern life back into first-century Asia Minor when we read those verses to speak about every member ministry. Universal (or near it) literacy is a very recent phenomenon (which is probably behind us already). Whereas most of us can read and most of us have several English Bibles, most people in Timothy’s congregation not only couldn’t read but they didn’t have a portion of Scripture to read.

Therefore, I think it’s helpful to speak about the

witness of the laity to *the faith* (that which is objectively revealed in the Word and confessed by the Reformed Churches) and their witness to *their faith*, i.e. to their subjective appropriation of the biblical faith. Yes, we should speak to our neighbors, friends, and co-workers about the faith and our faith, but we should distinguish lay witness from the official proclamation of the gospel. God the Spirit is free to act through popular witness or public proclamation, but as has been noted, it is to the latter that he has attached promises.

I realize this is heresy in contemporary evangelicalism, but not everything every Christian does is “ministry.” The baker has a *vocation* to bake to the glory of God but baking is not his ministry. We need to recover the idea of vocation. Calling the daily work of Christians “ministry” is intended to elevate it but it actually accomplishes the opposite. It devalues it by implying that anything that isn’t “ministry” isn’t valuable significant in itself. Really, what the EMM model has done is to take us back to the pre-Reformation view of the church in which there were two classes of Christians. The Keswick Movement did the same thing. Again, folk were thinking of two classes of Christians, those who have the blessing and those who don’t. The EMM movement implies that unless what someone does is “ministry” it isn’t really significant.

This approach is closely related to that pietist stream of neo-Kuyperianism that seeks to baptize everything that Christians do (whether softball or painting) as “ministry.” It suggests that there is something unclean about extra-ecclesial vocation so it makes everything ecclesial. Thus, we have Reformed Churches spending offerings on dozens of good works by private persons and societies and because they are “ministries.” Did our Lord really institute all the alphabet soup of “ministries” in evangelicalism today or did he institute the visible church (Matt 18)? Did he commission every layman in the world to preach, teach, baptize, and make disciples? Not even the most committed EMM congregation has (yet) free-for-all baptism parties where anyone can baptize anyone else. If it’s happening, I really don’t want to know.

I wasn’t always a stuffy high-church Calvinist. I came to faith in the context of a revivalist Southern Baptist congregation. I learned quickly as an evangelical that I needed to have a “ministry.” It wasn’t enough simply

to be a teen-ager and to learn the basics of the faith and to go about my daily life trusting Christ, dying to sin and living to God. No, I had to have a “ministry.” So we took “spiritual gift” tests. The test said that I had the gift of prophecy. I’m still waiting for that one to kick in. In order to be regarded as full-time, sold-out, born again Christians, one had to have a ministry. So, with other students, we started a campus bible study at the local public school (which was contested by the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union the next year!). I was at Campus Life and if not there then at Youth Group or at a FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) or Campus Crusade (I was a religious over-achiever) meeting at the University or every week. My last two years high school was a blur of religious activity. When I got my first radio job helping to produce and then to host a Sunday morning gospel show on a local country station, my well-meaning youth pastor told me that it was okay to miss Sunday AM services because I had a “ministry.” Conway Twitty had a way of making even “Just as I Am” sound lecherous. Call

me a Donatist, but there’s no way playing Conway Twitty is “ministry.” It was a job. Don’t get me wrong. I loved every minute of it. It was a lot more exciting than sitting through another altar call and not walking the aisle again.

Strictly speaking, ministry is what ministers do. They administer the Word of God. They fulfill their calling just as God’s people, who hold the office of believer, fulfill their callings (vocations) to bake, to pave streets, or even do radio shows to the best of their ability, before the face of God, to the glory of God. Not everyone in the congregation is a “minister” and frankly, that should be a relief.

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WHEN THE CHURCH LOSES THE KEYS

by Howard Sloan

Have you ever lost your keys? Most of us at some time or another have at least misplaced them for a short period of time. When you lose your keys it can cause chaos. You might not be able to get into your house or place of business. You might not be able to use your car. You might not have access to important files, supplies, or money. Even worse, what happens if your keys fall into the hands of someone who does not have the best of intentions? The consequences become even more severe and dangerous. But what happens when the church loses the keys to the kingdom? The effect is much greater than just not being able to get where you want to be or what you need. The effect of the church losing the keys of the kingdom is a matter of spiritual life and death.

Lord’s Day 31 of the Heidelberg talks about the keys of the kingdom and their purpose in the life of the church when it says in answer 83, *“The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.”* These keys are the responsibilities entrusted to the church,

specifically the leadership of the church, for the proper administration of the church until Christ returns. So important are they that Jesus says that when the keys are used that *“whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:19) and *“If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”* (John 20:23) That is serious business. So what happens if the keys are lost, or even worse, fall into the wrong hands?

1. People think they are in the kingdom when, in fact, they are not. To me, this is the greatest danger possible. What can be a worse delusion, or more costly? This can happen when the true gospel is not preached, or a false one is put in its place. A false sense of hope, a misplaced faith, or an idolatrous love are the results when this key is mishandled. This misuse of the Key of Christian Discipline can also leave someone with a false sense of eternal security. If suspension or excommunication are not rightly administered, the unrepentant sinner is left thinking that they are still right with God. This may be far

from the truth. Their soul may be in great peril all because the church failed to act.

2. It denies entrance to those who seek it. This is the exact opposite of the purpose of the keys. We who hold to the sovereignty of God and irresistible grace realize that those whom God chooses can in no way be kept out. However, in practice, by mishandling the word of God and the privilege of preaching the gospel, many are led astray. They are presented with a road that supposedly leads to heaven, but in fact takes them to hell. Thanks be to God that even though truth may be replaced with lie, God's purposes to save a people for Himself can not be stopped. This even has the effect of keeping the elect out of the kingdom and denying them fellowship with God until the true gospel is revealed to them.

3. The Sacraments become a means of profaning Christ rather than of proclaiming His death. Paul deals with this in his first letter to the Corinthians. *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord."* (1 Cor. 11:27) Paul clearly states that

there are times people should not partake of the Lord's Supper. He states that partakers are to "examine themselves" and "discern the body and blood." The thing about this process is that one must be adequately instructed in order to do so. Hence, the proper preaching of the gospel is a necessity. When Christian discipline fails to be executed, unworthy people are allowed to partake to their own judgment and to the profaning of Christ name.

4. Sin goes unchecked and no conviction of sin occurs. When Christians fail to do their duty to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" (2 Tim. 4:2), sinful practices are left to continue. That is the place of Christian discipline. Christian discipline begins when each believer demonstrates concern for the spiritual welfare of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and purity of Christ's church. We can be afraid to speak someone who has fallen into sin. It is intimidating – if we are

concerned only for ourselves and not for the other person. Jesus states in Luke 17:3 *"Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."* When we fail to do that, sin goes unchecked. When sin goes unchecked, no repentance occurs. When no repentance occurs, sin grows. Eventually that sin may grow to the point where the church itself needs to get involved (Matthew 18:15-18). If no one has done their duty up until this point, the church's task becomes all the more difficult. But what if the church is aware and does nothing? Woe to those men on the day of judgment who have failed to care for the souls of those in their care. Failure to call fallen believers to repentance leaves a stain on the witness of the church and is dishonoring to the work of Christ.

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5. People are given a "form of godliness" while "denying its power" Paul warns Timothy "that in the last days there will come times of difficulty" when people will have "the appearance of godliness, but denying its power." (2 Timothy 3:1,5) It will be a time when sinful behavior is tolerated and even flaunted (sound familiar?). Many assemblies that call themselves churches of

Christ are just like what Paul warned. They put on the trappings of religion. They may speak of morality or change, but the power of the gospel to transform lives is completely absent. The power of God in his gracious and merciful acts is gone. The power of the blood of Christ to take away our sins is gone. The power of the Holy Spirit to enliven and transform is gone. The power of the Word of God to impact our lives is gone. When this power is denied, what is left? A bare form of godliness that is unable to save.

6. Political correctness becomes more important than doctrine or practice. Unfortunately, this is all too often the case today. Likely, this has its root in a poor view of the inspiration and authority of scripture. If the scripture is seen as fallible, out of date, or riddled with mistakes, it will not be preached, nor held out, as the standard for doctrine or practice. When this occurs, the church is blown about by every wind of doctrine.

In our time, the strongest wind is political correctness. Tolerance, religious plurality, and personal freedom sweep away God's righteous standard. Jesus as prophet, priest, and king is replaced by Jesus activist, philosopher, and role-model.

7. The church opens itself to corruption of doctrine and life. Of course, when the church fails its use of the keys, corruption is bound to happen. When those whose doctrine is heresy are allowed to roam free, doctrines once held as essential are cast aside, or at best considered optional. Practices long considered deplorable are now considered 'alternatives.' Soon, the faithful are the minority. When someone tries to point out the corruption, church discipline is threatened or used in a way that our Lord never intended. It is detestable, but has happened throughout the history of the church.

8. The church loses its "saltiness" and its light is held under a bushel. Jesus says in Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." This is what happens when preaching no longer contains conviction of sin, a call to repentance, or the work of Jesus Christ. It is preaching that is nothing less than salt-less and worthless. It is the light kept under a bushel.

9. Lone Ranger Christians are developed. Many Christians feel that there is no need to submit themselves to the discipline of the church in membership. It is just "them and Jesus." But that is not the Christianity of the New Testament. The New Testament reveals a church knit together in covenant responsibility to one another under the covenant headship of Christ. When the church fails to declare the wonderful privileges and responsibilities of membership in the local church, it leaves believers to feel as though they are the sole authority in the matter of their "relationship with Jesus."

10. The integrity of the gospel is compromised. This is the ultimate result. The truthfulness, the beauty, the majesty, and the wonder of the gospel are stolen away. When the keys are lost, the gospel is lost. When the gospel is lost, hope is lost. We need the keys in order to maintain a faithful witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ throughout the generations.

Rev. Howard Sloan is the pastor of St. Paul's Reformed Church in Bedford, PA. He is also the Coordinating Secretary of the Heidelberg Reformation Association. All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, used by permission. All rights reserved.

Q. 83.
What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A.
The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Q. 84.
How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A.
In this way: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal

condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: (a) according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

Q. 85.
How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

A.
In this way: when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent with a profession of faith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those, who are appointed by the church for that purpose; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real change, are again received as members of Christ and his church.

WILL YOU SUBMIT?

by Ronald Cammenga

"Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid) to church discipline?"

I imagine this third question asked of those who make public confession of faith in the Protestant Reformed Church is similar to those of any church that practices true church discipline. It is closely related to two previous questions. In the first question we acknowledge the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments as taught in the confessions of the church. By means of Christian discipline, purity of doctrine is preserved in the church. In the second question we resolve by the grace of God to lead a new, godly life. The purpose of Christian discipline is to maintain godly living among the members of the church. The objects of Christian discipline are those members of the church who err either in doctrine or in life. The purpose of the exercise of discipline is the maintenance of true doctrine and holy living in the church.

Principles of Church Government

Three outstanding principles of church government are implied in this third question. Those who make confession of faith ought to understand these principles.

First of all, the Head and Supreme Ruler of the church is Jesus Christ. The form of government of the church is not democratic but monarchical. Christ alone rules in the church, and His rule is absolute and sovereign. He said that to His disciples at the time of His ascension: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Having ascended into heaven, Christ is seated at the right hand of God, the position of rule and authority.

In the second place, although Christ rules in the church, He exercises His rule through men whom He calls and appoints to office. The rule of Christ in the church is the rule that He carries out through

the officebearers of the church. The authority that the officebearers have is the authority that Christ has given to them.

The Scriptures are plain enough in teaching this truth. In Ephesians 4:11 we read: "And He (i.e., the ascended Lord Jesus Christ) gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Repeatedly the Apostle Paul refers to himself as the servant or minister of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17; Rom 1:1). Hebrews 5:4 is relevant: "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."

In the third place, although Christ rules the church and although He rules the church through officebearers,

He exercises His rule through the church herself. The church as a whole is responsible for this rule and actually carries it out.

It is for this reason that our third question speaks of "church government" and "church discipline". The emphasis of the question is on the responsibility of the church as a whole for the

proper government and discipline of the church.

That government and discipline are activities of the church as a whole is born out by several considerations. First, it is the church that administers the means of grace and exercises the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Contrary to the teaching of Rome, to no individual, but to the church, Christ has given the power of the keys. Second, the involvement of the church is seen in the fact that every member of the church is an office-bearer. Occupying the office of all believers, he is a prophet, priest, and king under Christ. And thirdly, the involvement of the church is seen in the teaching of Scripture that even those who are appointed to special office in the church are appointed by the membership of the church herself. The first deacons were chosen and called by the church at Jerusalem, Acts 6:3-5. Paul was called

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and sent out by the church at Antioch, Acts 13:1-3. Timothy had been ordained and entrusted with the duties of his office by the presbytery (elders) of the congregation of Ephesus, I Tim. 4:14.

Called to Submit to Church Government

To the rule of Christ exercised through the officebearers appointed by the congregation, we are called to submit. The person making public confession of faith vows to submit to church government. When he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ, he confesses faith in Jesus Christ not only as his Savior, but also as his Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ he also willingly places himself under the rule of Jesus Christ.

Many passages of Scripture lay before us the calling to be in submission to the officebearers of the church. After carefully explaining the duty of the elders, the Apostle Peter exhorts in I Peter 5:5, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." In I Thessalonians 5:12, 13 we read: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves." An especially powerful passage is Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

We are called to be in submission to the officebearers of the church. We are called to obey them because they "have the rule" over us. We are not to obey them merely because they are older or wiser than we are. We are not to obey them because of any kind of penalty or punishment that might result from our not being in submission to them. For no other reason are we to submit to them than that they have been given the rule over us. Christ has set them in authority, and us under their authority. Not for the sake of their

person, because we happen to like or dislike the person of the officebearer, but for the sake of his office and the authority of his office we are to submit to the officebearer.

Here is an important test of our allegiance to Christ. Here is the proof that we are servants of Christ and that we honor Christ as our Lord and King. It is easy enough to say that Christ is our Lord. It is easy enough to speak of Christ as the King of our life. But then we must show that, by our submission to the authority of Christ where He is pleased to manifest that authority. We must submit to the government and discipline of the church.

Especially urgent is our submission to the government of the church if we should become delinquent. This may very well happen. This has happened in the past, and happens today.

In Case We Become Delinquent

Especially urgent is our submission to the government of the church if we should become delinquent. This may very well happen. This has happened in the past, and happens today. It is a very real possibility that we fall into sin, serious sin, sin that we do not immediately repent of, sin that becomes the occasion for the discipline of the church. When this happens, we promise to submit to that discipline of the church and to receive the correction of that discipline.

This certainly is an outstanding reason for church government and for officebearers in the church. One purpose of church discipline is the recovery of the wayward. In II Timothy 2:25, 26, Paul calls the officebearers to labor with those members of the church who have fallen into sin: ". . . if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Sad to say, in many cases this vow is broken. Often it is the case that those who fall into sin will not submit to the government of the church. They will not receive the pastor or elders when they call on them to admonish them. If they receive the officebearers, they will not be convinced by the teaching of the

Word of God, but stubbornly persist in their sin. Often instead of submitting to government of the church, they simply "ask for their membership papers" and leave the church entirely, or go to a church which fails to manifest faithfully the marks of the true church of Christ in the world.

This is serious sin! Sin is a serious matter. Unrepented of sin is a serious matter. But stubbornly to persist in sin after the admonition and discipline of the church is still more serious. To do this in spite of the solemn promise we have made to submit to the government of the church is the worst sin of all.

Freedom of Conscience

This does not mean that every decision of the church is to be obeyed unquestioningly. Our obedience to the government of the church is our obedience to Jesus Christ and to the Word of Jesus Christ. If the church exercises authority apart from Jesus Christ, in contradiction to the Word of Christ, in good conscience the believer may not obey. Our conscience is not bound to the church and the decrees of the church, but our conscience is bound to the Word of God. And no church may ever attempt to bind the conscience of the members of the church. This, in fact, is a mark of the false church.

Two possibilities may be conceived of here. First, decisions are made by the church with which a member disagrees or with which he is not satisfied, but these decisions do not concern matters of principle. The member may question the wisdom or the appropriateness of such decisions. Perhaps the decision concerns a building project, a change in the liturgy of the church, change of time of the Sunday worship services, or many similar matters. In this case, although the individual is personally opposed to the decision, because it does not involve a fundamental teaching of the Word of God, he acquiesces to the decision and abides by it. This is submission to church government.

The second possibility is that decisions are made by the church that are plainly contrary to the Word

of God. Perhaps the church has decided to open the special offices to the women, or the church has approved some false teaching in the preaching of the minister. In this case, the member may not in good conscience before God obey the government of the church. To do so would be to obey men rather than God. Even then, he is called to submit. He cannot obey, but he must submit. It is possible for him not to obey, and at the same time to submit. The opposite of submission is rebellion, and no child of God under any circumstances may rebel against those in authority. Even when those in authority demand of us what is contrary to the Word of God, we may not rise up against those in authority, we may not be abusive of those in authority, we may not seek the overthrow of those in authority.

If the church exercises authority apart from Jesus Christ, in contradiction to the Word of Christ, in good conscience the believer may not obey.

At the same time, involved in submission to church government when the government of the church demands of us what is contrary to the Word of God is our calling to bring our objections to the decisions of the church in the orderly way. A member does this by protest and appeal. This is the way of submission. In this way, the member hopes to convince the church of its wrong-doing. If, in the end, this fails, the member

is left with no alternative but to leave his church for one that adheres faithfully to the truth, or he is called to institute the church anew with other like-minded Christians.

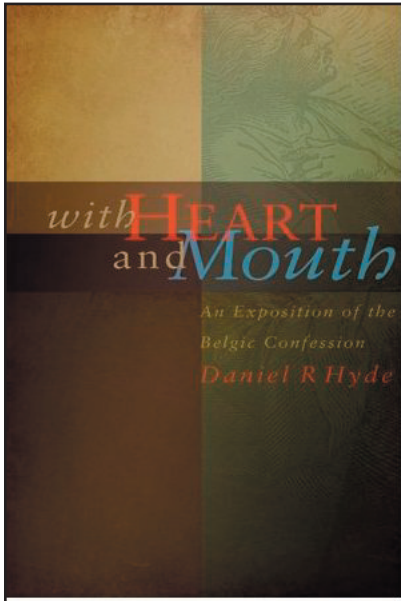
The Word of God makes clear our calling, Confess your faith in Christ! Hold to the sound doctrine! Live a new, godly life! Submit to the government of the church!

This is the straight and narrow way that leads to life everlasting.

Rev. Ronald Cammenga is Professor of Old Testament and Dogmatics at Protestant Reformed Theological School, This article is reprinted with minor changes from the Standard Bearer, Volume 63, Issue 16 under the title "Confession of Faith (6)". It is used by permission. All Scripture quotations are KJV.

Book Reviews

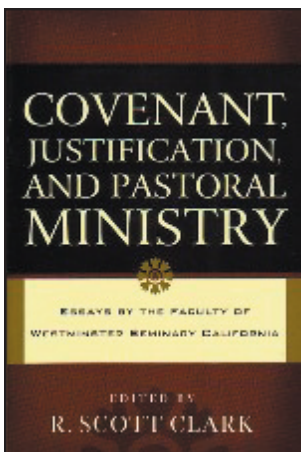
WITH HEART AND MOUTH by Daniel Hyde (2008, Reformed Fellowship, Inc.)
Reviewed by R. Scott Clark



These are the opening words of the Belgic Confession. As the publisher's blurb says, "The Belgic Confession contains doctrine that is worth dying for, as its author and many adherents learned all too well." The Belgic Confession is not a systematic theology but the historic and systematic confession of faith by the Reformed

churches. With this commentary Danny Hyde has done the Reformed churches a great service by placing our confession in its historical, theological, and ecclesiastical contexts again. By reading it in the light of those contexts, he brings it to life for us in our time. Anyone wishing to understand better the Belgic Confession on its own terms and as it has been received by the Reformed churches must consult this intelligent work.

COVENANT, JUSTIFICATION, AND PASTORAL MINISTRY edited by R. Scott Clark (2007, P&R Publishing)



Reviewed Rev. Lane Keister

Despite some criticisms of this book (by Doug Wilson, although he has also some positive things to say about it), I read the whole book with the greatest pleasure. In fact, there were times I had to put the book down and literally dance around the room in pure glee, because of a point made that

undermined the various heresies floating around today in Reformed-dom. Buy the book. That is not a request. It is a command. What with this book and *By Faith Alone*, which is just about to hit the stalls, the Federal Vision and New Perspectives on Paul will have a hard time in Reformed circles from now on.

I'm just going to hit a few of the high lights. All the essays were top-notch, in my opinion. And just because I am mentioning some essays and not others, does not mean I found the unmentioned ones unprofitable. I have underlining on just about every page (and I am spare with the pencil!).

First up: Iain Duguid's outstanding critique of covenantal nomism from the perspective of the Old Testament. If staying in the covenant (to use Sanders's jargon) means works, then Israel would have been sunk countless times. Even if we grant (which I don't) that New Perspective authors do not hold to a view of the Old Testament like this, it at least proves that the Second Temple Judaism that Sanders describes has *nothing* to do with the Old Testament.

Scott Clark points out why it is that we no longer define Reformed theology by the symbols of the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards: "Rather than identifying ourselves as Reformed and defining Reformed by the symbols, over time we identified ourselves as conservatives and came to regard our Reformed identity as just a subset of a broader antimodern reaction" (pg. 6).

David VanDrunen and Scott Clark point out the importance of the *pactum salutis*. It underlies all of covenant theology. This is a very similar point to that made in the White/Beisner article in *By Faith Alone*. In fact, it was extremely interesting to compare the two articles, which have quite a bit of overlap (though by no means superfluous: buy both books!).

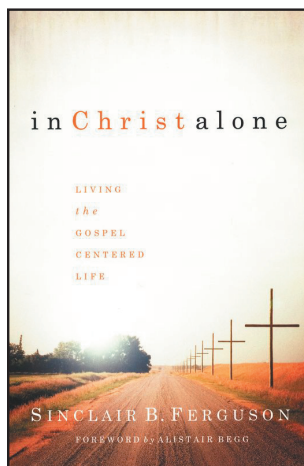
Michael Horton has a footnote in his article that destroys the "works of the law" interpretation of the New Perspective on Paul: "If in Romans 2 the Jews are condemned for not fulfilling the works of the law, that can hardly fit circumcision, dietary laws, etc., which they did in fact keep scrupulously" (pg. 214,

footnote 45).

Godfrey quotes Bavinck as saying that there is no difference between Calvin and Luther on justification (pg. 268). Amen.

I decided not to do with this book what I did with By Faith Alone, since this book is twice as long, and even Doug Wilson does not do each article justice. So I merely point out some of the many highlights in an effort to whet your appetite for this fantastic book. Buy it. that is not a request.

Rev. Keister is a PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) pastor currently serving a CRC (Christian Reformed Church) and an RCA (Reformed Church in America) church located in North Dakota. This review was originally posted on his blog greenbaggins.wordpress.com and is reprinted by permission.



IN CHRIST ALONE
by Sinclair Ferguson
(2007, Reformation Trust)
Reviewed by Rev. Howard Sloan

I read In Christ Alone by Sinclair Ferguson and loved every page of it. Each chapter is filled with meat. This book is not a book about Christ. It is not a book about the Holy Spirit. It is not a book about

soteriology. It is not a book about the Christian life. It is a book about all of these and more. Ferguson takes

the reader through the various facets of what it means to live the gospel centered life, as he calls it. The book consists of 50 chapters of around five pages in length. He has broken down the book into six sections entitled: "The Word Became Flesh," "The Heart of the Matter," "The Spirit of Christ," "The Privileges of Grace," "A Life of Wisdom", and "Faithful to the End."

As is usually the case with Ferguson, his theology is spot-on. What makes this book special to me is how he has taken solid theology and cut it into small chunks, so that while you are not swallowing much at one time you are still being substantially fed. It is also a well balanced meal. It is nice to pick up a book where you can read a little bit and get so much.

To me, this quote toward the end of the book summarizes what Ferguson intends the reader to get from reading the book.

"The way in which we maintain 'the expulsive power of a new affection' is the same way as the way we first discovered it. Only when grace is still amazing – when we return to Christ and the cross where God's love for us was demonstrated to us (Romans 5:8) – does it retain its power over us. Only as we retain a sense of our own profound sinfulness can retain a sense of the graciousness of God." (p. 225)

This is a book for every Christian to read who wants to know his Lord better and how to serve his Lord better.

SPRING BIBLE CONFERENCE 2008 MAY 27-29, 2008 - BEDFORD, PA

ST. PAUL'S REFORMED CHURCH

OUR SPEAKER - REV. RONALD CAMMENGA

Rev. Ronald Cammenga graduated from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in 1979. He has served congregations Hull, IA, Loveland, CO, Grandville, MI and Jenison, MI. In 2005 he accepted an appointment to the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grandville, MI to teach Old Testament and Dogmatics. For many years he has been a contributing editor of *The Standard Bearer* and is currently the editor of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Ron is co-author of the book Saved By Grace, a study of the Five Points of Calvinism. Ron and his wife Rhonda are the

parents of eleven children, and currently grandparents to ten grandchildren.

He will present four sessions. "The Reformation's Teaching on Assurance in the Heidelberg Catechism," "The Reformation's Teaching on Gracious Salvation in the Heidelberg Catechism," "The Reformation's Teaching on Christ in the Heidelberg Catechism," and "The Reformation's Teaching on the Christian Life in the Heidelberg Catechism." The round table discussion will be on "The Use of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Life of the Church."

News, Notes, and Prayer Requests

NEWS AND NOTES

- All members and pending members should review the constitutional amendments that are under consideration at the Spring Bible Conference. They are available on the HRA website.
- Registration for the Bible Conference is due by May 15, 2008
- The theme for the June 2008 issue will be “Common Questions and Objections.” The deadline for content will be May 15, 2008.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Members Rev Elden Smith and Rev Howard Sloan have been asked to participate on the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference’s committee on a new or revised statement of faith. Please pray for their work. Elden will also be acting as chairman.
- Pray for Rev. Cammenga as he prepares the sessions for the Bible Conference.
- Pray for the final preparations and arrangements for the Bible Conference.

Noteworthy Dates & Events

TUESDAY, MAY 27- THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2008
HRA SPRING BIBLE CONFERENCE
ST. PAUL’S REFORMED CHURCH - BEDFORD, PA
“HEIDELBERG’S REFORMATION VOICES”

Great Reformation Themes Contained in the Heidelberg Catechism.
Presented by Professor Ronald Cammenga ,
Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at Protestant Reformed Theological School.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2008
HRA ANNUAL MEETING
ST. PAUL’S REFORMED CHURCH; BEDFORD, PA

Editorial Policy for the Reformation Voice

1. The Executive Committee shall serve at the editorial committee for the Reformation Voice. They shall have the right to select or reject any content for inclusion in the Reformation Voice.

2. Content may be submitted by members, pending members, or members of member churches. The Executive Committee may also solicit the right to (re)print articles from other authors or reviewers whose writings may be of value to the membership of the HRA.

3. In keeping with the purposes of the Association, books reviews in the Reformation Voice shall be reflective of the purposes and standards of the Association.

4. The Reformation Voice shall not be used as a platform to voice views and positions that are particular to a denomination or group. Rather, it should seek to promote those theological positions which are held in common by all who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.